

## THE BUDDHIST CULTURE ASSOCIATED WITH THE IRRIGATION OF SRI LANKA : A REVIEW

CHANDANA ROHANA WITHANACHCHI

### Introduction

The influence of Buddhism is the decisive juncture of the development of a social and cultural base of Sri Lanka. The excellent irrigation systems which were built in Rajarata area are provided the unique specimens of social, cultural, economic, political and ecological aspects. Those irrigation systems which were based on the Rajarata area helps to promote the status of the island throughout the world. Not only had that but also enhanced the groundbreaking Buddhist philosophical guidance to the reality.

Sri Lanka's irrigation sector has developed with its own identity, rather than the other aspects. According to the literature sources, the origin of the irrigation industry was based on the North Indian Origin. Nevertheless, according to the archaeological research carried out so far, it has been revealed that the Sri Lankan irrigation works done beyond the arrival of the Aryans (Withanachchi 2013: 31-3; 2014: 72-7)' However, some factors related to the identity of the irrigation industry remains. In the very first days of colonization, village tanks were built, and after that as the population grew up, technologically advanced people had developed their minds and built large tanks to meet the growing population (Withanachchi 2014: 77). Accordingly, the glorious civilization of the land of Rajarata in Sri Lanka differs from the primacy of the early civilizations by the excellence and ecological inspiration they created. It has been further strengthened with the Buddhist culture.

Associated with The dry zone can be identified as the backbone of the ancient Sinhala civilization (Withanachchi 2012a: 43-64). The first Aryan settlements began with the dry zone. It has been further strengthened. The longtime dry atmosphere is the special characteristic of this region. Dry and warmth winds of the Southwest can be seen in this region. Small rocks, highlands, and lumps are located everywhere in this site. Nevertheless, this climate has been highly beneficial to the agricultural industry and has become an attractive area of the ancient people, surpassing other environmental hardships, from the pre-historic eras. According to the Pre-Brahmin inscriptions, the dating of the north, north central, northwest, east, southeast and southern

regions, c. As of the first century, it was possible to determine the habitation throughout the region (Mendis, Withanachchi 2011:103-104; Withanachchi 2012b: 358; 2013: 32-37).

The village tank was a water storage system that provides water for drinking, bathing and other needs of the villagers to escape the difficulties encountered by the environment. In the past, villagers were considered the village tank as a great honor for them to find their needs at the right time. They regularly acted in keeping with the concept of "Lake, Dagaba, village and the temple". Accordingly, the village tank was becoming as the main feature of the villagers, village, their life and the culture. The village tank was bound up with the life of the community as the tree which bounds up with its coating. Accordingly, the tank was a decisive factor in all aspects of the life of people. The village tank plays a significant contribution to the life of the villagers, and it was essential for all the elements, such as their rituals and customs, food, language, faiths and beliefs, livelihoods. This study aims to discover the diversity of the Buddhist culture in the Sri Lankan irrigation society.

## Review

### The relationship between the irrigation industry and the Buddhist culture

The Buddhist culture was existed for over two thousand years in the dry zone of Sri Lanka. There is a cultural thought associated with the Buddhist culture. Cultural thinking differs from what people think. The offering of first water sample in a lake or reservoir to the sacred Bodhi is a cultural thought. Such a cultural thought was found as a result of moral culture. In Sri Lanka, a people's tradition was closely associated with the respectful temple, paddy field, and the tanks culture. There was a bhikkhu culture in Sri Lanka. *Arahant Mahinda* Thero brought a group of bhikkhu community to Sri Lanka who could be led to the rural leadership and thereby contribute to the development of Buddhist culture in every aspect of life. The Buddhist culture is remaining with us. The tanks were the lakes of Buddhist culture. The names of some villages which ends with lake and tank also found in various parts of Sri Lanka like *Vilpattu* and *Vilachchiya*. Clear evidence of the formation of human settlements, the village lakes provide a great contribution. Early Brahmi inscriptions prove that the colonies were established nearby the village tanks. A tank called *Erika vapi* was the source of the village called "*Erakapi*" mentioned in the Nattukkanda inscription (*Jc. Vol.i: No. 168*), also in the inscription "*Lona Vapi*" placed in Mihintale, the name of the village "*Lonapi*" is compiled (*ibid: No. 25*), as mentioned in the Handagala inscription *Anulapivapi* (*ibid: No. 1130*), names in the villages as "*Upalavi*" in the inscription Mihintale Rajagiri Kanda (*ibid: No. 112; Ez. Vol. v: 225*) can be cited as examples. The relationship between the irrigation and the Buddhist culture is a powerful sign of the civilization of Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka's irrigation industry has been growing since the third century BC in a Buddhist background. All the inscriptions of the country's irrigation system were made for some religious purposes. Many of these letters refer to the offer of a tax to the temple obtaining from the canal or an irrigation scheme. Therefore, it is clear that the relationship between Buddhism and the Irrigation of Sri Lanka has been in existence since the beginning.

