

A CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL OBSERVATION ON THE WHEEL SYMBOL

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The wheel symbol played an important role in both art and literature in different cultures, communicating various aspects regarding the socio-religious consciousness of mankind. It is remarkable that, throughout the history of religion the wheel has been a powerful communicative image which represents very deep philosophical and cultural values. It is seen as a common symbol used by different ethnic groups to develop religious thoughts among their followers.

The origin of the wheel symbol is related to primitive beliefs. Many socio-cultural and anthropological observations reveal that it contains complex meanings within itself. According to linguistic investigation it was a hieroglyphic of primitive man communicating his ideas.

In history, first, it stood for prosperity associated with nature worship practised by early man. For instance, in Egyptian civilization, the wheel represented solar worship with the idea of prosperity on earth. Among the Greeks, the god Apollo representing light appeared with a halo. The ancient Chinese used the wheel to represent good and bad (ying-yang). In India, clay and slate seals found in tombs in the early period also symbolized birth and death. Henry Ceil Wyld pointed out that the wheel was a symbol of the eternity of time.

In oriental culture the dispassionate policy of the Cakkavatti monarchy was represented by this symbol. Furthermore it represented the heat element in the cosmos. After the Buddha's death, 'early Buddhists used the wheel as a monument and they practiced wheel-worship because it was a symbol of the Buddha's Dharma Cakra. Moreover, Buddhists developed the Dharma Cakra concept in artistic and literary work, giving new interpretations, namely Desanç Cakra and Lakkhana Cakra, to the Buddha's teachings. Early Buddhists also used it to represent the doctrinal teachings of the five realms and the three unwholesome roots viz craving, hate, and delusion. Furthermore, it was used to represent reincarnation.

However, because the wheel has for the most part not been investigated in its various aspects but rather in general, the attempt of this paper is to bring out its cryptic meaning with a cultural anthropological observation with reference to the available evidence of antiquity and modern research.