Buddhism and Aesthetic Creativity

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ABSTRACT

Buddhism, just as other world Religions, has inspired a legacy of the finest and the most beautiful creations in architecture, painting, sculpture, statuary, and prose and poetic literature. In tracing the origin and the development of this magnificent legacy, this paper seeks answers to the following questions:

How is it that the earliest reliably datable monuments and works of art including written records, hitherto discovered in the Indian Subcontinent, happen to be of Buddhist origin?

How is it also that a vast literary movement in which poetry and story-telling figure prominently start with the Buddha setting new standards and directions?

What role did the Buddha and his teachings play in this enigmatic revival of aesthetic creativity in the Indian Subcontinent and its extension to the rest of Asia and its continuance to present times?

It is done in three Parts. In the first Part, the canonical texts in Pali are analyzed for evidence on how the Buddha personally inspired and took the initiative to promote aesthetic creativity. It has been possible to unravel that the Buddha did consciously resort to the highest standards of poetic expression in literature and also encouraged significant innovations in art and architecture. The second Part examines how Buddhism as it developed in stature as a religious system and spread within and outside the Indian Subcontinent promoted aesthetic creativity in practically every domain of art. Especially noted is how Mahayana Buddhism had a popular appeal and played a very significant role in this process. The third Part is a brief but extensive survey of the marvels and masterpieces of the vast Buddhist cultural heritage. To the paper are appended a literary appreciation of three popular poetic texts and a substantive index of similes and metaphors, attributed to the Buddha, in the four Nikayas of the Pali Canon. The conclusion reached is that in every field of art, architecture, literature and performing arts, the impact of Buddhism has been historically impressive and currently extensive.

Introduction

Aesthetic creativity (See End-note1) in diverse arts such as literature, architecture, sculpture, painting, music, dance and drama has been fostered by every known religion and spiritual tradition. Hence are most of the finest and most beautiful creations inspired by religion. Examples come from the oldest known monuments and objects of art of Egypt, Sumeria, Indus Valley and China right up to those of our own times.

Referring to the Indian Subcontinent, a pioneering art historian, Ananda Coomaraswamy, asserted, "All India can offer to the world proceeds from her philosophy" and another pioneer, E.B. Havell said somewhat differently and perhaps erroneously, "The main types of Indian art have been derived from the Yoga philosophy." (K. de B. Codrington in Garrat 1937, p. 76). These statements were made

at a time when Indian archeology was still in its infancy and the dating of monuments and works of art was not well developed. They looked at the vast legacy of Indian art and architecture not diachronically on a time-line but synchronically without historical analysis. But as discoveries increased and the need to trace the historical development was recognized, significantly different conclusions were reached.

Antecedents of Buddhist Art, Architecture and Literature

Indus Valley Civilization or the Indus-Sarasvati Civilization (as some Indian historians appear inclined to name it) yielded breathtaking evidence not only of advanced architectural creativity but also of a vast variety of artistic creations. The sculpture had reached a high level of sophistication, as revealed by the artistic representation of human and animal forms and even more astoundingly by the exquisite microscopic carvings of detailed scenes in tiny seals. Each figurine and seal, when studied in detail, testify to centuries of evolution of a refined aesthetic tradition, which Ananda Coomaraswamy traces to Sumerian Civilization of Mesopotamia and calls "Indo-Sumerian" (Coomaraswamy 1927 p. 3). The latest artifacts of Indus Valley or Indus-Sarasvati Civilization belong to a period around 2000 BCE. Almost two millennia passed and the Indian Subcontinent has nothing material to show as a continuation of the mature aesthetic achievements in art or architecture of Indus Valley or Indus-Sarasvati Civilization.

The absence of monuments and artifacts, however, is compensated by evidence of aesthetic creativity especially in literature and possibly performing arts. Vedas (whether indigenous works as a new school of Indian historians asserts or a legacy of migrating Indo-Europeans or Aryans—the latter being more likely) represent a literary tradition, which, too, had evolved to maturity over millennia. The sophistication in meter, imagery, language, style and literary quality of the hymns of Rgveda reflects a conscious process of aesthetic expression, which has aimed at perfection in poetic creativity.

Samaveda, likewise, is testimony to corresponding developments in music and song. On the contrary, the liturgical and magical content of the other two Vedas and the preoccupation with sacrificial ritual in the voluminous Brahmanas and Aranyakas indicate a long hiatus of at least a millennium in creative literature of aesthetic quality. Yet in the Brahmanas are evocative stories, which stand out as green oases in sterile deserts and point to a latent talent of the people of the Subcontinent for creativity in other aspects. What Winternitz calls a "public literary property" of charming narratives, insightful sayings, gnomic verses and aphoristic proverbs called for imaginative thinking and purposeful expression. Also in the prose Upanishads, which are in a way a continuation of the Brahmanas and the Aranyakas, aesthetically significant narratives, parables and similes do occur in profusion. In the latter Upanisads in verse, one observes a return to poetic expression.

Why the developments in literature were not accompanied by corresponding achievements in art and architecture during this long period remains an enigma. Many explanations have been offered. It may be that the people of Indus Valley or Indus-Sarasvati Civilization migrated elsewhere without seeking new homes to the east in the Indian Subcontinent. It has been held by many scholars (though now disputed) that the

Aryans replaced their urban commercial culture with a rural agricultural culture, which had no place for grandiose cities or public monuments. It is also suggested that the hiatus in the discovery of artifacts of any significance could be due a change in building materials. Could it be that successors to Indus Valley or Indus-Sarasvati Civilization used timber for buildings and wood and clay for objects of art and the tropical climate of the Indian Subcontinent wiped them out completely? The timber structures of the Mauryan capital Pataliputa (modern Patna), ascribed to the times of Candragupta Maurya, and the accounts of Palibothra by Megasthenes as quoted in later Greek works are held out as evidence.

While raising these questions, one important fact has to be noted: when Buddhist art begins to appear, all its manifestations are neither amateurish nor conspicuously primitive. There had been a development in art and architecture, which could have taken many centuries. In the present state of our knowledge of the Indian Subcontinent, it is neither prudent nor advisable to arrive at any definite conclusion. An important caveat to be borne in mind is that a new site unearthed by archeologists at any time could provide new answers as had happened repeatedly (See End-note 2)

There are, however, other questions pertaining to the reappearance of evidence of aesthetic creativity following millennia of absence:

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> How is it also that a vast literary movement in which poetry and story-telling figure prominently start with the Buddha setting new standards and directions?
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> What role did the Buddha and his teachings play in this enigmatic revival of aesthetic creativity in the Indian Subcontinent and its extension to the rest of Asia and its continuance to present times?

Part I - The Buddha and Aesthetic Creativity

The Buddha and Nature, Music and Performing Arts

The Buddha's background as a prince must have prepared him to appreciate beauty and luxury. He has spoken of his splendid palaces and rich quality of life in which luxurious food and musical spectacles had a role to play. Yet as a founder of a religious path with the end of suffering as the final goal, he discouraged everything that did not contribute to emancipation and, even more strongly, those that distracted one from the pursuit of the Path. Thus in the eightfold and the tenfold precepts, the discipline enjoined to novices and other serious practitioners centered on limiting intake of food to only morning hours, rejecting all forms of entertainment such as dancing, vocal and instrumental music and comic shows, abandoning flowers, perfumes, make-up and ornaments, and avoiding the use of luxurious beds and seats (Mahavagga-56). But no such restrictions appear in the Pratimoksa rules of discipline for bhikkhus and bhikkhunis. Of course, monks going to see dancing, singing or music (Cullavagga V,6,2)

and bhikkhunis who had dances performed (X, 5, 10), are enjoined not to do so, as these were offences of wrong-doing. Singing the discourses by the Sangha is declared a minor offence. (Cullavagga V, 1, 3) What monastic has to avoid is "long-drawn song sound" (āyatika-gītasara), which may be better rendered as melody with a cadence like ālap in modern Hindi classical music. But the Buddha at the same time allows sarabañña, which I.B. Horner translates as "intoning". (See End-note 5 for reasons for this rule.)

A curious encounter between the Buddha and a troupe of dramatists is recounted in Tālaputtasutta of Saṃyuttanikāya. The leader of the troupe asks the Buddha whether it was true that players who delight large audiences were reborn among the gods of laughter. Having refused to answer his question thrice, the Buddha is said to have stated that those who induce sensual states in others would be reborn in purgatory. The troupe then entered the Sangha and attained the highest spiritual attainment (S.IV, 306 ff. Thag 1091-1145). An interesting point to be noted in this episode is that the Buddha was reluctant to either hurt or discourage the troupe of dramatists and had to be compelled by them to answer this question.

That the Buddha did not argue profoundly against the arts is clearly shown by his discourse to Sigāla in Sigālovādasutta of the Dīghanikāya. Whereas the Buddha gives six evil ways by which wealth is destroyed and hence should be avoided (i.e. addiction to liquor, frequenting streets at unseemly hours, gambling, evil friends and idleness), the evil results of haunting fairs and clubs are listed as follows:

> Where is dancing?
> Where is singing?
> Where is music?
> Where is recitation?
> Where are the cymbals?
> Where are the drums? (D.31)

The implication is that one wastes his or her time and energy by searching for these.

More positive evidence of the Buddha's attitude towards music comes from another discourse of the Dīghanikāya, Sakkapañhasutta (D.21). Here Sakka, the king of gods, is said to have employed a musician to get the attention of the Buddha who was "rapt in the bliss of meditation." Pañcasikha, the musician then is said to have approached the Buddha, played the lyre and sung the following song:

> Lady, thy father Timbaru I greet
> With honour due, O Glory-of-the-Sun!
> In that he wrought a thing so nobly fair
> As thou, O fount divine of all my joy!
>
> Sweet as the breeze to one foredone with sweat,
> Sweet as a cooling drink to one athirst,
> So dear art thou, O presence radiant!
> To me, dear as to Arahants the Truth.

[266] As medicine bringing ease to one that's sick,
As food to starving man, so, lady, quench,
As with cool waters, me who am all a-flame.

E'en as an elephant with heat oppressed
Hies him to some still pool, upon whose face
Petals and pollen of the lotus float,
So would I sink within thy bosom sweet.

E'en as an elephant fretted by hook,
Dashes unheeding curb and goad aside,
So I, crazed by the beauty of thy form,
Know not the why and wherefore of my acts.

By thee my heart is held on bonds, and all
Bent out of course; nor can I turn me back,
No more than fish, once he hath taken the bait.

Within thine arm embrace me, lady, me
With thy soft languid eyes embrace and hold,
O nobly fair! This I entreat of thee.

Scanty in sooth, O maid of waving locks,
Was my desire, but now it swelleth aye,
Indefinitely great, even as the gifts
Made by the faithful to the Arahants.
(Tr. T. W. Rhys Davids)

The response of the Buddha is recorded as follows:

> The sound of your strings so harmonizes with that of your song and the sound of your voice with the strings, that your lyre does not too much color your song, nor your song too much color your play. (Tr. Rhys Davids)

Though set in a mythological background, one conclusion is permissible from this text: that is, the Buddha was conceived by the redactors of this discourse as someone capable of appreciating not only the music but also the lyric, which had sensual love as the theme.

The Buddha and Aesthetic Creativity in Art and Architecture

The Buddha's aesthetic sensitivity figures in the Vinaya rules pertaining to robes. It was the attractive design of the rice field of Magadha (Magadhaketta), "laid out in strips, lines, embankments and squares" that prompted the Buddha to suggest to Ananda that monks' robes could similarly be designed. As robes had been made by patching together pieces of cloth picked up from dust-heap or the cemetery, the result of haphazard joining of pieces would have been quite unseemly. The Buddha's intention appears to have been to make the robe a better-finished product. Accordingly, he praises Ananda when such a robe was designed, saying, "Clever is Ananda; of great intelligence is Ananda, inasmuch as he can understand that which is spoken by me in brief and can make a cross-seam, a short cross-seam, a circular seam, a short circular seam, a central

piece, side pieces, a neck piece, a knee piece and an elbow-piece." (Mahāvagga 12). The Buddha insisted on monks' being well dressed as he rebuked those whose robes were shabby (Ibid. 23). He enjoined monks to pull off misshapen corners and repair frayed threads of their robes by braiding, binding or darning (Ibid. 21).

The Buddha's appreciation of artistic beauty is best revealed by his injunctions on monasteries and dwelling places for the Sangha. At first lodgings were not permitted for the Sangha who lived in forests, mango groves, caves, cemeteries, and took shelter in potters' halls and public halls (Cullavagga V1, 1, 1). "Going forth (i.e. entering the Sangha) is for living at the root of a tree: in this respect, effort is to be made by you for life," says the rule (Mahāvagga I, 30). Once a merchant offered to provide dwelling places, he not only permitted five kinds of buildings (Ibid VI, 1, 2) but also accepted sixty dwelling places that were built by the merchant. This discourse conveying thanks is particularly significant as the Buddha praises the gift of "**charming** dwelling places" (*vihare karaye **ramme***):

The Lord thanked the (great) merchant of Rajagaha in these verses:

> "They ward off cold and heat and beasts of prey from there
> And creeping things and gnats and rains in the wet season.
> When the dreaded hot wind arises, that is warded off.
> To meditate and obtain insight in a refuge and at ease:
> **A dwelling-place is praised by the Awakened One as chief gift to an Order.**
> Therefore a wise man, looking to his own weal,
> Should have **charming dwelling-places** built so that those
> Who have heard much can stay therein.
> To these food and drink, raiment and lodgings
> He should give, to the upright, with mind purified.
> (Then) these teach him *dhamma* dispelling every ill;
> He, knowing that *dhamma*, here attains Nibbana, cankerless."
> (Tr. I. B. Horner)

The emphasis on beauty is conveyed by *ramme* (pleasant or charming) which is not necessarily *metri causa* (Ibid, VI, 5, 1). The Buddha has progressively relaxed austerity as regards dwelling places (Ibid VI) but with strict restriction of excess as the following text (Ibid VI, 3, 2) shows:

