

Lord Buddha's Parinibbana and the 1st Council

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Parinibbana :-

It was a sad scene in the Sal garden of the Malla Kings of Kusinara. Monks had gathered round to witness the last hours of the Buddha. He had spent 45 years preaching the doctrine in the Indo-Gangetic Plains.

Even during the last moments of His life, bearing the Pains of His illness He was explaining the eightfold Path to a devotee who made his appearance at the eleventh hour.

The monks were weeping. "Weep not O monks " the Master said. " All those who live rich or poor, weak or strong will one day come to an end There is no one on earth or heaven who has been able to withstand the inexorable advent of death. Therefore make full use of your human life in realising and achieving Nibbana

That is the greatest homage you can pay me.

The Buddha gave instructions to Venerable Ananda regarding the last rites that should be performed concerning the holy body of the Buddha.

It was the determination of the Buddha that His holy relics and ashes should remain in areas where the largest number of devotees reside.

When the Kings and Princes who assembled round the funeral pyre of the Master demanding a lion share of the relics, Show of Strength was about to take place. But Drona, the Brahmin stepped forth and offered to divide the relics to equal Portions and Share out Portions to the Kings Who demanded relics

Thus peace was restored.

1st Council :-

The Venerable Arahant Kashyapa Was the most Senior Arahath among the Bhikkhus left behind after the Parinibbana of the Blessed One.

Thus the Venerable Thera felt it his duty to safeguard the Sasana for years to come. He overheard a remark made by monk Subhadra who rejoiced at the demise of the Buddha, " Now that the rule- maker is gone, we can live as we like enjoying every luxury we like. ",

The Venerable Arahant made arrangements to revise the Dhamma, as preached by the Master as soon as possible.

He approached the ruling King of Magadha and requested him to make the necessary provisions for an assembly of 500 monks to revise the Dhamma and Vinaya.

King Ajathasatue son of Bimbisara acted as the Chief devotee of the Conference.

The Saptapanni Caves of Rajagaha provided a natural setting.

The venerable Ananda Thera at first was a problem. His presence was a must for the assembly. 500 Arahants were necessary. All invitees had to be Arahants, but Ananda Thera was not one. Already he heard monks talking about it. It was embarrassing.

He was a great treasure- house of the Dhamma. He had a wonderful memory. He could repeat anything accurately, if heard only once. He went about with the living Buddha and if he was not present at a discourse, the Buddha always repeated what was preached in his absence.

Modern psychotherapists are of the opinion that the populous and highly industrialized societies have a bad effect on the mental and physical health of the people.

Another very significant feature of Early Sri Lankan architecture is the 'stupa' the dome shaped mound built of brick in which the relics mainly of the Buddha are enshrined. It had to be built high in order that it might be seen clearly and evoke the devotion of the faithful. To the Buddhists, the stupa not only enshrines the relics, but also symbolizes the virtues of their extraordinary teacher - the Buddha. The devotee holds the stupa in reverence, offers flowers to it feeling that his troubles vanish in its presence. The stupa is erected at an elevated place on flat ground or sometimes on a hillock. This and other characteristics, such as its shape, quantity, colour, etc., as a whole bring about a therapeutic effect on the minds of the devotees, specially, the faithful Buddhist devotees. The stupas called Ruwanmeli and Jetavanarama at Anuradapura, and the stupa at Mihintale near Anuradhapura, which were all built in the early historic period of Sri Lanka and which remain to the present day, bear testimony to this. Simply by their appearance they evoke the feelings of reverence and holiness in the minds of the beholders. They induce a state of relaxation relieving the beholder of anxiety. Thus, psychotherapeutically these stupas play a significant role in calming the minds of the devotees.

In addition, these bubble-shaped stupas with their conical 'kota' or pinnacle appear to have been intended to convey a doctrinal message. The bubble-shaped part is a representation of the all inclusive world. The pinnacle is turned towards the sky and appears to move towards limitless space, evoking a sense of the wisdom attained by means of meditation. When wisdom is attained by the devotee, his mind is freed from all kinds of defilements and projected to an extremely subtle point.