Another reason for building Tanks was they were built according to religious requirements. When the number of Buddhist monks in Buddhist temples grew gradually, it was necessary to earn income to the temples. Later, kings have offered various types of pagan gardens, villagers, salvians, and irrigation specialists to temples and because of that, the irrigation systems were become importance (Gunawardana 1993). Commencement of the veneration of the tanks as the source of income for a temple begins with the help of King Lajjatissa, it was proved by the Navulpotha and Deewagala inscriptions (*ibid: 58*). According to the sources, several kings in Sri Lanka constructed tanks and offered it to the monks. King Bhatthiyasa Tissa was offered the *Maminियawewa*, to the *Gawarathissa* temple (*Mahawamsa xxxvi: 2-3*). As stated in the Mahavamsa the king Chandramukaseewa offered a lake called *Manikagama*, to *Isurumuni Viharaya*. King Gajabahu has built Gamini Tissa Lake and given the income to the Abhayagiri Viharaya (*ibid' xxxv: 47*). In the Viharagala inscription, the king named as Subha buy *Ualadothika wawi* (Uthpaladothika wewa) for 500 coins and the muddy was removed by given another 500 coins and offered it to the temple named as *ekadhawarika*. It can be identified that the contribution of such rural tanks was very high in the early colonization based on Buddhist culture.

King Wasaba has been demised the ownership of the Elahera canal to the *Muchela Viharaya* which was his main irrigation project (*ibid'* xxxv: 47). These details show only a few examples of the kings of Sri Lanka who offered tanks and water plants to the temples. This information shows that past kings performed agriculture to show their religious dignity. As same as the ordinary people have also offered their irrigation to the monks. According to the Thimbiri Wewa rock inscription, a woman named as Anulaby has offered her income which was received from the lake, offered to the *Gagapavatha* temple (*Jc. Vol i, P art ii, 1983: 186*).

According to these factors, it is also possible to identify the practice of sacrificing the irrigation industry which was an essential part of the life of the people of the country. Therefore, on the other hand, it is possible to accept the fact that the irrigation works have built for the religious purposes. It seems that the irrigation works are also built for the reason of religious necessities, and it is clear that the kings and the people have acted to conserve the tanks as a way of maintaining religious institutions and temples. Later, it is also indicated in the Discipline books regarding the manners in which *bhikkhus* should act about the water reservoirs (*Samanthapasadika* Vol. iii, 1930: 679&. According to these facts, it was clear that the construction of tanks was used as a viable way for the maintenance of temples. Also, sources say that there were religious incitements for the construction of tanks as a way of collecting of merit for the kings. An important factor in this was given in the period of King Mugalan (535 - 555 AD). It was said that he was constructed very lovingly and attracted *Sitpahan wewa*, *Dhana wewa* and *Girithara wewa* due to long life (*Mahawamso* xxxv: 61,62). It was clear that such actions since the inception period affected to build a Buddhist cultural landscape around the irrigation industry.

The concept of the lake in the dry zone social structure is something that is agro-oriented. It is mainly composed of sluices, tank bund, main canals, ralanpanawa, water lamps, etc. The tank was also important not only for people's cultivation but also for bathing and drinking. There are also instances that the tanks were placed as sacred. It was a common place, and the development and maintenance of tanks took place within the peoples' unity. Also, Dam or anicut also had some value.

When it comes to the culture of Sri Lanka, it is indispensable to say whether it is irrigation culture. Because the ancient Sri Lankan Dry Zonal villages formed by the tank. Cultivation and collectivity were important, and the tank was the central factor in that structure. It was so close to the village, and the villagers did not even think twice to protect the lake, and they considered that the full tanks were their prosperous.

### **Buddhist culture with tanks**

The ancient villagers were organized for two main issues related to the lakes. First, it's the duty of the tank. The second was a godly duty. The proper maintenance of the canal, field and the bunt are the main security functions of the tank. The worship of the tank is organized according to the organizational structure. It is the only hope of offering sacrifices that protecting farmers, cultivating crops, and building their own brass family. It is with great expectation that the people health, not cowards from the animals. This is the most profitable for agriculture, farming, strong of unions, the emergence of concrete examples of action, interaction. There are many functions together with the tank such as *laying ceremony*, *laying of pots*, *patches*, *water perahara*, *Mahadana*, *poor sacrifice*, *new rice mangallaya*, *sightseeing Mangallaya*. There were a lot of customs and traditions.

No one in the village was able to vacate the task of protecting the tanks from gave praise to God; This is why there are many festivals held around the tanks. *New Rice Mangallaya* organized for the Buddha. After reaping the new harvest, the peasants in the reservoirs have been continuously holding a ritual of sacrificing the sacred part of their harvest to the temple. The villagers in *Rajarata* zone customary sacrifice the holy sacred toddy dedicated to the Buddha and to sacrifice it to the *Sri Maha Bodhi* and offered the merit to their parents and gods.