> "Now at that time the sleeping places of members of other sects were whitewashed, the ground was coloured black, the walls were treated with red chalk. Many people went to see the sleeping places. They told this matter to the Lord. He said: "I allow, monks, whitewash, black colouring, red chalk to be used in a dwelling place." Now at that time the whitewash did not adhere to the rough walls. They told this matter to the Lord. He said, "I allow you, monks, having applied lumps of grain-husks, having kept some back with a spoon, to put on the whitewash." The whitewash would not stick on. They told this matter to the Lord. He said, "I allow you, monks, having applied soft clay, having kept some back with a spoon, to put on the whitewash." The whitewash would not stick on. "I allow, monks, what exudes from trees and flour-paste."
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> Now at that time the red chalk did not adhere to the rough walls... *(as above)*... The red chalk would not stick on. They told this matter to the Lord. He said, "I allow you, monks, having applied the red powder of rice-husks (mixed with) clay, having kept some back with a spoon, to put on the red chalk." The red chalk would not stick on. They told this matter to

> the Lord. He said, "I allow, monks, mustard-powder, oil of bee's wax." It was too thick. They told this matter to the Lord. He said: "I allow you, monks, to sponge it over with a piece of cloth."
>
> Now at that time the black colouring did not adhere to the rough walls... *(as above)*... The black colouring would not stick on. They told this matter to the Lord. The black colouring would not stick on. They told this matter to the Lord. He said, "I allow you, monks, having applied clay (mixed with the excrements of) earthworms, having kept some back with a spoon, to put on the black colouring." The black colouring would not stick on. They told this matter to the Lord. He said: "I allow you, monks, what exudes from trees, an astringent decoction."
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> Now at that time the group of six monks had a bold design made of figures of women, figures of men, in a dwelling-place. People touring the dwelling-places, having seen this,... spread it about, saying: "Like householders who enjoy pleasures of the senses." They told this matter to the Lord. He said: "Monks, you should not have a bold design made of figures of women, figures of men. Whoever should have one made, there is an offence of wrong-doing. I allow, monks, wreath-work, creeper-work, swordfish teeth, the five strips (of cloth design)." (Tr. I. B. Horner)

The Buddha, who permitted painting and possibly sculpture even in bedrooms by monks, had to deal with questionable forms of erotic art. What was euphemistically called ***patibhānacitta*** or "imaginative design" (Vinaya IV, 61) and commented by Buddhaghosa as *vippakatamethunaṃ itthipurisarūpaṃ* (picture of a man and a woman in interrupted or unusual or unnatural sexual intercourse) comprised "drawings, designs, paintings or sculptures with a sexual import." (Perera 1990 p. 113) Rules were enforced to prohibit the execution or display of such erotic art by the Sangha. Bhikkhunis were particularly prohibited from visiting palaces and picture galleries (cittāgāra); in this case, the presence of patibhānacittas in the picture gallery of King Pasenadi Kosala is specifically mentioned. (Vinaya IV, 298). Despite such restrictions, the encouragement given by the Buddha to the use of art for ornamentation of monastic dwellings has been consistently noted. Thus *Vinaya-vinicchaya*, a digest of rules of discipline for the Sangha, elaborated the Buddhist position with the following rule:

> A bhikkhu who does or causes another to do a painting (or sculpture) of men, women and animals commits a minor offence. But it is proper for him to get others to do paintings of Jatakas and similar stories. (2836-7)

The same position is re-stated in *Sārasangraha*, another Sri Lankan Pali work (dated 13th century), which says, "It is fitting to construct monastic residences and create works of art (*cittakammaṃ*) there." (Perera, 1990 p. 118).

While the Buddha was alive, lay devotees vied with one another to provide extensive and comfortable monastic establishments for him and the Sangha. Monasteries such as Veluvana (Bamboo Grove) of Rajagaha, and Ghositarama of Savatthi were well-appointed. The most elegant among them was Jetavana, which the greatest benefactor of the Buddha built in Savatthi on a land purchased by paving it with gold coins. It is described as consisting of living rooms, bedrooms, stores, baths and conveniences, refectories, kitchens, promenades (both indoor and outdoor) and ponds. (Cullavagga VI, 10, 4). What is important to note is that the amenities of Jetavana Monastery were identical to those which well-to-do lay people had constructed as their luxurious residences (Mahāvagga III, 5, 6-9)

That art was used not only for ornamentation as in murals but also as visual aids for instruction is evident from an incident connected with Veluvana as recorded in the Sanskrit Buddhist work Divyāvadāna. Moggalāna is said to have used a diagram of a wheel to illustrate a discourse on Dependent Origination. The Buddha approved it and had it painted on the outer wall of the monastery for public display.(p. 300). This is regarded as the origin of *Bhavacakra* (wheel of existence) used at Ajanta and on Tibetan Tangkas.

As significant as the Buddha's encouragement of establishing beautiful monastic residences was the role he apparently played in introducing the Cetiya, Caitya, Thūpa or Stūpa as a central Buddhist shrine. The statements attributed to the Buddha regarding Cetiyas and relic-worship in Mahāparinibbāṇasutta (D. 16) had a poignant impact on Buddhist architecture. Developing from the simple burial mound, this specifically Buddhist monument evolved as a symbol of the presence of the Buddha in Buddhist worship and persists worldwide to this day. Its variations in design, size, ornamentation and symbolism—as seen all across the Asian Continent—are a testimony to the aesthetic creativity in Buddhist architecture.

Equally important is the association of the Buddha in the same discourse (D. 16) in evolving the concept of holy sites to which devotees would go on pilgrimage. The Sutta specifically mentions Lumbini, where the Buddha was born, Buddha Gaya, where he attained enlightenment, Isipatana in Sarnath, where he delivered his first discourse and Kusinara or Kushinagar in Gorakhpur, where he passed away. With such an injunction, it is but natural that other spots connected with the life of the Buddha too became centres of pilgrimage.

What this evidence indicates is that the Buddha himself had set in motion through conscious steps and unequivocal directions the beginnings of Buddhist art and architecture. The impetus thus given to these fields of aesthetic creativity has not only been enormous but also long-lasting.

The Buddha and Aesthetic Creativity in Literature

The Buddha was a teacher in a hurry. As the early sections of Udāna shows, he began to formulate his teachings in an orderly and presentable manner even as he spent the early weeks of Buddhahood in solitary contemplation at Buddha Gaya. As he walked from there to Isipatana to deliver his first discourse to his one-time fellow ascetics, he had structured his presentation. The first two discourses, the *Dhammacakkappavattanasutta* and the *Anattalakkhaṇasutta* (also called *Pañcama*), are succinct statements reflecting significant pedagogical skills. The Buddha was convinced that he had a message for humanity and he was keen to commence his missionary role without any delay. It was such a conviction that prompted him to create the Sangha within days in Isipatana, inform its members adequately of his fundamental teachings and send the first sixty disciples in all directions, no two going on the same road. Their task was to announce that a path to immortality had been found. They were equipped with a minimum of information for their mission and, as textual evidence shows, such information was couched in verses such as the following:

Ye dhammā hetuppabhavā
Tesaṃ hetu tathāgato āha
(Of those phenomena, which arise from a cause,
Their causes the Buddha has declared)

The Buddha was no doubt aware of the massive Vedic literature on which the contemporary religious and spiritual traditions were based. For him to establish a parallel tradition, he too needed the backing of a literature. That he had to create himself. The very volume of statements, attributed to him by his disciples, is proof that he had approached this task systematically. From the very beginning he had taken steps to ensure that whatever he taught was remembered, repeated and incorporated in a growing corpus to be preserved through oral transmission from teacher to disciple and generation to generation. He adopted the Vedic pedagogical device of group recitation (*svadhyāya*) in the form of *sajjhāyanā* (collective chanting). The Sangha as a learning and teaching society was his delivery mechanism. But the primary creator of the literary material had to be the Buddha himself.

His efforts in literary creativity appear to have been in two directions:

First, he summarized and re-stated his doctrines in poetical compositions and used verse as a medium for his aphoristic statements on not only doctrinal subjects but also on social and ethical issues. If verse was a mnemonical device in an oral educational setting, poetry for the Buddha was a means of generating aesthetic attention culminating in *camatkara* of Indian belles lettres or aesthetic arrest or thrill of modern literary critics. (See End-note 1).

Second, the Buddha as a masterly teacher was an adept in the effective use of spoken word. Apparently he was conscious of his creative genius as a speaker and equally aware that all he said and did mattered to his mission as a founder of a Path and a way of life. He, therefore, set in motion the practice of preparing journalistic records of his encounters with various personalities. It is unimaginable that the technique of such recording with descriptive backgrounds and first person quotes would ever have come into existence without the Buddha's expressed interest and even direction. Thus arose the vast Buddhist literature in prose reflecting in its many aspects impressive achievements in aesthetic creativity. (Cf, Winternitz 1983 p.5) (See End-note 3)

Poetry of the Buddha

The Buddha was a poet of notable skill and talent. The earliest portions of the Buddhist Canon in Pali—whose authenticity as words of the Buddha can hardly be disputed—are his exquisitely beautiful poetry. The poems of Suttanipāta (even when read in Lord Chalmer's attractive rendering into English verse) evoke sentiments as a poet of genius would generate. The dialogue between the Brahman Dhaniya and the Buddha, each expressing his preparedness—one materially and the other spiritually—for the on-setting storm reflects emotions recollected at leisure and expressed in charming words and double *entendre* to express the joy of renunciation and detachment (Guruge 1999/2004 p.190). A literary criticism of the three most popular discourses of Suttanipāta—*Mahāmangala, Ratana* and *Karaṇīyametta*-- is appended to illustrate the results one would obtain if other poems were similarly analyzed as literature (Guruge

1993 Chapter XVI – See Appendix 1). Among the seventy poems in 1154 verses of this collection, the following stand out as worthy of special attention as charming compositions:

- Khaggavisāṇasutta with its refrain *eko care khaggavisāṇakappo* (Wander alone as does a rhinoceros)
- Munisutta in praise of asceticism
- Brāhmanadhammikasutta on moral degeneration
- Sammāparibbājanīyasutta on the bliss of monastic life
- Vasala, Dhammika, Attadaṇḍa and Tissametteyya suttas on ethical realism
- Pabbajjā, Padhāna and Nālaka Suttas on the Buddha's on-set as an ascetic, and
- Ālavaka, Hemavata and Pārāyaṇavatthugāthā which are eulogies on the Buddha.

Dhammapada with its 423 verses and Udāna and Itivuttika where each episode culminates in a verse or two consist of *ad hoc* utterances of the Buddha in response to a situation or someone's query. It is not very likely that the Buddha's responses were always in metrical form or with the figures of speech and embellishments they now contain. What is more likely is that whatever was spoken at a given time was re-stated in verse with added literary qualities to facilitate memorization and remembrance. In these the Buddha used a variety of meters—some not found in earlier Vedic literature (Winternitz 1983 p.5 footnote)—and resorted to attractive imagery as reflected in his picturesque similes and metaphors. He played with words using alliteration and double *entendre* effectively. Being conscious of recitation as the main means of transmission, the effect of sound has been equally utilized as that of meaning.

The numerous similes and metaphors in Dhammapada illustrate the Buddha's ability to draw parallels from daily life to add color to his ethical injunctions. The following are from the first four chapters alone:

- Suffering follows the evildoer as the cartwheel follows the hoof of the bull (1)
- Happiness follows the good as the shadow follows a person (2)
- Death overthrows the lazy like the wind a weak tree (7-8)
- Lush pierces an ill-developed mind like the rain an ill-thatched roof (13-14)
- One who studies the Dhamma much but does not practice is like a cowherd who counts others' cattle (but has no share of the produce (19-20)
- The wise guard diligence like his wealth (26)
- The wise and diligent ascend the wisdom-palace and sees others as one on a hill sees those below (28)
- The wise straighten the mind as a fletcher does an arrow. (33)
- The mind flutters like a fish out of water. (34)
- Know the body to be like a pot of clay and the mind like a city and guard them with the weapon of wisdom (pannavudha). (40)
- Lustful man collecting the flowers of sensual pleasure is taken away by death like a flood does a sleeping village. (47)

- A sage wanders in a village (for alms) like a bee that does not hurt the color or scent of a flower (49)
- As a beautiful flower without scent, the fine words of one who does not act accordingly are useless. (52-53)
- One should gather merit as one makes many garlands from a heap of flowers. (53)

An example of a beautifully crafted poetic composition is the verse presented as the Buddha's first utterance on achieving enlightenment:

> Through many a life in the cycle of rebirth
> I wandered without success
> Searching for the builder of the house.
> Suffering it is to be born again and again. (153)
> Builder of the house! You have been spotted!
> Never again can you build the house!
> All your rafters are destroyed.
> Your ridge pole is broken.
> Liberated is my mind.
> I have reached the end of Desire- (154)
> (Tr. Narada Maha Thera)

The imagery for the elusive cause of suffering is the builder of a house (*gahakāraka*) and for attainment of enlightenment is the breaking of his rafters and ridge pole: The house-builder is the personification for Desire and victory over it is celebrated. Briefly but poignantly, the claim of success in a search spanning many lives is the Buddha's lasting message of hope to humanity.

Read in Pali, one is no doubt impressed by the pithiness of the numerous quotable quotes in which the choice of words and the sound effect of recitation appear to have been deliberately pursued. Some examples, again from Dhammapada, would illustrate this special aspect of the Buddha's poetic compositions:

- Manopubangamā dhammā
  Manoseṭṭhā manomayā
  (All things have the mind as fore-runner; the mind is supreme and they are mind-made)- (1-2)
- Na hi verena verāṇi
  (Not by hatred the hatreds) – (5)
- Anikkasāvo kāsāvaṃ
  (One without removing defilements [wears] the saffron robe) – (9)
- Idha modati pecca modati
  (Here one rejoices; having departed one rejoices; the virtuous rejoices in both) – 16 (also 15, 17, 18)
- Appamādo amatapadaṃ
  Pamado maccuno padaṃ
  Apammattā na mīyanti
  Ye pamattā yathā matā
  (Diligence is the path to immortality; heedlessness is the path to death. The diligent never die; the heedless are like the dead) – (21)
- Cittaṃ dantaṃ sukhāvahaṃ
- Cittaṃ guttaṃ sukhavahaṃ
  (A mind, tamed/guarded ushers in happiness) – (35-36)

- Puññapāpapahīnassa
  Natthi jāgarato bhayaṃ
  (To the awakened who has dispelled both good and evil there is no fear) - (39)
- Yodetha māraṃ paññhāvudhena
  (Attack death with the weapon of wisdom) – (40)
- Dīgho bālānaṃ saṃsāro
  (The cycle of rebirth is long to fools) – (60)
- Attā hi attano natthi
  (One does not even have oneself) – 62)
- Attā hi attano nātho
  (One is one's own refuge/master) – (380)
  Attānaṃ damayanti paṇḍitā
  (The wise tame oneself) – (80)
- Attā have jitaṃ seyyo
  (Greater indeed is self conquered) – (104)
- Ko nu hāso kim ānando
  (What laughter and what joy) – (146)
- N'añño aññaṃ visodhaye
  (None purifies another) – (165)
- Verinesu manussesu
  Viharāma averino
  (Among hateful men we live without hate) – (197)
- Akkodhena jine kodhaṃ
  (Conquer anger with love) – (223)
- Natthi loke anindito
  (There is none in the world, who is not blamed) – (227)
- Na tena pandito hoti
  Yāvata bahü bhāsati
  (By the extent one talks a lot, one does not become a learned man) – (258)
- Sabbarasaṃ dhammarasaṃ jināti
  The flavor of dhamma excels every flavor) – (354)
- Dinnaṃ hoti mahapphalaṃ
  (What is given brings great reward) – 357-359)
- Santakāyo santavāco
  Santavā susamāhito
  (Appeased in body and word; Possessed of peace and mind well concentrated) – (378)

An element of shock and curiosity is generated by some verses like Dhammapada 294 and 283:

> **Having killed the father and the mother**
> **And also the two warrior kings**
> **Having destroyed the country with its guardsmen,**
> **The Brahman (=Arahant) goes to peace.**

One goes to the commentary to solve the puzzle and finds that parents symbolize craving and conceit, the kings the concepts of eternalism and nihilism, the country the sense faculties and objects, and the guardsmen attachments. In 283, the riddle is how to cut the forest but not the tree:

Cut down the forest but not the tree
From the forest generates fear
Having cut down the forest and the scrub
Bhikkhus! Be free of the forest.