Let us now, turn to the Buddhist monastery. Buddhist monasteries are said to have existed in Sri Lanka from the third century B.C. As far as Buddhist monastic architecture is concerned, the monastery is a place which always had trees in its surroundings. Because of this very reason, it was also known as a grove. In any monastery the Bodhi tree (=ficus religiosa) occupies an important position. The manner in which the monastery helped to control the human mind and achieve union with nature can be understood from the significance borne by the Sri Maha Bodhi tree, at Anuradapura, which provided a dominant inspiration to art in Sri Lanka.

In particular, places given to continuous worship naturally acquire an air of sanctity not found in ordinary places. A place dense with trees imparts a feeling of depth and awe to those who come there. Since the devotees spend a long time in paying homage to the statue of the Buddha, and the Bodhi tree, both of which induce holy thoughts, such places definitely build up a capacity for spirituality even in their material structure. This is a situation which affords satisfaction to the human mind.

If by architecture, we mean the way space is organized into a meaningful form, then the connection between architecture and psychology becomes evident. If we examine the manner in which the Buddhist monasteries were designed and the purpose they fulfilled, the psychological function of their architectural form can be correctly understood. The Temple of the Tooth Relic in Kandy built in the eighteenth century is illustrative of the fact that architecture fulfills a highly useful psychological purpose. Serenity and sublimity are easily evoked in the minds of those who enter such sacred shrines. The Temple of the Tooth Relic is itself regarded as a stupa because the most sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha is housed within it. Because of this very reason, Buddhist devotees consider it as a symbol of the Buddha and they are overwhelmed with spiritual emotion in its presence. As far as the Buddhist mind is concerned, the sense of reverence that this building evokes has no parallel to Buddhists not only in Sri Lanka but also in other Buddhist countries throughout the world.

In discussing Buddhist sculpture, mention must be made in the first instance of the basic influence of Greek sculpture on the Buddha image. Although the Buddha image has undergone Greek influence, we must not forget the fact that it has attained oriental features. The Buddha image of Sri Lanka followed Indian tradition, and there are many important examples in various places throughout the island which show this. Among them, the Buddha image in the meditation posture, known as 'the Samadhi Buddha Statue' at Anuradhapura, is considered a unique creation of Sri Lankan sculpture. It is best reflected in the compassionate and peaceful smile and the unity of the other facial expressions which are in conformity with this smile. This statue provides an almost animate indication of the entrance into the spiritual world once the phenomenal world has been overcome in the highest stage of artistic expression and the enjoyment of a supreme experience free from all defilements. It reveals the limitless relief obtained therefrom. The Sri Lankan sculptor who created this magnificent example has employed his art to depict a personality with a mind that is unshaken and satisfied. It reflects the artist's skill in comprehending and portraying facial expressions. The statue also depicts the sublime aspect of one in the fullness of knowledge and wisdom. At the same time, it elevates the beholder. The Buddha's smile evokes faith in the beholder, who is generally, overwhelmed by problems. As a result, he is led to inquire as to how this ecstasy may be attained. In short, the beholder is gripped by the attraction of the statue. He tends to forget his sorrows

and troubles for a moment; his mind is relieved. This is a part of psychotherapy obtained by means of Buddhist sculpture. This is how the mind of the Buddhist devotee is put to rest by this great religious art.

The ability to provide relief in this manner, can be regarded as a very significant psychological aspect of Buddhist sculpture in Sri Lanka. In addition to the Samadhi Buddha, there are numerous other examples of Buddhist statues in Sri Lanka. It must also be emphasized that there are several other features of sculptures associated with either the Buddha statue or the Buddhist monastery which have not been considered here.