Two ritual sacrifices for the god protect the village tank. The worship of the Buddha at the beginning of all these sacrifices is a tradition, and it is a blessing for other rituals. The main place of the sacrifice was near the

tank or devale near to the tank, and the leading item will be the *Mutti Mangallya*. Firstly, the area that separates God from his crops is placed with Welwidane's house cleaning cans, where the deposit is placed with security guard *Kathakebella*, *Kohomba Poruwa*, *Iron Barn*. This is often the case on the day before *Mutti Mangallya*. Early in the morning, a procession is reached with everything that is needed for the *Mutti Mangallya* with the traditional concerts to the scarified tree of the tank bunt. First, the tree is cleansed, then the Kewum, bananas, betel, betel nut and Gods jewellery etc., are placed on the bloom bed. In the meantime, Muruthen dana is prepared for God. Only men in the village will participate to this event. They act in prayer and sacrifice to God. The *Kapurala* pledging for God to protect the entire village, including the tank, and assured to do the same in next year. Then, boiling the three fresh pots near the tree. After that three branches of the tree are cut down and put on the three pots. This is the end of the *Mutti Mangallaya*, and all of them receive part of the Muruthen. If they are eating this *Muruthan* villagers, believe that they were protected by the God. The lunch prepared near by the tank and then they were eaten and going down happily. Although the region has some minor differences in the area, the main customs and rituals are similar. Boiling of milk pots for lord was considered as a blessing for the future security and the worldly flourishing, all of which are blessed with mangallas. It is hoped that God will bring blessings to the Lord of pagans by offering sacrifices to the Buddha and obtain God's blessing. It has developed as a cultural activity in the dry zonal areas. They entrusted that the security of the tank, village, animal and all are protected by the supernumerary power. It is clear that in the method followed, it is inevitable that there is a mutual and psychological relationship between the two.

As a result of this, a culture emerging from the lake has developed, and the Buddhist method of the Dry Zone is interconnected with each other and contributes to the unity and peace and reconciliation of the village community. When it comes to the reservoir of peasant communities living in reservoir villages, it is evident that their ritualistic was directed towards the care of the tank. All other rituals are aimed at continuing the practice of using the lake. Folk stories, folk arts, and poetry shows about the aesthetic value of the tanks. The system of laws that transplanted people in the tanks was the folklore. Buddhist culture is all there.

The villagers also believe that gods are living near the lake which provides flowers for the Buddhist worshipping. Sometimes the tank is the place where the villagers are making united and peaceful. The same was the servant who provides them food, drinks, bathing and protecting them. Sometimes it looks like a demon, and at times it looks like a place where sightseeing creates a place.

The massive amount of knowledge built up with the irrigation industry has been created creatively within the people's generations by adding notes to the folklores. The villagers considered the lake as so sacrilegious, and it created a variety of beliefs in all matters related to the people. A unique tree with the lake was named as "*Sanhinda*" and it was also seen in the ancient village. It was a place dedicated to God. Once the rejuvenating villagers first worship the Buddha, they subscribe and worship for God. There is a custom of lighting oil lamps in the evening near the village tanks of the *Sath Korala* in the North-West Province, which is a sacrifice made before leaving a important, a sickness is committed or before any work is done. First, after bowing down to the Buddha and lighting the 21 lamps to God, the vow is proved by applying prayers.

The kings, commanders, people who supported to build tanks in the irrigation industry were considered as gods. The villagers also treated all of them as Buddhist gods. For example, the belief among the people that King Mahasen who built the Minneriya Wewa as the god of Minneri. Farmers in this area obtain the blessings of the god of Minneri before the commencement of their works. After promising at the *Minneri devale*, villagers held the new rice festival near devale located near the Minneriya tank and offered their promises, believe that it helps for their fertility. For an example, the temple of God of the *Kadawara* in the Kala Wewa and the temple of God in the *Hurulu Wewa*. All traditions in the *Orubadhi Siyabalawa Devale*, near the Elahera canal going through the Buddhist culture.

The study of folk customs, rituals and Buddhist traditions in the ancient Lankan dry zone society reveals that the majority of people are closely related to the village tanks. When analyzing the rural social structure, it is clear that the tanks, dagaba, village, temple, how well they fit into the existing rural connection, how structurally suited they are. During the time of the cultivation of paddy fields, the paddy fields belonging to

the temple, and those of the mother of the infant, whose husband died, could not work, was also cultivate the field by the village headman (*Gamarala*) due to the developed in Buddhist culture.

## Conclusion

In the past, the tank and the village were closely interconnected. A key factor that reflects this is the folk habits and beliefs associated with the Buddhist culture. But nowadays it does not seem to be close as the relationship between the tank and the village, even though it is now a stepped-up tank. The spiritual and cultural ties between the rural tank and the village have also contributed to the deterioration of the degradation. This situation can also be seen in many village tanks in the dry zone of Sri Lanka. Due to the progressive encroachment of the rural community, the tank and related customs and restrictions did not admit it, and the irrigation culture centered on the village tanks was gradually devastated.

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