One can imagine the kind of discussions and arguments the Buddha could have generated among the Sangha with these statements. One may trace the early beginnings of the ***koan***, which reached its perfection within the Ch'an (Zen) tradition.

Creative Elements of the Buddhist Prose Literature

The prose discourses of the Buddhist Canon, interestingly, are clearly indicated to be oral records of a disciple—in this case, Ananda, who is believed to have presented them to the First Buddhist Council with the cautious introduction ***Evam me sutam***—(Thus or in this form have I heard). It implies that the same event or statement reported could have been presented by another disciple differently. As such, the Buddha's authorship applies to the direct quotes attributed to him with, of course, the caveat that what is recorded is what Ananda recalled. But it is clear that several decades of organized literary activity within the Sangha had provided him with adequate resources to sustain a very high level of authenticity. The internal consistency of statements attributed to the Buddha is definitely the result of a deliberate effort. Standard clichés had been developed to ensure that each definition, response or exposition or description of situations was repeated in identical phraseology. The repetition of such clichés, though cumbersome in print, had a special role to play in communal recitation.

An enormous editorial service of the Sangha had been in operation for preserving the word of the Buddha. The compilation according to length (Dīgha and Majjhima), numerical enumeration (Anguttara), cognate subject-matter or audience or location (Saṃyutta) and size (Khuddaka), assigning names for each discourse, and organizing them in sub-files named and numbered had been functions carried out right through the life-time of the Buddha. Such activity culminated in the comprehensive lists of headwords representing a remarkable example of intellectual creativity in the Saṅgīti and Dassuttara suttas, attributed to Sāriputta. (D.33, 34). Apparently, the Buddha encouraged the Sangha to go beyond the mere preservation of his word. A process of intellectual analysis and interpretation was inherent in the Buddha's method of instruction (Guruge 2002 pp.23-53). That resulted in the scholasticism, which began in the Buddha's lifetime and proceed to produce the rich analytical and philosophical literature commencing from works like Paṭisambidhāmagga, the whole of Abhidhamma literature and the Mahayana sutras.

The aesthetic creativity of the Buddha, as reflected in the prose discourses, is to be seen in the imaginative story-telling and the effective use of the parable. The Buddha was undoubtedly an accomplished story-teller. Kūṭadantasutta (D. 5) is an interesting example of how the Buddha found a tactful approach to convince a Brahman, who assumed that the Buddha as a spiritual leader of the time knew some special secrets on the sacrificial rites. Instead of denying any involvement in sacrifices or preaching against violence, or even rebuking the Brahman, the Buddha proceeds to tell the story of a chaplain who performed a sacrifice for a king in the past. He sustains the interest of

Kūṭadanta who realizes at the end that no efficacy is assignable to a sacrifice involving the killing of hundreds of animals.

Whether the Buddha invented the numerous stories or borrowed them from the public literary property of the time, one finds difficult to determine. There was always the possibility that the Buddha adapted old stories, giving them new twists to serve his purposes. Whatever the origin, these stories led to the creation of the special class of narratives called the Jātakas in which the leading character came to be identified with the Buddha in one of his previous lives and other characters with contemporaries of the Buddha. Such an assumption on the part of the disciples could have arisen out of the impressive manner in which the Buddha related each story to a current situation, convincingly establishing resemblance or identity. Satire, often, was an element inherent in these stories whose human interest is consistently high. Humor figures abundantly. The literary merits of the Buddhist narrative literature, especially the Jātakas, have received due attention. (See Winternitz 1983 pp. 108-151)

The prose narratives are interspersed with verse. In the discourses of the Dīgha and Majjhima nikāyas, two kinds of metrical compositions are found: some a part of the journalistic record which Winternitz equates to ballads and other which summarizes the doctrinal points. This latter kind of metrical compositions, which. Winternitz calls momentous utterances. (Winternitz 1983, p. 34), too, could be the Buddha's own.

The direct quotes of the word of the Buddha are as replete with apt similes and metaphors as are the poetical compositions. Apparently, a delightful feature of the Buddha's speech had been the colorful imagery chosen to clarify an idea. The Pali Text Society translators of Suttapiṭaka were so impressed by the plethora of such similes that an index was prepared for each volume to enable easy reference. (See appendix II, where these indexes are collated to facilitate easy reference).

An exceedingly interesting example of the Buddha's creativity is the parable. (See End-note 3) As Winternitz says,

> It was also certainly a part of Gotama Buddha's method of teaching to captivate and convince the listeners by parables. A parable is certainly no argument, but in the heart and even in the mind of the listener a parable often has the effect, which is more than that of a thousand arguments. Buddha was very well aware of this, he liked to embellish his speeches with allusions and his disciples followed him in this. Thus we find in the Suttas of all four collections (=Nikāyas) a veritable flood of parables and it is indeed in no small measure that they lend a literary character and artistic value to these speeches. (Winternitz 1983, p. 68).

Among the most striking of the Buddha's parables are the following which are oft-repeated in the Canon and widely quoted by students of Buddhism:

- The blind and the elephant to stress on systems approach to knowledge;
- The surgeon and the man wounded by a poisoned arrow to establish the pragmatic approach to speculative questions of creation and the creator;
- The hunter and the water snake to highlight dangers of misunderstanding the Dhamma;
- The man who carries on his head the raft up the hill out of gratitude to show that even Dhamma has to be left behind when its use is over;

- The man who talks of his love for a girl when he has no idea as to who and where she is, to satirize the seekers for companionship with Brahma whom neither they nor their teachers know;
- The builder of a staircase with no knowledge of what and where the building is to emphasize the same point as above;
- The parent who will spare no pain to save child by dislodging a pebble from his throat to justify the austerities of the Path of Salvation;
- The lamp and the oil to show how suffering is perpetuated as long as greed fuels existence;
- The four rivers losing their identity in the water of the ocean to illustrate how Recruits to the Sangha from the four castes lost their caste identities;
- Fires generated by members of the four castes, that glowed alike, to emphasize the oneness of humanity;
- One-eyed tortoise seeing the skies through the eye of a yoke floating in the ocean to illustrate the probability of being born a human;
- The man, threatened by an elephant above and a snake below and saving himself by clinging to a thorny creeper, still enjoying a drop of honey that falls on his tongue to show how one is indifferent to suffering;
- The man who insists on carrying his bundle of jute even when silver and gold is given freely to ridicule diehard conservatism;
- How a tamed elephant tames the wild elephant to illustrate a method of instruction.

The imaginative use of a string of parables to establish a point is seen in Pāyāsisutta of Dīghanikāya.

The Buddha's lead and innovations in his multifaceted literary pursuits had inspired his contemporaries as vividly evident from the outpourings of poetic sentiments in the Theragāthā and Therīgāthā and later compositions included in the Khuddakanikāya such as Vimānavatthu, Petavatthu, Apadāna, Buddhavaṃsa and Cariyāpiṭaka. The continuation of the tradition is also noticed in the quasi-canonical work, the Milindapanha.

Taken together the poetic compositions and speeches attributable to the Buddha and the Buddha's attitude to arts in general and architecture in particular, it is amply clear that the Buddha laid, by his own pursuits and convictions, the foundation for aesthetic creativity, which characterizes Buddhism as a significant civilizing force.

Though Buddhism appears to have remained stagnant as a regional monastic system during the first three hundred years after the Buddha, the literary and scholastic activity which began in the Buddha's life-time had continued with vigor as is demonstrated by the codification of the Canon in three Divisions or Baskets and the development of Abhidhamma and exegetical literature. The spread and evolution of Buddhism as a popular religion has been phenomenal since the Mauryan Emperor Asoka and later Kanishka I of the Kushan Dynasty extended their patron to Buddhism. This movement spreading over two millennia has been characterized by a remarkable development of aesthetic creativity at every geographical location in the whole of the Asian Continent to which Buddhism was taken.

Part II – Buddhism and Aesthetic Creativity

Was the Buddha an Artist?

In the foregoing pages we examined the Buddha's own contribution to art, architecture, poetry and creative literature. A question to be further explored is the extent to which the contribution of the Buddha laid the foundation for the Pan-Asian Buddhist Culture. M. Anesaki appears to have been among the earliest to seek an answer to this question. In 1916, his work on "Buddhist Art in its Relation to Buddhist Ideals with Special Reference to Buddhism in Japan" sought "to provide an elucidation of Buddhist art in its developed form" – based on his assumption that "Japanese Buddhism is representative, more than Indian and Chinese, of a continuous development both in doctrine and in art. (Anesaki 1916, p. vii)

It was Anesaki's view that the personal inspiration of the Buddha laid the foundation of Buddhism and the resulting culture. He asks himself the question:

> What was the source of the artistic inspiration, which Buddhism developed so opulently? In other words: Was Buddha himself an artist, or had Buddhism any inherent tendency to express itself in art?

He proceeds to answer:

> Our answer is affirmative, with a certain special extension in the meaning of the words "art" and "artist." Buddhism offered three areas of artistic inspiration. The first is the conception of life implied in Buddha's personality and proclaimed by his teachings. The second is a consequence of the first and consists in the pious memory of the Master cherished among his followers. The third, another corollary of the first, is the practice of dedication based on the ideal of universal communion. ....
>
> Buddha was an artist, not, I dare say, in the sense that he ever worked with brush or chisel, but in the sense that his perception of life was artistic because he perceived in man and in nature the vital and sympathetic tie, which bound them to his own soul. This is the process of idealization, the secret of artistic creation; and Buddha grasped this secret in his conception of universal communion and through his training in the transformed life. ...
>
> Moreover, the strong impressions received by Buddha and his followers from animals and plants and the imposing landscapes of India, worked so deeply upon their minds that their feeling toward nature played an essential part in their idea of fellowship. Perhaps in no other religion are animals and flowers treated with such intimacy as in Buddhism, not only in the way of similes, but also in concrete manifestations of tender sympathy. ....
>
> Thus the ideal communion of the Buddhist faith comprised all kinds of existences, actual and imaginary, in men and in nature. The expansion of Buddha's spiritual being, wrought by this new conception of life, became the fountain-head of an inexhaustible inspiration in religion and morals, in art and poetry. ....
>
> To recapitulate, this ideal of the ultimate unity of all existences is the source, in Buddha's life and teaching, from which Buddhist art derived its profoundest and most enduring inspirations. .... Now we come to the second point in the inspiration of Buddhist art. The communion of life was, for the Buddhists, not a mere ideal vision but an actual fact realized in Buddha's life, in his conversion and in his inspiration. The Truth-winner and Truth-revealer, the Master, was believed by his disciples to be a

personal testimony, an incarnation, of what he preached. Faith, not only in the truth but also in the person of Buddha, was what distinguished Buddhism preeminently from any of the older religions of India, and it was this personal influence that gave vitality to the Buddhist religion and its art. ....

Closely connected with the ideal of communion and stimulated by the personal remembrance of the Master, the idea and practice of dedication played a great part in the religion and art of Buddhism. ....

The new religion inaugurated by Buddha asserted its influence upon the moral life of his disciples and also expressed its faith and ideals in the forms of architecture and sculpture. The first manifestation of artistic activity among the Buddhists was seen in the memorials built in honor of the relics of the deceased Master. Mounds (stupa) or chapels (caitya) were erected as repositories for these precious relics, and a little later palings and gateways were built around these memorials. Ceremonies were performed about the mounds or in the chapels, and processions marched around the reliquaries. These structures were embellished with relief carvings, which show the earliest work of Buddhist sculptors. (Anesaki, 1916 pp. 5-16)

Anesaki added further,

> The beginning of the Buddhist religion in a small community of Buddha's disciples, the rise of Buddhist sculpture after his death, the rapid development of Buddhist art partly through the contribution of the Greeks, ... the spread of the religion together with its art to China and Japan – these steps will remain forever a marvel of human achievement inspired by the zeal of faith. Herein we can discern the subtle but close connection between religious faith and artistic inspiration and the connection becomes more manifest and vital in the developed form of Buddhism known as the Mahayana, the Greater Vehicle or Broader Communion. (Anesaki 1916 p.13)

Beautiful Monasteries as Centers of Artistic Creativity

There is no doubt that the establishment of "beautiful monasteries" with the Buddha's own approval for employing decorative art motifs for ornamentation led to the progressive development of Buddhist sculpture and painting as the earliest manifestations. But how is it that no archaeological finds hitherto has revealed any examples before the time of Asoka. In 1967 when I reviewed this issue, I came to the conclusion that perishable building materials such as wood, clay and terra cotta could be the reason why earliest specimens of Buddhist art are absent, I argued,

> Asoka, of course, seems to have made a lasting contribution to Indian art by adopting more durable materials. ... Why did Asoka decide to adopt bricks and stone? Some scholars explain that this change was due to the influence of the Greeks. This is somewhat doubtful. ... Any influence of Greek architecture should be seen in the works of Candragupta rather than in those of Asoka. What is specifically new in the works of Asoka should naturally be the result of a cultural influence to which he alone and not the earlier members of the dynasty were subjected. The only such influence known is Buddhism. ...Two hundred years of existence had given the Buddhist Sangha the assurance that its permanency was established. So, when the emperor offered to erect no less than 84,000 monasteries throughout the subcontinent, the monks' preference would

> have been for stone buildings. To my mind this appears more probable. (Guruge 1967 pp. 107-108)

It is on account of the use of stone that we have, as the earliest of extant Buddhist art and architecture, the Asokan pillars as at Bakhira, Laurya Nandangarh and Sarnath, sculptures of Indra in the form of a Brahman offering a bundle of grass and the yaksini in the traditional form as entwining a tree with a leg at Buddha Gaya, and Udayagiri bas-relief of an elephant and architectural components of the Viharas at Bairat and Sanchi and of Stūpas at Taxila. But the more extensive and artistically well-developed examples are to be found from about a century later than Asoka. These are all associated with Stūpas at Bharhut, Sanchi, Amaravati and Nagarjunikonda, which display how this particular Buddhist shrine evolved as an architectural form providing many opportunities for aesthetic creativity. The dome, as its central feature, lent itself to innovations in size and shape and in embellishments such as stairways, railings, and multiple stone parasols. At Bharhut and Sanchi, the enclosing stone railing and gateways were the domain of the sculptors to bring out the best of their ultimate talent.