Turning next to Buddhist paintings in Sri Lanka, it is noted that only a few examples of paintings belonging to the early historic period in Sri Lanka remain, for example those at Sigiriya and Hindagala. Although seemingly influenced by the Indian Ajanta cave-paintings, the Sigiriya paintings do not depict a peculiarly Buddhist theme. But the paintings at Hindagala depict an incident from the life of the Buddha, and, in fact, religious themes seem to have been adopted in most of the paintings of Sri Lanka. This becomes specially evident when we come to a later stage of Sri Lankan history. Somewhere around the 10th or 11th century, particularly, we find examples of paintings similar to those at Hindagala. On the wall at the entrance to the building known as the Tivanka Pilimage, we find the birth stories or 'Jatakas' depicted in painting. The art, here is aimed at the inducement of a certain devotional frame of mind, appealing to the emotional sentiments of the devotee. At the next stage, we see gods and men paying homage to the Buddha. Certain important incidents of the life story of the Buddha have been committed to painting. It is only at the third stage that the devotee enters the image house where the colossal Buddha statue in standing posture is found. When the total conception is considered we can see in the painter as he gradually fulfills his supreme objective the insight of a hypnotist. The devotee is induced to learn the greatness of the Buddha by the manner in which the artist has depicted the scene. (Wijesekare 1959, p. 102). He is told the past birth stories of the Buddha in the first instance. He is then led to an understanding of the Buddha's supreme qualities - the qualities because of which he is venerated, by men as well as by gods. It is such a great person that the devotee finally approaches, and by this time his mind is filled with faith, belief and devotion.

As Siri Gunasinghe has observed:

"Buddhism was valued for the simplest of its teachings such as its basic social ethics, belief in rebirth in the most pleasurable heavens and the super-human personality of the Buddha, this last being perhaps the most significant for the arts".

(Gunasinghe - 1978, P.5).

When considering the psychological value of themes taken from the birth stories as evidenced from the paintings of the eighteenth century, we observe that the spectator is impressed by evil results of the desire to do harm to others and the good results of helping others. In like manner, the artist has attempted to depict the natural condition of the mind, and the mind influenced by the ethical behaviour taught in the doctrine. Pictorial art being one of the simplest media by which ideas may be impressed upon individuals irrespective of their learning or literacy, it has been made use of by the artist to generate universal compassion in the minds of the people.

Paintings can be of further importance, when colours make us feel and dream as music does, in the same incommunicable fashion (Parker-1946, P.206). Colours, it is evident, help the people to break the monotonous pattern of their life. When they enter an image house, they feel as if they enter into a place where some change of their mind is likely to occur.

Buddhism has greatly encouraged the arts in Sri Lanka as well as in India. However, it must be accepted that Buddhism absorbed, some of the features of Hinduism (Sarachandra - 1953, P.8) yet the fact that Buddhist art dominated over other kinds of art in Sri Lanka cannot be ignored. Accordingly, it can be concluded that many of our artists, if not all, have drawn inspiration from Buddhism.

In Sri Lanka, professional psychotherapy has been unknown in the past, and it is uncommon even today. Most of the people are not even aware of psychological illnesses or psychotherapy as such. When they are confronted with some kind of mental illness, they take refuge in the witch-doctor and devil-dancing. Another means by which they seek relief from their mental agonies is by absorbing themselves associated with religion.

In dealing with the treatment of psychological illnesses such as psycho-neuroses, the sufferer is expected to gain understanding (insight) into the psychic origin of his symptoms through talking and thinking about himself with the help of a therapist (Encl. Brit. Vol. 15-1975). The provision of an environment in which he is protected, and in which, away from the demands of ordinary life, he can gradually work his way through his periods of confusion and disturbances is also very necessary.

(Encl. Brit. Vol. 15-1975). Despite the prevalence of modern methods such as Electro-Convulsive Therapy in the treatment of psychological illnesses, there is one point which deserves attention in this industrially oriented age. This is the recognition that we also have much to gain from a wisely ordered artistic environment, in the education and refinement of our emotions which would serve as an antidote to certain aspects of psychological illnesses, particularly, psycho-neuroses.

It is accepted that 'the cathartic method was ever preserved as a sort of nucleus psychoanalysis' (Freud -1938). There is no doubt that the process of catharsis occurs, when enjoying a work of art. This is increasingly so when it is combined with a sense of spirituality. This spirituality which is inherent in Buddhism and Bhddist art has therefore played a predominantly significant role in providing the Buddhist masses with effective relief in many psychological problems.

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Abbreviations:

Encl. Brit.	=	Encyclopaedia Britannica.
MN	=	Majjhima Nikaya .
MV	=	Mahavamsa .