There seems to have been no restrictions as to what motifs they used. The use of the feminine figure, minimally clothed or nude in suggestive erotic postures, at both Bharhut and Sanchi had baffled art historians. K. de B. Codrington assumed that the figures of yakṣas and yakṣiṇis on the railings of Bharhut were godlings of pre-Buddhist faiths and Buddhism adopted them. This may be so as regards Bharhut, which gives their names. But his following assumption with regard to Sanchi needs closer examination:

> These godlings have lost their names, but persist under the generic titles of yaksha or yakshi, guardians of the four gateways of the great stupa. Swinging from the branches of trees, yakshis form brackets to the architraves. ... Between them passed each one of the thousands of pilgrims who attended great festivities (Garrat 1937 pp. 78-79)

Both at Bharhut and Sanchi, it appears more reasonable to assume that these erotically executed feminine figures were used for ornamentation to attract visitors. Once the beauty of the sculpture, and also paintings brought the visitor to a shrine, Buddhist art proceeded to achieve its primary function of educating him or her. While male and female figures, the floral designs and panels depicting daily life added to make the stone railings and gateways works of art, the cleverly designed medallions and square panels were turned into "books" narrating visually stories on the present and past lives of the Buddha. By the time of Bharhut, which was around the second century BCE, a technique of combining or overlaying several episodes to tell a story had been developed into what Rowland called "artistic shorthand."

A century later with the more abundant finds at Sanchi, we see the process in a far more refined and sophisticated state. Ornamentation has reached a zenith in artistic versatility to include an exceedingly rich variety to floral designs combined with animals in diverse combinations and specifically Buddhist symbols of the wheel (for Dhamma), and the trident (for the Triple Gem). Sanchi gates were designed with the architraves resembling giant scrolls of palm leaf strips curled at the two ends: the opened center carried exquisitely carved sculptures narrating such episodes as the Great Departure, the Mārayuddha, (victory over Māra), Vessantara Jātaka, Asokas's pilgrimage to the sacred

Bodhi Tree etc.. Steles and jambs told in square and rectangular panels many episodes from the life of the Buddha

What is clear from both these early shrines is that the Buddhist monastery served three functions of assembly, worship, and religious instruction. The first and the last functions were served by art. (See End-note 4) Evidence exists that paintings on walls and less durable surfaces like wood were as ubiquitous as sculpture. A great deal of concern with the economy of space is visible in these early specimens of educational art. The pictures served as mnemonical devices to facilitate the guide or the visitor himself to recall the stories which one already knew from discourses and religious instruction.

An astounding feature at both these shrines and also the early phases of other stūpa sites as Amaravati and Nagarjunikonda is that the life of the Buddha is told without once using the image of the Buddha in human form. Unlike in the Ten Commandments, no explicit prohibition of representing the Buddha in human form is found in Buddhist scripture. Yet, for at least the first four hundred years after the Buddha, he was represented by such symbols as the royal parasol, footprints, wheel, Bodhi-tree, column of fire and stūpa. This restriction, however, had not in any way deterred the eloquent story-telling artist.

At Amaravati and Nagarjunikonda, as well as at Sarnath, the very dome, which is paved with carved stone slabs, and the immediate periphery served the dual mission of ornamentation and religious instruction. As sites which had seen longer periods of development and sophistication, both Amaravati and Nagarjunikonda show the gradual displacement of aniconic symbols for the Buddha with the image of the Buddha. Also seen is the development of epitomized symbols for major events in the Buddha's life aniconally with an elephant for birth, a bull for childhood (related to an episode connected with Suddhodana's plowing ceremony), a horse for the Great Departure, a wheel for the first discourse, roaring lions for the mission as a teacher and a stūpa for the demise. In human form, the symbolic representation came to be epitomized into Queen Maya's dream of the white elephant (for conception), her holding a branch of the Sāla tree at Lumbini (for birth), prince Siddhartha riding a horse (for the Great Departure), the Buddha touching the earth with the right hand (for the attainment of Buddhahood), his preaching the first discourse with fingers in problem explaining gesture and his reclining between two Sāla trees at Kusinara (for the Demise of the Buddha). Established so early in the history of Buddhist art, these symbolic representations traveled all over the Asian continent and continue to this day as the common vocabulary of all Buddhist art.

How the tradition has survived can be vividly demonstrated with one interesting example: the Buddha is said to have slept without losing his awareness and the sleeping Buddha has his toes in a perfect line: but on his death-bed, a pain at the knees had caused him to slip his legs, changing the orderliness of the toes. Every artist in every country even today would represent the dying Buddha with varying degrees of exaggeration of the position of the feet. Similarly universalized are the Buddha in meditation, delivering a discourse, proclaiming Buddhahood, offering sanctuary or freedom from fear, and inviting one to come closer.

Part III – Buddhist Cultural Heritage

Evolution of the Stūpa

The four stūpa sites discussed above show how the symbolic burial mound, with enshrined relics of the Buddha, evolved as the central Buddhist shrine in a monastery. It is another feature of Buddhist art and architecture which spread world-wide and accordingly has been subjected to a wide range of innovations in size and design.

In Sri Lanka, which has preserved an unbroken growth of Buddhist culture over twenty-three centuries, the first stūpa was constructed under the direction of the royal missionary Mahinda himself. For an inexplicable reason, later Sri Lanka monarchs had concentrated on the size of the stūpa of each monastery that they established. When Tissamahārāma was constructed in the second century BCE in southern Sri Lanka, it turned out to be the largest Buddhist monument in the Subcontinent. A few decades later Duṭṭhagāmiṇi builds for the Mahāvihāra a stūpa twice as large. A century later, Gajabāhu makes the stūpa of the rival Abhayagiri monastery to supersede that of the Mahāvihāra. Three centuries later, Mahāsena builds for the third monastery, Jetavana, a gigantic stūpa which remained for over a millennium the second tallest monument in the world and the largest brick building ever. Only the great pyramid of Egypt surpassed it in height. If the Demalamahasæya in Polonnaruwa, commenced in the twelfth century and half-built, was completed, it would have exceeded 600 feet and become the tallest building in the world until the Eiffel Tower was erected. Though the emphasis on size ceased to persist, the centrality of the stūpa, with specifically Sri Lankan innovations in the cubical structure and the spire above the dome and the altar-like fronticepieces (*vahalkaḍa*) at cardinal points, has continued. The prominence of the stūpas, called in Sinhala **Dāgap**, is reflected by the current use of the term **Pagoda** (the Sinhala name read right to left by the Portuguese as in Arabic) for the many architectural variations all over Asia.

The pagoda now ranges from the hemispherical dome of the Indian Subcontinent, the elongated dome of Southeast Asia, the upturned ice-cream cone of Myanmar, the multilevel myrobalan-like chortens of Tibet, the multi-storied structures with jutting eves of East Asia to the ornamental pillar-like specimens of Korea. In every such form, the stūpa or Thūpa, Dāgaba or Pagoda is a gem of Buddhist architectural creativity and stands out as a striking symbol of the presence of Buddhism.

Introduction and Evolution of the Buddha Image

Even more significant as a symbol of Buddhism is the Buddha image. As noted earlier, the Buddhist art of the first four hundred years after the Buddha had demurred from representing the Buddha is human form. The variety of the symbols by which the presence of the Buddha was conveyed and their geographical spread within India and Sri Lanka indicate the strictness with which a prohibition or self-imposed restraint preserved this tradition, In Sri Lanka the symbol for Triple Gem prevalent in early centuries as a symbol of worship was the rectangular stone on which were carved two footprints with the royal parasol above them to represent the Buddha, a wheels on each sole to signify the Dhamma, and two lotus beds to symbolize the Sangha. In tropical Buddhist countries, the Bodhi-tree (ficus religiosa) became a symbol for the Buddha and as a

shrine received the attention of architects who designed enclosures for the tree. (Railings of Buddha Gaya in India and Bodhighara of Sri Lanka).

When the Buddha statue came into existence is a subject of continuing debate. Legends, which trace its origin to the days of the Buddha, lack historical support because of the persistent use of symbols. The Sri Lankan chronicle, the Mahāvaṃsa (6th century CE) describes images of the Buddha enshrined in the Great Stūpa of Anuradhapura in the second century BCE. They were said to be in precious metal and gems. Without the excavation of the relic chamber, the doubt remains as to the authenticity of the description. Could it be that the chronicler reflected the practice of his times?

The earliest datable image of the Buddha comes from a coin of Kanishka I of the Kushan dynasty (first century CE). The standing figure surrounded by a halo and dressed in toga-like robe is labeled in Greek letters as BODDO. There are many factors, which favor the currently held view that the Kushans could have played a major role in the introduction of the Buddha image:

(1) They were a foreign dynasty from Central Asia and did not share the sentiments of the early Buddhists;
(2) They had adopted a more populist form of Buddhism, namely Mahāyāna, wherein the Buddha increasingly acquired supramundane (lokottara) attributes; and
(3) Their empire jutting into the Greco-Roman region was exposed to Greek and Roman religious use of images of gods.

The unmistakable resemblance of early Buddha images to the Greek God Apollo lends support to this view. The thousands of miniature stone carvings, which represent the Gandhāra Buddhist art of the Northwestern region of the Indian Subcontinent, bear an enormous resemblance to Greek art.

Once the Kushans had broken the tradition, the aesthetic creativity of the Buddhist artist took over. In the Indian end of the Kushan Empire, in the region around Mathura – the Buddha image evolved with purely Indian characteristics. The Mathura Buddhas – contemporaneous with Gandhāra art – turned out to be delicately executed works of art. Not only the facial features but also their ornamentation with halos of floral design and neatly folded robe has a purely Indian character.

With no idea as to what the Buddha actually looked in life, the sculptors or artists were free to portray him with a countenance familiar to them. The Buddha appears to have acquired the physical characteristics of each country in Asia. Some concentrated on physical beauty and perfection of form as of a youth with even feminine features (Cf. for instance the Sarnath seated Buddha with the teaching gesture.) Others stressed personality and attempted to signify wisdom, calmness and deep concentration (Cf. Samādhi statues of Anuradhapura and Toluwila in Sri Lanka). The Buddha is represented as teaching, meditating, offering sanctuary and beckoning in gestures, which became universally applicable. Thailand also produced a walking Buddha, which bears resemblance to the Polonnaruwa Tivanka Pilimage painting of the Buddha descending down a stairway.

With the glorification of the Buddha in Mahāyāna Buddhism, the emphasis shifted to the stature. Giant Buddha statues came into existence wherever the Buddha

was conceived as supramundane under the influence of the Lokottara tradition of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Attributes of the historic Buddha were personified as independent Buddhas: the Buddha of unlimited light and life becomes Amitābha-Amitāyus and, as Amitābha, presiding over Sukhāvati or Western Paradise or Pure Land, is associated with a simplified practice of calling out his name to gain blessings and rebirth in Sukhāvati. (Cf. Japanese Nembutsu).

Other attributes result in a pantheon of Dhyāni Buddhas with Vairocana figuring in most sculpture. The most outstanding of the gigantic statues were the standing Buddhas at Bamiyan in Afghanistan, which were destroyed by Talibans. Equally remarkable statues – usually seated – are found in China at Lashem near Chendu and Dun-huang. In Sri Lanka two standing Buddhas at Aukana and Maligawila (each over 30 feet) and the reclining Buddha of Gal Vihara in Polounaruwa (50 feet) are around fifteen to eight centuries old. Gigantic Buddha statues of equal antiquity are in Nara and Kamakura in Japan. Later statues of equal and greater dimensions have come into existence in Myanmar, Thailand and Cambodia. Among the most recent of such Buddha statues is the enormous Mandala-style seated Buddha statue in bronze which the People's Republic of China constructed for Hong Kong in Lentau island in 1993. Its size may be gauged by the fact that the nose and the fingers are as large as a full-grown man.

The Pantheon of Bodhisattvas and Taras

Mahāyāna Buddhism provided another opportunity for aesthetic creativity. The Bodhisattva cult brought into existence many Bodhisattvas each with specific iconographic characteristics. The artist was challenged to exercise his ingenuity in creating diverse elements of gesture, posture, embellishment, and symbolism to distinguish one from another. What began in India traveled via Central Asia to China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam and each country has its own treasures of exquisite statues, sculptures and paintings of Bodhisattvas. The presence of Mahāyāna in Sri Lanka, too, is evidenced by the exceedingly beautiful thirty-foot Bodhisattva of Dambegoda, the gigantic bas-reliefs of Avalokitesvara and Taras of Budururagala, and Sasseruwa and the unique bronze statue of Tara of exceptional artistic and technological significance, currently in the British Museum, London.

Two significant developments in East Asia as regards the concept of Avalokitesvara led to artistic innovation. Avalokitesuvara, the protector with eleven heads and a thousand hands, called for imagination for the supernormal, while the same Bodhisattva as the symbol of compassion became Kwan-yin (in Chinese) or Kannon (in Japanese) highlighting the beauty and tender characteristics of a woman. The gallery of Kannons at Sanju-sangendo in Kyoto is an incredible example of aesthetic creativity of Japanese Buddhist art. Just as the Buddha statue, Kwan-yin statues continue to be erected throughout East Asia and in size and beauty many of the recent creations have reached new heights of technical and aesthetic perfection.

The Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Tārās in Tantric or Vajrayāna Buddhism of Tibet and Mongolia demanded imaginative visual treatment of some extraordinary concepts. Sexual overtones of Tantricism resulted in erotic representation of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas embracing female consorts. The universe is conceived as being inhabited by all kinds of demons and spirits. The artist in Vajrayāna tradition met the

challenge of these concepts with both works of exceedingly charming beauty and the most grotesque and frightening creations.

Vajrayāna also added a portable shrine into Buddhist worship in the form of Tangkas (wall-hangings). It also brought in two kinds of ephemeral art in the form of butter sculpture mainly for decoration and the sand maṇḍala for a variety of purposes ranging from meditation to ornamentation.

Painting and Sculpture in Caves or Grottoes

The Buddha and his disciples used existing caves as residences and a cave like Saptaparni or Rajagaha was 'prepared' (?!) for the First Buddhist Council. But the earliest known man-made caves or grottoes in the Indian Subcontinent are those of the Barabar Hills, which Asoka and his grandson, Daśaratha, donated to the Ājīvakas.

Between the second century BCE and the seventh century CE the Buddhist Sangha perfected in the region of the Western Ghats the art of cave architecture displaying a very high degree of engineering and mathematical skill. Living cliffs were scooped out systematically going into the heart of the rock as far deep as 100 to 125 feet and leaving behind at correct places walls, columns, ceilings, stūpas, images of the Buddha, and human and animal figures. The final result was a shrine or a dwelling place, which imitated the wooden buildings of the age in such great details as even to carve the joining of rafters in a realistic manner. Caves or grottoes of Bhaja, Kondane, Pitalkhora, Karle, Junnar, Kanheri and Nasik and of the extensive monastic complexes of Ajanta and Ellora have preserved most of the early Buddhist paintings, sculpture, and statuary. The dwellings are austere and the shrines have either a stone-cut stūpa or a stūpa with a standing or seated Buddha in front as the focus of worship. An interesting innovation in these sites is that the Buddha is seated in Western style rather than in the usual Yogic posture.

Pillars with attractive capitals and windows and entrances in the shape of a Bodhi-tree leaf are artistic elements of cave architecture. While Ellora is a more austere complex of caves mainly with sculpture, Ajanta shrine caves preserve remarkably captivating paintings of great artistic merit. The paintings portray events from the life and career of the Buddha, several popular Jatakas and some events from Buddhist history. The universally acclaimed quality of the aesthetic creativity of Ajanta paintings seems to have influenced cave or grotto paintings of Central Asia and China in the north and Sigiriya and Dambulla of Sri Lanka in the south.

Grottoes in Bamiyan and Begram of Afghanistan Khotan, Miran, Bezeklik, Fondukistan, Kizil and Kucha of Central Asia and the 492-cave complex of Dun-huang have both paintings and statues whose early phases reflect direct Indian influence. In Dun-huang, the older the painting or sculpture, the closer it is to Ajanta especially in the emphasis on attributes of feminine beauty. The continuation of cave architecture in China is to be traced in the most impressive colossal statues of Yun-kang, which show little influence of indigenous Chinese art; Lung-men, where an innovative art tradition blending Central Asian and Chinese features had evolved; and T'rin-lung-shan where Chinese character stands out prominently. Further geographical extension of this form of

aesthetic creativity is represented by the cave temple of Sokkulam in Korea, with its most beautiful seated Buddha.

Buddhist shrines -- especially the Image House -- continue to be adorned with paintings and sculpture. Themes dealt with for the education of the visitor remain identical from the very beginnings of the Buddhist artistic tradition: namely, life and career of the Buddha, Jātaka stories and history of Buddhism. Sri Lanka has spectacular mural paintings datable from around the fifth century to modern times (e.g. Sigiriya, Mahiyangana relic chamber, Dimbulagala, Tivanka Pilimage, 20,000 square feet of wall and ceiling paintings of Dambulla, and murals of Rajamahāvihāras of the Kandy region such as Degaldoruwa, Madawala, Gangaramaya). The modern murals by celebrated painters Solius Mendis and Nanadalal Bose at Kelani Vihara and George Keyt at Gotami Vihara reflect remarkable advances in design and execution. In addition, Sri Lanka has perpetuated a traditionally handed down form of artistic creativity called Sittara Art. Myanmar and Thailand have a similar heritage and an exception as regards the themes is to be found at Wat Phra Keow and Wat Poh of Bangkok where the story of the Rāmāyana is dealt with in murals and stone sculpture.

Massive Temple Complexes

This survey of Buddhist aesthetic creativity in art and architecture will not be complete without reference to colossal temple complexes of Indonesia and Cambodia. Borobudur in the island of Java was constructed by the Shailendra Dynasty around 800 CE. The top of a hill was flattened to form massive circular platform for a central stūpa surrounded by seventy-two smaller stūpas, each containing a beautiful Buddha image in its perforated dome. The circular path leading up the hill is lined with stone panels of exquisitely carved scenes from the traditional sources of Buddhist artistic themes. Borobudur is undoubtedly an astonishing art gallery marking the zenith of Buddhist aesthetic creativity.

The Cambodian heritage is at least four centuries later and had been jointly and severally inspired by both Hinduism and Buddhism. Angkor Wat is predominantly Hindu whereas Angkor Thom and Bayon display some of the most attractive architectural and artistic features of Cambodian Buddhist Art.

A return to massive temple complexes has been made in modern times with the initiative taken by opulent Chinese communities of Penang and Taiwan. The Chinese Temple, Kek Lok Si of Penang in Malaysia and Fo Guang Shan in Kaohsiung in Taiwan are both impressive centers of Buddhist art and architecture. Due to the enterprising ingenuity of Grand Master Hsing Yun, similar temple complexes are being established in the West as well. Hsi Lai Temple of Hacienda Heights, California and Nan-Tien Temple in Australia are among the most spectacular. Each is also a center for the study of the pan-Asian Buddhist artistic tradition.

Aesthetic Creativity in Buddhist Literature

Going back to the days of the Buddha we find that the foundation that the Buddha laid to the development of poetry and narrative literature was solid and long lasting. Just as he did, his male and female disciples expressed the joy of renunciation

and liberation in moving poems, which in the two books *Theragāthā* and *Therīgāthā* are included in the Pali Canon. Versified narratives in the *Jātaka*, *Vimānavatthu*, *Petavatthu*, *Buddhavaṃsa* and *Cariyāpitaka* too were treated as canonical. An early record of a series of dialogues between King Menander of Bactria and Thera Nāgasena are preserved in *Milindapañha*, which is included in the Canon in Myanmar. A unique feature of this remarkable work is that Nāgasena is portrayed as presenting ingenious analogies and parables to establish each doctrinal issue discussed, very much in imitation of Pāyāsisutta of Dīghanikāya.

Early Buddhism as it spread to Sri Lanka concentrated more on exegetical and commentarial literature with only occasional efforts in creative poetry. But the commentaries to Dhammapada and Jātaka developed the narrative to a well-developed art form. These narratives contributed not only to Indian literature of fables which in turn went to Western Asia through Kalilah-wa-Dimnah in Arabic and by way of Aesop's Fables and Jean de La Fontaine's elegant French poem *Fables* influenced modern literature.

Just as in the development of art and architecture with increasing aesthetic creativity, it was the Mahāyāna tradition that ushered in some major works of poetic creativity. The devotional element of Mahāyāna, accentuated by the concept of a supramundane (Lokottara) Buddha, provided the inspiration and themes for this poetry. *Mahāvastu* narrates the life of the Buddha with a profusion of supernatural attributes and miraculous happenings. *Lalitavistara* is a work of much greater literary merit and its well-ordered narrative and beautiful poetry in elaborate meters speak highly of the ability of its composers, who, as in the case of Mahāvastu remain anonymous.

Aśvaghoṣa, the reputed spiritual adviser of Kanishka I, was a literary figure of astonishing versatility and excelled in employing the evolving new media of ornate poetry and drama in Sanskrit for the propagation of Buddhism. His two epics, *Buddhacarita* and *Saundaranandakāvya*, has the life of the Buddha and the episode of the conversion of Nanda as their themes; his drama, *Śāriputraprakaraṇa* deals with the conversion of the Buddha's chief disciples. The literary quality of Aśvaghoṣa's works is indeed outstanding. *Gaṇḍistotragāthā*, another work ascribed to him, is a beautiful lyrical poem, Hymns of Mātrceṭa are noted for the deep expression of pious devotion, lucid style and apt choice of words. In Aryaśūra's *Jātakamālā*, Sanskrit Buddhist literature adopted another form of literary creativity called *campu kāvya* (narratives in prose interspersed with verse), which followed the tenets of ornate poetry.

As the typically Mahāyāna Avadānas evolved as a literary form, *campu* style gained popularity and *Divyāvadāna* stands out as one of the earliest and most remarkable works of this kind. Kṣemendra's *Avadānakalpalatā*, dated 1052, consists of 107 legends retold tastefully in the style of ornate court poetry.

Mahāyāna philosophers and literati adopted the model of the discourses of the Pali Canon and the Āgama Sūtras, starting with the familiar statement "Thus it was heard by me" and created the class of philosophical, narrative and evangelical literature generically labeled *Vaipulya Sūtas* (Great discourses) or Mahāyāna Sutras. These go to hundreds even though nine are considered core works. Among them, Saddharma-pundarika, more popularly known as Lotus Sūtra remains a work of the highest quality

of aesthetic creativity. Its poetry, in particular, and imaginative use of parables have inspired generations of Buddhist poets over well nigh two millennia and continues its impact world wide even today. It is not surprising that Lotus Sūtra has assumed the role of sole scripture in several schools of Buddhism in China and Japan.

China and Tibet translated the Indian Buddhist literature mainly from Sanskrit so comprehensively and systematically that many Sanskrit Buddhist works, which are no longer available in the original, could be reconstructed from Chinese and Tibetan translations. These Chinese translations in due course inspired the development of the Chinese literary tradition regarding which Chau-pu-chu says the following:

Buddhism has introduced to Chinese literature entirely new things – new horizons, new literary genres and new ways of expression and rhetorical devices. Aśvaghoṣa's minstrelsy has brought us an excellent example of epic-writing. The Sadddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra, the Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra, the Sūtra of One Hundred Parables and other works lent inspiration to the novels of the Tsin and Tang dynasties. The thought of Prajnā has left traces in the poetical works of Tao Yuang-ming, Wang Wei, Pai Chu-yi and Su Shih (Su Tung-po). The popular ballads introduced in ancient times for the preaching of Buddhism gave rise to a special form of literature, the spiritual tales, which were in fact scriptures in laymen's language. The scriptural tales excavated in the Tunhuang caves were all popular works of literature in those days, written in an easy flowing style and exceedingly rich in imagination. From these works, the origins of early stories, novels, operas and other forms of vernacular literature can be traced. In addition, there exists another special genre of literary writing arising from the conversations and the minutes of religious instructions of reverend priests, namely, the Analects. Following this simple and free style of writing, the Confucian scholars of the Sung and Ming Dynasties produced various "records" in which they expressed their thought. In short, Buddhism has found rich and colorful expression in the field of Chinese literature. (Chao Pu-chu 1960, 20-22)

The quality of beautiful poems on the Buddha and Buddhist philosophy in Chinese can be gauged from their English translations in Richard Robinson's *Chinese Buddhist Verse*, London 1954.

In Tibet, it is poetry that evolved under Buddhist literary influence. Based on such works as Śāntideva's *Bodhicariyāvatāra*, which was translated into Tibetan with a deliberate effort to highlight poetic expression, Tibetan poetry soared to significant heights of aesthetic creativity. Poems of Milarepa and other Tibetan mystical poets are widely appreciated.

In East Asia as a whole, national literary movements owe their origin to Buddhist narrative and poetic literature. The newly invented Korean script was popularized through a biography of the Buddha. The Zen school of Buddhism generated a tradition of Buddhist poetry and in Japanese the laconic ***haiku*** became a vehicle of aesthetic expression of philosophical viewpoints.

In Sri Lanka, poems on Buddhist themes are traceable in rock inscriptions datable in the first century BCE and extant books go as far back as the ninth century CE. Among poetical compositions in adoration of the Buddha are Sanskrit inscriptions of

Mihintale and Tiriyay, which display the impact of Mahāyāna. While the enormous literary output of Sri Lanka was in the domains of exegetical and historical literature first in Sinhala and later translated into Pali, versification in Pali gave rise to Dīpavaṃsa and Mahāvaṃsa, the great chronicles, and to a substantial number of Pali poetic works. This Sri Lankan literature in Pali spread to Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. Besides the Pali works which each of these countries produced on their own, their national language literatures owe their origin to Buddhist models.

Jātakas and other narratives, especially in commentaries, provided themes for story-telling in both prose and verse. In Sri Lanka the earliest extant poems, with the exception of an adaptation of a Sanskrit treatise on figures of speech and the art of poetry (Siyabaslakara), are on Jātakas – Makhādeva, Sasa, and Kusa. Among them Kavsilumiṇa on the ugly king Kusa is hailed as a poem of the highest literary merit. These works, which imitated Sanskrit ornate court poetry, came in for criticism during a Buddhist reform movement in the twelfth-thirteenth century. One of the injunctions in a convention on the conduct of monastics was: "Poetry and drama should neither be learnt nor taught." As a result the next two centuries saw the production of a substantial prose literature. Experimenting with various styles to which a flexible Sinhala language lent special color, both monastic and lay writers retold with a high degree of aesthetic creativity stories culled from Pali and Sanskrit literature. Gurulugomi's *Amāvatura* and Vidyā Cakravarti's *Butsaraṇa* are hailed as "prose poetry," the former in lilting pure Sinhala and the latter in equally musical mixed Sinhala with a plenty of borrowed Sanskrit words. Dharmasena's adaptation of the commentary on Dhammapada, called *Saddharmaratanāvaliya* has captivated generations of readers through the apt and telling similes and metaphors, which the talented author derived from contemporary life and environment. In Sri Lankan culture, until the radio took over, people regularly gathered around literate neighbors to listen to these and many other prose narratives read aloud practically every evening. As a result these works of the 13th and the 14th centuries continue to be read and understood by Buddhist devotees with a minimum of education.

Poetry came back in the fifteenth century when a number of eminently gifted monastics produced poetic works of remarkable quality, such as Toṭagamuve Rahula's *Kāvyasekhara* and Vættæve's *Guttila Kāvyaya* on two Jātakas and Vīdāgama Maitreya's *Buduguṇālankāraya* (a eulogy on the Buddha) and *Lōvæḍasaṅgarāva* (a didactic poem resembling Sanskrit Buddhist *Suhṛllekhā*).

When after nearly two centuries of stagnation due to Portuguese and Dutch occupation of maritime regions, Buddhism underwent a revival in the eighteenth century. Buddhist poetry reappeared in profusion. With the advent of printing, a form of Buddhist folk poetry became so very popular that practically every Jātaka and incident in the Buddha's life was retold in inelegant but expressive colloquial Sinhala. These booklets were produced in many thousands and nurtured the reading habit of the average Buddhist in Sri Lanka.

The experience of Southeast Asian countries was similar. Myanmar even produced their own Jātakas in Pali as noted by Padmanabha Jaini. In all countries, Buddhist narrative and poetic works in national languages had the same influence on the people as they did in Sri Lanka.

In modern times, the impact of the creative literature on Buddhist themes are not restricted to Asian Countries only. Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia*, Joseph Victor Wildmann's *Buddha* and Richard Wagner's musical drama, *The Victors* are precursors to modern literary creations inspired by Buddhism. So profuse is Buddhist Poetry throughout the world that a Google search resulted in 544,000 entries!

Aesthetic Creativity in Performing Arts

With the total prohibition of dancing, singing and music (*nacca-gīta-vadita*) in the sixth of the lists of Eight and Ten Precepts and the discouragement of such arts in other contexts, Early Buddhism, being primarily monastic, does not appear to have directly promoted performing arts. The recital of Buddhist texts (*sajjhāyanā*) has been widely practiced. But whether such recitations could be termed vocal music is a moot point. Asoka in Rock Edict XIV speaks of statements, which were repeated because of their sweetness (*Madhura*). But sweetness here seems to refer to prose.

Again, it is with the rise of Mahāyāna that performing arts developed within Buddhist circles. Unlike literature or art and architecture, there is no way by which the antiquity of dancing, music and drama could be traced other than through stray references in texts or portrayals in painting and sculpture. That Aśvaghoṣa produced *Sāripturaprakaraṇa* as a drama presupposes that drama in his days was utilized to propagate Buddhist themes. If Gaṇḍistotra also can be attributed to him or his period, poems set to music could be dated in his times.

Processions seem to have been in use among Buddhists. In Sanchi is one of the oldest panels which depict a procession led by a drummer and a team of instrumentalists to or around a Stupa. Some figures in this panel are in poses that suggest dancing. In all Buddhist traditions, processions with music and dance are not only common but are an enthusiastic way of showing one's veneration and devotion. In addition, some form of music is associated with temples. In Mahāyāna temples, chanting accompanied by bells and percussion instruments promotes music and in recent times Buddhist chanting – both Chinese and Tibetan – has promoted singing and music.

In Southern Buddhism, too, the temple has its own orchestra of drums and wind instruments. In Sri Lanka, The Kandy Perahera is an event in which drumming and dancing are prominently displayed. In Thailand, there is at least one temple where dancing is the form of offering to the Buddha. Chanting of Paritta, too, has developed into a form of vocal music. While more systematic research is required in this field, it can still be concluded that Buddhists today do promote aesthetic creativity in performing arts too. Especially in national drama, Jātakas continue to provide the themes.

Conclusion

This survey, though not meant to be exhaustive, has shown the numerous ways in which Buddhism has had a favorable impact on aesthetic creativity. In every field of art, architecture, literature and performing arts, the impact of Buddhism has been historically impressive and currently extensive.

Endnotes

(1) **Aesthetic**, derived from Greek and Latin roots meaning "stand still" signifies beauty and attractiveness, which creates in the observer or enjoyer an experience of awe and wonder. James Joyce, the Irish writer, called this experience Aesthetic arrest and explained it as arising out of integrity, harmony and clarity of the object observed; the expression Aesthetic arrest may be tautological as both words mean almost the same. But it is adequately expressive and very interestingly corresponds to the term ***camatkāra*** (producing wonder, causing surprise, derived from ***camat!***—an interjection of surprise: Monier-Willams:SD) used in Sanskrit *belles lettres* to signify the effect created by a good poem or a spectacle. Breathtaking, in common parlance conveys an identical meaning.

(2) Cf. my analysis published in 1967 (Guruge 1967/1991, p.103), which remains valid: "First and foremost, it should be made clear that the artistic tradition of the Indus Valley civilization did persist as a significant trend in Indian cultural without a hiatus. There is ample evidence in support of this view from the religious and philosophical data available to us. The theory that there was a gulf between Indus Valley and India of the Buddha's time was based on an *argumentum ex silentio,* which is no longer acceptable. **The absence of archaeological evidence cannot be a cogent argument in a country where the science of archaeology is still in its infancy.** Here, I am not willing to agree with those scholars who think that the buildings of the intervening period were constructed out of perishable materials. This may be only partially true. The availability of good timber might have brought about a change in building materials. In fact, the wooden ramparts of Chandragupta Maurya's Pataliputra, unearthed at Bulandi Bagh in Patna, the fragments of a Mauryan stockade, (now in the Calcutta Museum) and the massive teak-wood platforms which supported the foundations of the façade of Mauryan palace are concrete examples for the use of timber in city-building. But there are still certain elements of a city, which cannot be restricted to timber. It is safer, therefore, to assume that vital information might still be under the earth to be discovered with the advance of archaeology."

(3) Winternitz says, "Speeches like the famous Sermon of Benares on the "four noble truths" and the "noble eightfold path" which again and again recur word for word in the same form not only in many places of the Pāli-canon but also in Buddhist Sanskrit texts, some of the farewell speeches occurring in the Mahāparinibbānasutta which the master is said to have addressed to the disciples before his death, some of the verses and short addresses handed down as "Words of the Buddha" and in the Dhammapada, in the Udāna, in the Itivuttaka and in more or less in the same form in the Sanskrit texts of Nepal as well as in Tibetan and Chinese translations as "Words of the Buddha," we may perhaps consider as originating from Buddha without ourselves being guilty of gullibility. But Gotama Buddha has not only preached his new doctrine of the suffering and the end of the suffering but he has also founded a formal religious order; he has gathered around himself a community of disciples who lived a holy life as expected by the master according to strict rules, in order to attain the end of the suffering — the much-admired Nirvāna. And thus some of the rules and prescriptions for this community of monks. Especially the ten commandments for the beggar-monks (dasasīlaṃ) and perhaps also the confessional litany (pātimokkha) may be traced back to the Buddha. Although none of the works belonging to the Buddhist literature may originate from the time of Buddha, yet individual texts contained in these works may perhaps be considered as the words of the Buddha. Among the early disciples of the Buddha also there were certainly some excellent scholars and some of them might be the authors of a few of the speeches, sayings and poems found among our collections. (p.5)

(4) Internal Buddhist tourism in the form of pilgrimages for the spiritual purpose of accumulating merit in countries of the Southern Buddhist tradition is greatly motivated by

the fame and reputation of different temples for artistic and architectural innovations and excellence. My own experience in Sri Lanka in my childhood is that the family has periodically gone long distances simply because a particular shrine is reputed to have some spectacular displays of sculpture, paintings and statues or works of art. I have had similar experiences in Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos, where temples vie with one another in creating "tourist" attractions in the form of gigantic Buddha statues as well as Buddhist "theme parks."

(5) For this rule about singing with a long-drawn melody and intoning, five reasons are given as follows: the monastic who sings is taken away by the melody; listeners are taken away by the melody; the people are taken away by the melody; the melody disturbs concentration on the meaning; and people in the future fall into the way of wrong views. The Buddha made rules only when a question of conduct was brought to his attention. Apparently, no monastics danced or performed comic shows and the need to lay down a rule did not arise.

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APPENDIX 1

BLESSINGS, JEWELS AND LOVING KINDNESS: THE MAGIC OF "THE THREE GOOD TALKS."

1. INTRODUCTION

In spite of the rational orientation, the ethical idealism and the primacy of mental development in original Buddhism, the popular religion, which developed around it, is not totally devoid of an element of faith-based rituals. Such ritual, of course, is directed to the accomplishment of mundane objectives. There is no compromise as regards the basic principle that Deliverance, itself is to be attained by reliance on anything but spiritual progress. The most significant rite in Buddhist circles of the Theravada tradition is the *Paritta*—Protective Chanting which consists of selected *Suttas*) literally, *"well-uttered"*, su+utta= Sanscrit:ukta),* twenty-four in number as far as the anthology prevalent in Sri Lanka is concerned.

Out of these, three *Suttas* have been particularly popular to the extent that they are known throughout as "The Three Good Talks" (*Tunsutraya*, in Sinhala). These are *Mangala*, *Ratana* and *Karaniyametta*. Serving as the core texts of Protective-Chanting, they constitute the contents of a minimum service. Judging from what is regarded the veritable hymn book of the Buddhists, the *Khuddaka-Patha*, which is incorporated in the *Tipitaka*, the popularity of these three *Suttas* and the sanctity attached to them might be of great antiquity. All these Suttas occur in *Sutta-Nipata*, which is reputed to be one of the oldest texts of the Buddhist Canon.

Hardly a week would pass in the life of a Sri Lankan Buddhist without being treated to a recitation of the three *Suttas* in a temple, at home or over the radio. Monks in temple recite them during daily service of *Vat-pirit* (literally, the rite of protective-chanting). Many include them in their daily worship and, as I recall, I was hardly five years old when my grandfather had taught me to repeat many a stanza from them. In illness as well as on occasions of both anxiety and happiness, the chanting of at least one of these *Suttas* is the standard mode of invoking blessings.

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* The Sanskritized form "sutra" apparently is inapplicable to Discourses of the Buddha. Sutra, as a literary from of Sanskrit, meant "mnemonic formulae" usually gibberish which was easy to memorize and used as a recall mechanism to information. Sutta or Sukta or "good talk" is more relevant to Buddhist texts. Vedic texts were called Suktas and Buddhist texts were named Suttas.

2. ENDURING MAGIC

What is the enduring magic of these three short texts? These questions have often arisen in my mind, as I begin my day with an hour's yogic exercises while listening to a variety of recordings of pirit. These recordings represent different traditions of pirit chanting in Sri Lanka. They range from the rhythmic sonorous group chanting on formal ceremonial occasions to the business-like hurried recitation by a single monk. There is also a rendering by the monks of Vajiraramaya in Colombo, who according to a tradition started by its distinguished and saintly founder, Venerable Pelene Vajiraranana Mahayanaka Thera, actually reads the texts in a measured tone to facilitate comprehension.

With the daily listening, my interest in the three *Suttas* has progressively grown in intensity to my own surprise. One would expect that an hour of chanting every day despite its variety would become monotonous and boring. The most one would expect is an increasing indifference. This, however, has not happened. On the contrary, I have only become more and more curious about their efficacy or, as I state in the title, their magic.

3. AESTHETIC QUALITY

The first appeal, which the three *Suttas* make is to one's aesthetic sensibility *first*, through music, and, second, through poetry. *Paritta* chanting seems to perpetuate a tradition of Indian music which goes back to the hoary days of the *Sama Veda*. Perhaps, its antiquity extends to early Indo-European nature-worship psalms as evident from the close musical affinity with Lithuanian chants. The rhythm and intonation have much in common with religious chanting elsewhere in the world: specially Koranic recitations in the Middle East and the choral singing of the Greek and the Russian Orthodox Christian churches.

The monks of different countries have added their own variations in tone, tune, and diction. Those of Myanmar, Thailand and Kampuchea pause after each pair of syllables giving the recitation a staccato effect which is relieved by a long-drawn cadence at the end of each stanza. Sri Lanka preserves at least a dozen identifiable traditions and certain temples have achieved distinctive reputations for their forms of Paritta chanting. The soothing music of the three *Suttas*, in whatever tradition, is inescapable. That alone assures their popularity even among those who hardly know their meaning.

But to those who know Pali and understand them, what is more profound is the depth of poetic expression. The Buddha is undoubtedly a consummate poet and the lulling softness which is intrinsic to the Pali language renders it a perfect vehicle of poetry. Unlike most of the text in the *Paritta* collection, which contain long repetitive passages, the three Suttas are unique for being concise to the point of being terse. The few chorus-like refrains (i.e. *etam mangalam uttanam*—tis is a supreme blessing; and *idam pi buddhe I dhamme I sanghe ratanam panitam*—this is the supreme preciousness (literally, Jewel) in the Buddha/the Doctrine the Sangha and the repetitions in Karaniya-metta Sutta (i.e. *Sabbe sattaa bhavantu sukhitatta*—may all beings be happy; and *manasambhavaye aparimanam*—cultivate an unlimited mind) not only provide verbal embellishment but also underscore the principal message of each *Sutta*.

Each of the three *Suttas* is a cleverly designed discourse, with much thought given to the structure as well as the sequence of ideas. The key concept expressed in each Sutta is the attainment of the ultimate *summum bonum* in *Nibbana* but it is presented differently with apt words. *Mangala Sutta* says, *"Sabbattham aparajita sabbattha sotthim gacchanti*—undefeated in every front they (i.e. those who act as advised in the *Sutta*) attain happiness everywhere. *Ratana Sutta* concludes with the statement: *"Nibbanti dhira yathayam padipo"* the wise pass

away even as the light of this lamp. *Karaniya metta Sutta* says the same in more picturesque terms:

"Na hi jatu gabbhaseyyam punareti"—he shall never again find abode in a womb (i.e. shall never be reborn).

To lead the devotee in stages to this goal is the objective of each Sutta and how the Buddha accomplished this objective merits analysis and admiration.

4. MANGALA SUTTA: The Discourse on Blessings

Mangala Sutta is generally considered a list of thirty-eight blessings. But it is not a haphazardly presented list. Its logical arrangement is conditioned by the Buddha's emphasis on *"Sabbattha"* (everywhere) in the statement of its goal. He wants the devotee to be victorious everywhere and happy everywhere. To achieve such a state of universal victory and happiness, action needs to be taken in regard to every aspect of one's life. So the Buddha begins by referring to one's immediate environment—first the human and then the material.

Not associating with the foolish, associating with the wise and honouring those worthy of honour constitute the main elements of the ideal human environment conducive to achieving the goal set before the devotee. Residence in a genial locality, as the fourth blessing, emphasizes the role of a suitable spatial and material environment. These one can find or modify with one's effort. The next blessing, on the contrary, is an inherited asset, namely merit acquired from the past – inherited not from one's ancestors but from one's previous existences.

It would be out of character for the Buddha to have mentioned, in his list of blessings, merit from the past merely as an invariable determinant. With his characteristic purposefulness, he would certainly have intended by this to underscore the continuing advisability of acquiring this important asset. All ensuing blessings comprise qualities to acquire, duties to perform and goals to achieve. The pre-condition for all these is the sixth blessing: *"atta samma panidhi"* translatable as "a well-resolved mind" or as 'setting one's self in the right direction.

Blessings to be acquired are erudition and technical competence, discipline and restraint (literally good rating) and pleasant speech. Still in the sphere of day-to-day life are listed such obligations and qualities as supporting one's parents, cherishing one's wife and children, engaging in uncomplicated or unconfused occupations, being generous and of righteous conduct, tending one's relatives and performing blameless deeds. Thus far there hardly a hint on the Buddha's own doctrines or the fundamental elements of His Path of Deliverance.

Gradually, he passes on to the sphere of moral principles. Revulsion to and abstinence from evil tops this sub-list. As if reminded of a necessary condition for avoiding evil, he adds restraint in the consumption of liquor (*majjapane ca sannano*), emphasizing restraint or discipline in drinking rather than prohibiting. Thence forth is an enumeration of positive qualities and actions.

Pregnant with meaning are the two terms *garavo* and *nivato*. Most translators have failed to catch the significance or *garavo* when they render it as simply "reverence" or "reverence towards reverence-worthy." After the clear statement in the very first stanza, this idea needed no reiteration. The Buddha is so laconic in his poetry that he hardly repeats an idea in this manner. So the word here has to mean "dignity" or "being dignified"—a quality which goes with the Buddhas concept of *"anatimani"* which occurs in the third Sutta under analysis.

The other expression, "*nivata*", meaning humility is significantly evocative specially to an English reader who will be reminded of the idiomatic expression "putting on airs." One may also recall another text in which the Buddha described an arrogant man most graphically as "*Patthaddagivo carati aham seyyo'ti mannati*"—he walks with his neck drawn tight and thinks he is greater.

Four other qualities also constitute blessings: contentment, gratitude, forbearance and obedience or, more precisely, courtesy. Between the two pairs occur the action of listening to the *Dhamma*. Whether this was actually so presented by the Buddha for literary reasons to avoid the juxtaposition of two similar expressions *"kalena dhammasavanam"* and *"kalena dhammasakachcha"* or was a corruption by later redactors is a moot point. I would personally wish to see the blessing of listening to the *Dhamma* at the appropriate time in the subsequent set of three blessings which mark the transition from domestic virtues to the higher life which alone mattered most to the Buddha.

In the logical unfolding of this sutta, this transition is represented by listening to the *Dhamma* (a somewhat passive action), seeing or visiting monks or recluses (a more positive state) and participating in religious discussions from time to time (a step making direct involvement). It is by these that the devotee paves way to the next set of blessings—eight blessings of a higher life culminating in perfect Deliverance.

Here, too, the order is significant: asceticism or austerity or self-control (tapo) and celibacy (rather than chastity) *(brahmacariya)* would signify the state of renumciation and entry into the religious life as a monk—an essential preparation for the accomplishment of what follows, namely, the perception of the noble truths (i.e. the four noble truths of suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering and path leading to it) and the realization of *Nibbana*.

The final set of blessings is the preserve of the truly delivered person, who has realized *Nibbana:* a mind that is unruffled by the vicissitudes of life (literally, the nature of the world), freedom from sorrow and defilements, and tranquility. The oft-quoted stanza referring to these blessings is attractively couched in beautiful words so full of meaning: *"phutthassa lokadhammehi cittam yassa na kampati asokam vijaram khemam."* It cannot be an accident that this remarkably cogent list of blessings ands with *Khenam*. To the Buddha who sought to bring mankind to the safe and secure sanctuary of the tranquil state of *Nibbana*, there could be no other blessing in which the efforts of the devotee should culminate.

Thus as I analyse the contents of this Sutta, my admiration grows for the wisdom of the Buddha who so effectively gave a formula to be victorious on all fronts and happy everywhere. Meeting many an odd in life, I seek not only solace but also tranquility for objective analysis and remedial action by endeavouring to adhere to just one injunction: to remain unruffled by the vicissitudes of life.

5. RATANA SUTTA: THE DISCOURSE ON JEWELS

Ratana Sutta is a poem in praise of the Triple Gem of Buddhist faith, the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. As it exists today, the first two verses and the last three are, in all likelihood, extraneous to the original composition of the Buddha. The first two verses invoke supernatural beings to listen to the text and to protect human beings and the last three verses, attributed by tradition to God Sakka, pay homage to the Triple Gem. It si significant that in the *Paritta* chanting in Thailand and Kampuchea, these five verses are usually omitted. Apparently, there had been an old tradition which recognized *Ratana Sutta* to have only twelve stanzas originating possibly among the forest-dwelling monks *(vanavasi)* of Sri Lanka, who played a leading role in propagating Theravada Buddhism in South-East Asia.

The poem proper is easily identified by its refrain which affirms that the qualities described in each stanza established the preciousness of the *Buddha*, the *Dhamma* or the *Sangha* and intones the benediction: "*etena saccena suvatthi hotu*"—by this truth may there be happiness. The distribution of stanzas among the three jewels is particularly interesting. What may be recognized as the first part of the poem devotes one stanza to the Buddha, two to the Dhamma and as many as six to the Sangha. There, the Buddha seems to have a specific didactic purpose in giving greater weightage to the *Sangha*. In what better way could the efficacy and effectiveness of the teacher and the teachings be highlighted than demonstrating the achievements of the disciples? The second part of the poem consists of three stanzas: two on the *Buddha* and one on the *Sangha*. It is however quite possible that, in an original version, there were equally distributed among the three jewels; that is, the stanza beginning with *"Varo varannu"*, which says, "The peerless noble one the knower of the noble and the giver of boons preached this noble doctrine" was actually in praise of *Dhamma*.*

The Sutta begins with the affirmation of the uniqueness of the *Buddha* and the *Dhamma*. There is no jewel, it says, here, hereafter or in heavens which is comparable to the Buddha. As regards, the uniqueness of the Dhamma, the affirmation is supported with a number of attributes: "There is nothing comparable to the *Dhamma* which the calm and collected *(samahito)* Sakyan sage realized as decay (or transience), detachment and the supreme Deathless", "There exists nothing that is equal to the mental training *(Samadhi)* which the Supreme Buddha extolled as pure and unfailingly conducive to concentration". Thrice repeated in these two verses is the crucial concept of *Samadhi*: first as "*samahito*" as an attribute to the Buddha, second as the state of mental concentration which is upheld in the Buddha's Path of Deliverance and finally as a synonym to *Dhamma* itself signifying the mental training conducive to concentration.

The succeeding six stanzas in praise of the *Sangha* are rich in the poetic quality which modern literary critics call allusiveness. They assume the reader to know in depth the fundamental teachings of the Buddha and recall in detail an array of significant doctrines, to which allusion is made very briefly. Thus the statement, "Those eight persons praised by the virtuous comprise four pairs" outlines the gradual Path of Deliverance of the Buddha, in which the disciple passed from the Path *(magga)* to Fruit *(phala)* in each of the four levels of attainement: *Sotapatti* (Stream-winner) *Sakadagami* (Onece-returner), *Anagami* (Non-returner) and *Arahant* (literally, the worthy, representing the realization of *Nibanna)*. A further aspect of this Path is referred to with the statement, "Those who realize the noble truths which were preached by the Buddha with his profound wisdom will not take an eighth existence however delayed they might be"; a stream-winner is believed to be reborn only seven times at the most before the attains Deliverance.

Stanza No. 10 draws attention to the ethical content of the Buddha's Path of Deliverance. Again, it is to the achievement of the disciple at the very initial level of progress that reference is made. Briefly it says that such a disciple abandons, as a concomitant factor of gaining insight as a stream-winner, three defilements of self-illusion, skepticism or doubt and reliance on rites and rituals and thus becomes freed from birth in any of the four evil states and incapable of committing any of the six heinous crimes. This single stanza thus serves the mnemonical purpose of recalling the Buddha's teachings on the ten defilements and their progressive elimination and on rewards and retribution for actions. To one who is conversant with the contents of these teachings, this stanza is pregnant with meaning. So is the reference to the enjoyment of *Nibbana* as a state acquired with no price *(laddha mudha)*. How well is portrayed the Buddha's supreme success in democratizing spiritual training and its achievements!

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*In 1956 when Lanka Bauddha Mandalaya, on the occasion of 2500 Buddha Jayanti, arranged 100,000 copies of the *Tun Sutraya* to be published with a Sinhala translation, Ven. Kahandamodara Piyaratana Thera actually had *"Dhamme"* in place of *"Buddhe"*. A correction had to be issued on account of popular demand.

The eulogy on the Sangha goes beyond the usual assertion that the monks are worthy of offerings *(dhakkhineyya)* as what is given to them ensures an abundance of rewards (*etesu dinnani mahpphalani*). Their steadfastness in the pursuit of the Path of Deliverance is emphasized twice over: once it is said that they with a steadfast mind apply themselves firmly to the dispensation of the Buddha and, freeing themselves from defilements enjoy immortality (*amatam nibbutim*, literally deathless emancipation); then an apt simile is employed to reiterate the same idea: "To a deeply-planted post in the earth which stands unshaken by the winds from the four quarters, do I compare such a virtuous person". The other quality of the *Sangha*, which is stressed through repetition in two stanzas, is the capacity of the monk in pursuit of Deliverance to do evil and more than that to do evil in secrecy and to conceal it: "If he were to do any evil action through deed, word or thought, he would never be able to conceal it, for that incapacity (*abhabbata*) is proclaimed of him who has seen the Path".

The second part of the poem begins with a picturesque simile: the Buddha says, "Just as the woodland groves are crowned with blossoms in the heat of the first month of summer, so did I, for supreme benefit, preach the noble doctrine leading to *nibbana*". The next stanza opens with a beautiful play on the word vara: "*varo varannu varado varaharo*" where the first is a synonym for the Buddha, the second for the *Dhamma* and the last two to the boon of emancipation which the Buddha assures.

This conscious effort in poetic expression is further illustrated by the last stanza of this part which, on account of the cryptic terminology, has a truly mystical character. It describes the disciples who have attained the highest spiritual accomplishment, *Nibbana:*

> "Extinct is their past; nothing new would arise;
> Unattached are their minds to an existence in future;
> With their seed destroyed and desires beyond growth;
> Just as this lamp would, the wise would blow away".

The doctrinal import of this single verse demands a voluminous commentary. It relates to the doctrine of *Karma*, the teaching that desire is the root-cause of all ill and evel and the nature of *Nibbana* as a state beyond rebirth and re-death. The happy simile to describe the *Nibbana* had prompted a long-drawn controversy which has still not abated: that is, whether *Nibbana* signifies a state of annihilation.

As a whole, *Ratana Sutta* is a delightful composition even though it demands a very deep knowledge and understanding of Buddhist doctrines in order to appreciate it in full. If such expertise in Buddhism is accompanied by a linguistic sensitivity to feel the aesthetic appeal of the Pali expressions in the Sutta, one would indeed derive enormous pleasure. The clever use of alliteration or rather rhyme is to be found in such liens as:

> "Khayam vigaram amatam panitam"
> "Samadhimanantarikannamahu"
> "Laddha mudhanibbutim bhunjamana"
> "Khinam puranam navam natthi sambhavam"

and also in some shorter expressions like *"pattipatta"*, *"sampakampiyo"*, and "virattacitta". These coupled with the refrain make Ratana Sutta one of the most attractive pieces in the Paritta chanting. Its introductory verse exhorts "May all beings be of pleasant minds (*sumana* =

happy) and moreover, listen attentively *(saccacha)* to the uttering". It is an exhortation worthy of compliance.

6. KARANIYAMETTA SUTTA: THE DISCOURSE ON LOVING KINDNESS

The third poem is *Metta Sutta,* usually referred to as *Karaniya-Sutta*, that is the Good Discourse on Loving Kindness beginning with the word "*Karaniya*". *Karaniyametta*, as an independent expression has the meaning of "The loving kindness that should be practiced." I feel that this meaning is quite significant.

The unparalleled importance of this *Sutta* is that it is devoted to the central feature of the Buddhist Way of Life. Just as much as the contents, it is the poetic quality of the *Sutta* that draws our attention most to it. Incidentally, it is significant that whenever a *Paritta* chanting has to be cut short due to time constraint, it is confined to this *Sutta* followed by regular verses of benediction.

The poem consists of three main parts followed by a single stanza which serves as a fitting conclusion. The first part is an exceedingly concise presentation of the Buddha's concept of the ideal person. To him the best description of a perfect individual was as "*atthakusala*". Although it is a compound of two simple words, its meaning proves to be so profound as to invite elaborate exegesis. It means a person who is skilled in accomplishing his goals and objectives. The *Sutta*, as its opening couplet expresses, provides a formula to be followed by such a person to attain what the Buddha introduces as "the state of peace" (*tam santam padam*), meaning, of course, the final goal of *Nibbana.*

The qualities of the ideal person numbering in all to fifteen—are couched in ten lines. The list starts with "*sakko*", meaning efficient, capable or skillful. The next quality of being upright, straight or honest is doubly stressed with the expression: "*uju ca suju ca*". Following these are obedience, gentleness and humility, the last word characteristically reflecting the Buddha's advocacy of moderation: *anatimani*, literally, not excessively proud or arrogant.

The list proceeds then to attributes which appear to apply more to monks but their universality as virtues which the lay could try to acquire cannot be altogether denied. These virtues are contentment; being of easy sustenance, of few responsibilities and of simple livelihood; restraint in senses; prudence (literally, maturity); and not being impudent and over-attached to families. To describe them are used some very expressive words in Pali e.g. *subhara* and *sallahuvutti*, literally meaning easily supportable and light in livelihood, to depict the ideal of simplicity in dress, food and shelter, which forms the foundation of a monk's life; and *kulesu ananugiddha* to reflect the dual aspect of detachment from lay-life; and *restraint in association with lay folk.*

As if to cut a long list short, the next two couplets sum up the ethical conduct expected of the ideal person: "May he not commit even a trivial thing which the wise would censure in another".

Here, again, the idea is presented with an interesting twist, which not only evinces the Buddha's most realistic appreciation of human nature but also gives a more accurate measure of ethical judgment: *pare upavadeyyum* (would censure in *another*) Takes into account that one is apt to see faults in another than in one's self. It is, however, regrettable that most translators have failed to note the significance of *pare* (eg. Ven. Narada and Ven. Kassapa in *The mirror of the Dhamma*: The avoidance of aught mean for which wise others (ariyas) might rebuke.

More than all these, the overarching quality which characterizes the ideal person is the thought which should pervade all his thinking: namely, "May all beings be happy and safe;

may they have happy minds". What the Buddha has thus underscored is that the ideal person in his estimation is a person of goodwill and loving kindness, whose mind is suffused with only thoughts of friendship not only to those around him or her but to every being.

The second part of the poem—just two stanzas—attempts therefore to elaborate this concept of encompassing all beings within one's thoughts of friendship. The short list, however, describes this universality in five dimensions:

(i) the feeble or timid and the strong or brave
(ii) long, short and middling
(iii) small and large
(iv) visible and invisible
(v) born and yet to be born.

With such a classification none could be left out – not even an egg or an unborn embryo. This is more detailed and comprehensive than any other formula used to depict universality of coverage of the meditation on loving kindness: e.g. In geographical term as "in this village, in this region, etc." or in terms of emotional need as "those in suffering, in fear, in sorrow, etc."

The next four stanzas spell out *how* the thoughts of loving kindness are to be developed. The Buddha is a master of clear and detailed instructions—a perfect teacher who leaves little to be taken for granted. These stanzas provide one of the best illustrations of the pedagogical methodology of the Buddha's teachings:

May not one deceive another.
May no one insult another.
Through anger or ill-will
May no one wish harm to each other.
Just as a mother with her own life
Would save her only child – her son
So should be radiated to all beings
A thought of boundless love
Suffuse the whole world alike.
With a thought of boundless friendship
With neither enmity or rivalry.
Above, below and across without obstruction.
Standing, walking, sitting or reclining
As long as one stay awake.
May this mindfulness be firmly held.
Here it is called the sublime state.

The sixth stanza of this *Sutta* (i.e. the first four lines above) analyzes three ways by which one could harm one's fellow-being and in the process, postulates three distinct concepts: Deceiving, betraying or being treacherous. As conveyed by the word *"nikubbetha"*, these would refer to actions prompted by greed and self-interest. The next concept of insulting is appropriately couched in the verb *"atimannetha"*, which literally means "to think one's self to be superior". It thus covers not only overt acts of disparagement and depreciation but also purely mental attitudes of arrogance and haughtiness.

The third concept is explained in a simple expression: "desiring one another's suffering" (*n'annam annassa dukkham iccheyya"*), which is elaborated by another's misery either on account of sudden provocation or anger (*byarosana*) or due to a deep-seated feeling of malice (*patighasanna*).

This thoroughness in analyzing the anatomy of ill-will is further demonstrated later in the *Sutta* when two other expressions bring out the concept of hatred (*vera*) and rivalry (*sapatta*). *Vera* as a self-perpetuating emotion, reinforced by constant recall of injuries inflicted by others and by thoughts and acts of revenge figures prominently in several of the Buddha's oft-quoted aphorisms. The best known among them is "*na hi verena verani sammantidha kudacana*" (Never is hatred appeased with hatred). *Sapatta*, meaning rivalry, competition and jealousy, is etymologically significant. Derived from *sa+patni* (i.e. wives of a common husband), it depicts the feelings of malice, ill-will and hatred founded on sexual jealousy in a polygamous home. Upgrading this term from the domestic level, the Buddha has used it to round off his exhaustive, if brief, examination of various aspects of ill-will against which he has prescribed the antidote of loving kindness.

The stanzas 7-9 define the quality of loving kindness with the most appropriate simile of the love of a mother for her only son whom she would protect with her own life and proceed to describe how the thoughts of friendship and love are to occupy all walking hours of the devotee, whatever be the activity he is engaged in. The last two lines are important because of the reference to *sati* and *brahmavihara*—two key elements of the Buddhist practice of meditation.

The term, *sati*, reminds one of:

(a) Anapanasati, mindfulness based on breathing, an indispensable foundational stage in Buddhist meditation;

(b)Satipatthana-Suttas, two very important discourses on mental development, which elaborate four topics of meditation and

(c) Sammasati, Right Mindfulness, an aspect of the Noble Eightfold Path.

So when the Buddha advises the devotee to hold firmly to this mindfulness (*etam satim*), he equates meditation on loving kindness to an essential component in the Path of Deliverance, he preached. The other term, similarly, alludes to three other aspects of loving kindness which, with *metta* (literally, friendship), comprise the four sublime states, *brahmavihara*. Thus, in passing, the Buddha reminds the reader of equally important concepts of *karuna* (compassion), *mudita* (sympathetic or participatory joy, meaning the quality of rejoicing the other's happiness) and *upekkha* (equanimity). Thus, in spite of its brevity, this *Sutta*, too, serves as a basic text for elaborating an important element of the Buddha's doctrine.

What does the devotee gain from the faithful adherence to these instructions? This is the question that the last line of this poems answers. As already stated, the devotee is told that he would never again be reborn—that is, he would attain *Nibbana*. This idea is conveyed by means of an interesting imagery which is evoked by the expression: *gabbhaseyya* (signifying a foetus *sleeping* in the womb), a state to which the successful disciple shall never return.

In spite of the highest importance which the Buddha assigned to loving kindness, he was no doubt conscious that the Path of Deliverance leading to *Nibbana* was not limited to it. So with a view to making it clear, he put down four more conditions to be accomplished—all that in just three lines. The devotee is first enjoined to discard wrong views, which, when expressed positively, means to fulfill the first element of the Eightfold Path, *sammaditthi* (Right Understanding). The next is to be virtuous (*silava*) which, similarly, consists of *Sammavaca* (Right Speech), *Sammakammanta* (Right Action) and *Samma-ajiva* (Right livelihood). The third is to acquire insight (*dassanena sampanna*) and this injunction would cover at least *Samma-Sankappa* (Right Thought). With *sati* already indicated earlier, the Buddha seems to cover all but two of the eight elements of the Noble Eightfold Path. The fourth condition to be fulfilled is restraint in sensual desire, recalling with the expression *kamesu gedham* the fundamental doctrine of Buddhism which attributes the cause of suffering to craving. Here,

again, it is a kind of mnemonical aid that the Buddha was providing with his poem. With a few lines, he summarizes all the relevant teachings in such a manner that brevity does not interfere with comprehensiveness of presentation.

Thus *Metta Sutta* vies with the other two poems in depth of meaning and stimulation of thought. The logical organization of the information, as usual, is particularly attractive. So is the style which is characterized by short words strung together with the conjunctions *ca* (and) *va* (or) and repetition in identical words and synonyms the central them of the sutta (e.g. *sabbe satta bhavantu sukhitatta* in stazas 3 and 5; *manasam bhavaye aparimanam* in stanzas 7 and 8 with *etam satim adhitheyya* in stanza 9). As in the other two *Suttas*, the literary quality supplements the charm of the message which truly rings of the sincerity of purpose, which is the hall-mark of all teachings of the Buddha.

7. CONCLUSION

As I contemplate on these three *Sutta* from diverse standpoints, I am no doubt impressed with the wisdom of countless devotees—lay and religious—who have singled them out for frequent recitation. They attribute to them or rather the truth that they contain a spiritual force which ensures protection and well-being. So does the chanting of each *Sutta* conclude with the wish: "By this truth, or by this true statement, may all fears and diseases cease and may there be happiness."

To me, however, the magic of these *Suttas* goes beyond whatever power we, the Buddhists, traditionally attribute to them. It is the magic of well-chosen words to express a series of lofty thoughts that I marvel at most as ach stanza unfolds to me—through their mnemonical mechanisms—the word of the Buddha in its serene and inspiring fullness.

THE DISCOURSE ON GREAT BLESSINGS

Thus I have heard: Once when the Buddha was at the monastery of Anatha-Pindika, in the garden of Jeta of Savathi, late at night, illuminating with his luster the entire garden of Jeta. The deity saluted the Buddha and, standing beside him, addressed him in this verse:

Many a deity and man
Has pondered on blessing,
Desirous of their well-being
Pray, expound the higher blessing.

(The Buddha replied:)

(1)
Not with the foolish,
But with the wise to mingle,
And to honour those who deserve honour
This is the highest blessing.

(2)
To live in a genial environment
Possessing merits acquired from the past,
To set one's self in the right course,
This is the highest blessing.

(3)
Erudition and skill,
Besides well-groomed discipline,
And words which are pleasantly spoken,
This is the highest blessing.

(4)
To tend one's parents
Caring for wife and children,
Untangled in occupations,
This is the highest blessing.

(5)
Liberality and righteous conduct,
Cherishing one's relatives,
Engaged in blameless action,
This is the highest blessing.

(6)
To shun and abstain from evil,
Restraint in the use of intoxicants,
Heedful in the practice of virtue,
This is the highest blessing.

(7)
Dignity and humility,
Contentment and gratitude,
Listening on time to religious discourses,
This is the highest blessing.

(8)
Patience and courtesy,
The company of recluses,
And religious discussions at opportune moments,
This is the highest blessing.

(9)
Austerity and holy life,
Perception of the Noble Truths,
And attaining the bliss of Nibbana
This is the highest blessing.

(10)
A mind unruffled,
When touched by worldly happenings,
Free from sorrow, passionless and secure,
This is the highest blessing.

(11)
Acting in such ways as these,
Undefeated in every front,
They achieve happiness everywhere,
This is the highest blessing.
(Sutta-nipatta: Vagga 2, Sutta 4)

THE DISCOURSE ON JEWELS

(1)
Whatever beings here assembled
Of earth o of sky
May they all be happy.
May they also pay attention to what's said.

(2)
Thus, O beings, give ear to me:
Show your love to human beings,
Who bring you oblations day and night,
So, with diligence, do protect them.

* * *

(3)
Whatever wealth here, hereafter or in heavens
Never excels this supreme gem:
There's none that equals the Buddha
This is the gem supreme in the Buddha
By this truth may there be happiness.

(4)
Cessation, passionless, the Deathless supreme,
Which the Sakyan Sage, in the tranquility, realized
There is nothing equal the Dhamma.
There is the gem supreme in the Dhamma
By this truth may there be happiness.

(5)
Concentration without interruption
Which the great Buddha had praised as pure
Nothing exists that equals concentration
This is the gem supreme in the Dhamma
By this truth may there be happiness.

(6)
Those eight persons the virtuous praise
Constitute four pairs [... missing]
What's given to them yield abundant fruit
This is the gem supreme in the Sangha
By this truth may there be happiness.

(7)
With a steadfast mind well applied
In the Buddha's Order, free from passion,
Winning their goal and reaching the Deathless
They enjoy Peace obtained without price.
This is the gem Supreme in the Sangha
By this truth may there be happiness.

(8)
Indra's post sunk deep in the earth
Unshaken by the fourfold winds:
Like unto it do I compare the virtuous
Who perceive the noble Truths thoroughly.
This is the gem supreme in the Sangha
By this truth may there be happiness.

(9)
Who comprehend the Noble Truths
Preached well with wisdom deep
Even if be heedless somehow
Would never take on a eighth life.
This is the gem supreme in the Sangha
By this truth may there be happiness.

(10)
No sooner than the Insight is gained
Three conditions are cast aside
Heresy of Self as well as Doubt
And whatever faith in rites and cults.
Freed also from the fourfold hells
They could never commit the six graves crimes.
This is the gem supreme in the Sangha
By this truth may there be happiness.

(11)
Whatever evil acts he may do,
By word, deed or thought,
Unable is he to hide them
Impossible it's said for one who has seen the Path.
This is the gem supreme in the Sangha
By this truth may there be happiness.

* * *

(12)
The forest glades with blossoms atop
In the heat of the Summer's first month:
Like unto them, he preached the noble doctrine
Leading to Nibbana, for the supreme good.
This is the gem supreme in the Buddha
By this truth may there be happiness.

(13)
The peerless noble one, the knower of the noble,
And the giver of boons preached this noble doctrine
This is the gem supreme in the Buddha
By this truth may there be happiness.

(14)
Extinct is their past; nothing new would arise;
Unattached are their minds to an existence in the future.
With their seed destroyed and desires beyond growth,
Just as this lamp would, the wise would blow away.

This is the gem supreme in the Sangha
By this truth may there be happiness.

* * *

(15)
Whatever beings here assembled
Of earth or of sky,
The Buddha is honoured by gods and men
We salute the Buddha: May there be happiness.

(16)
Whatever beings here assembled
Of earth or of sky,
The Buddha is honoured by gods and men
We salute the Dhamma: May there be happiness.

(17)
Whatever beings here assembled
Of earth or of sky,
The Buddha is honoured by gods and men
We salute the Sangha: May there be happiness.
(Sutta-nipata. Vagga 2, Sutta 1)

THE DISCOURSE ON LOVING KINDNESS

(1)
Thus should be done by the purposefully skilled
To reach the goal of perfect Peace.
He should be able, upright and honest,
Courteous, soft and modest.

(2)
Contented, an easy guest,
No busy body but free of affection,
Restrained in senses, mature in outlook,
Bluster-free and detached from households.

(3)
May he not commit even a trivial thing
Which the wise in another would censure,
"May all beings be happy and safe,
May they all have happy minds."

(4)
Whatsoever life exists—
Weak or strong without exception,
Long or huge,
Medium, short, small or big.

(5)
Seen or unseen
Living nearby or far away

Born or seeking to be born—
May all beings have a happy mind.

(6)
May not one deceive another
May no one ever insult another,
Through anger or ill-will.
May no one wish harm to each other.

(7)
Just as a mother, with her own life,
Would save her only child—her son,
So should be radiated to all beings
A thought of boundless love.

(8)
Suffuse the whole world alike
With a thought of boundless friendship.
With neither enmity or rivalry,
Above, below and across without obstruction.

(9)
Standing, walking, sitting or reclining,
As long as one stays awake,
May this mindfulness be firmly held.
Here is called the Sublime State.

(10)
Free from heresy, in virtue steeped,
Gaining true insight
With greed or sensual delights subdued
Never again shall he return to a womb.
(Sutta-nipata: Vagga I, Sutta 8)
-Paris, April 1986.

APPENDIX 2

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