

# Religious Symbolism and Political Change in Ceylon<sup>1</sup>

by GANANATH OBEYESEKERE

One of the fascinating problems in a sociological study of the "higher" religions is the manner in which the doctrinal or theological corpus has been "transformed" – to use Weber's term – on the behavioural level. Such doctrinal transformations, it can often be presumed, occur under the pressure of human needs or motives and/or through the operation of social structural and economic variables. Theravada Buddhism is doubly fascinating from this point of view because some of its major doctrinal postulates seem to go counter to the religious needs of the masses as we understand them from the cross-cultural evidence, e. g. the concept of *nirvana* with its notion of the extinction of personality and the cessation of all Being; that of *anatta*, or the doctrine that there is no permanent soul or "self" outside of the phenomenal 'I'; the devaluation of magic and a personal deity, and in its place an Enlightened Being or Buddha who, in so far as he is no longer alive, cannot assist the worshipper in any direct manner. Finally, though the existence of various types of deities are recognised, their power is necessarily curtailed by the doctrinal theory of *karma*, the predominant if not sole determinant of ('samsaric') events.

Recent social science studies of Theravada Buddhism indicate that the kind of transformations and reinterpretations of doctrinal Buddhism first spotlighted by Weber<sup>2</sup> have indeed occurred on the behavioural level; e. g. Ames,<sup>3</sup> de Young,<sup>4</sup> Kaufman,<sup>5</sup> Leach,<sup>6</sup> Obeyesekere,<sup>7</sup> Spiro,<sup>8</sup> Wriggins,<sup>9</sup>

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- 1 This paper was originally prepared in 1966 for a Wenner-Gren Foundation Seminar and subsequently revised. I wish to acknowledge the criticism of my colleagues who attended the *Ceylon Studies Seminar* where this paper in substantially its present form was read on 8th June, 1969. I have to specially thank my friends Kitsiri Malalgoda and Tissa Fernando who helped me in various ways and K. H. Jayasinghe who referred me to the political pamphlet entitled "How Sirima's Government Fell". I regret that lack of knowledge of German prevented me from using Bechert's book *Buddhismus, staat und Gesellschaft in den Landern des Theravada-Buddhismus*.
  - 2 Max Weber, *Religion of India*, Glencoe, Illinois, The Free Press, 1958.
  - 3 Michael Ames, "Ideological and Social Change in Ceylon", *Human Organization*, Vol. 22, Spring 1963, pp. 45-53.
  - 4 John E. de Young, *Village Life in Modern Thailand*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1955.
  - 5 H. K. Kaufman, *Bankhaud, A Community Study in Thailand*, New York, J. J. Angustin, 1960.
  - 6 E. R. Leach, "Pulleyar and the Lord Buddha", *Psychoanalysis and the Psychoanalytic Review*, Vol. 49, 1962, pp. 80-102.
  - 7 Gananath Obeyesekere "The Great Tradition and the Little in the Perspective of Sinhalese Buddhism", *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXII, No. 2, 1963, pp. 139-153.
  - 8 Melford E. Spiro, "Religious Systems as Culturally Constituted Defense Mechanisms", *Context and Meaning in Cultural Anthropology*, pp. 100-112, Glencoe, The Free Press, 1965.
  - 9 Howard W. Wriggins, *Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation*, Princeton, 1960.

Yalman.<sup>10</sup> Yet most of these studies deal with Buddhism as it is practised in contemporary South Asian *peasant* societies, except Ames<sup>11</sup> and Wriggins.<sup>12</sup> My intention is to assume a peasant baseline for studying the changes that have occurred in Buddhism as a result of massive social changes, specially political changes in recent times. In order to do this we have to shift our focus from the village to the urban and the city context.

For the purposes of this paper the most important of these political changes was the transfer of political power to the Ceylonese with the granting of independence in 1948. The initial political dominance of the Christian population and the city "middle class" soon disappeared, and there was by 1956 an effective transference of political power to the Sinhalese speaking Buddhist population.

The details are available in Wriggins *Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation*,<sup>13</sup> and in Singer *The Emerging Elite*.<sup>14</sup> There is practically no chance of reversal of this trend; the dominant ethos is and will continue to be Sinhalese Buddhist. If the present political and religious trends continue Buddhism may be officially declared the state religion within a decade. For all practical purposes it is the state religion today.

The problem of my paper is as follows: with massive political changes concomitant changes in Buddhism, on the behavioural level, would have occurred. I propose to examine some of these changes, and the political and social "conditions" that have produced them.

Let me illustrate with one example the kind of religious change on the symbolic level which I am concerned with in the present analysis. I drive along a major highway in Colombo, formerly known as Turret Road, but recently renamed Dharmapala Mawata, after Anagarika Dharmapala, a prominent Buddhist leader in modern times. A short distance and I turn right and then come to a roundabout at a point where three major roads meet. Behind the roundabout is a large *bo* tree. On this roundabout are erected four huge concrete maps of Ceylon about five feet in height; they face the four directions in a square. In the middle of each map is engraved an ethical precept of Doctrinal Buddhism (1) *mudita*, "sympathetic joy", (2) *upekka*, "equanimity", (3) *karuna*, "compassion" (4) *metta* "universal love". On the top of each map is painted the national emblem of the Sinhalese, a highly stylized lion, with a sword held aloft in one paw. This structure was erected by a prominent member of the Ceylon Buddhist Congress, a powerful Buddhist organization whose leadership largely consists of

10 Nur Yalman, "The Structure of Sinhalese Healing Rituals", *Aspects of Religion in South Asia*, Special issue, *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXIII, pp.115-150, 1964.

11 Michael M. Ames, "Religion, Politics and Economic Development in Ceylon: An interpretation of the Weber Thesis", *Symposium on New Approaches to the Study of Religion*, Melford E. Spiro, Editor, pp. 61-76, Seattle, 1963.

12 Wriggins, *Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation*.

13 *Ibid.*

14 Marshall Singer *The Emerging Elite*, Cambridge, Mass., M. I. T. Press, 1964.

middle - class, professional and business persons. Its power is largely due to its wealth, its elite membership, its highly vocal leadership with political influence in national politics. It has practically no influence on the level of peasants many of whom have no idea of its very existence.

On the cognitive level it is unlikely that a Sinhalese Buddhist would see anything discordant in this roundabout. Yet for a sociologist there is something unusual. Firstly, there are four universalistic Buddhist concepts of sympathetic joy, equanimity, compassion, universal love; these "universal" concepts which from the doctrinal point of view are ethical norms for all mankind are "contained" within a map of Ceylon i.e. the universalistic concepts are embodied in a particularistic (national) framework. Moreover, the painting of the lion, a predatory, carnivorous creature grasping a sword, a symbol of violence, seems to contradict the lofty doctrinal sentiments. The emblem of the lion in turn relates to the origin myth of the Sinhalese race. This myth relates that the King of Kalinga had a daughter, who according to prophesy would elope with the King of the beasts. In order to ward off the prophesy the King kept his daughter confined, but one day she managed to escape and joined a caravan of merchants. While the caravan was passing the forest, it was attacked by a lion who carried away the princess and cohabited with her. Thus we have the theme of bestiality. According to the cultural norms of any group a bestial union cannot produce "good" offspring. The result of this union is Sinhabahu ('the lion arm') a male and Sinhasivali, a female. This pair grew up and became aware of their "unusual" life circumstances. One day when the father was away on a hunt, the son removed his mother and sister and fled to his grandfather's kingdom, where he was welcomed as the heir apparent. The son married his sister. The theme of bestiality is compounded by that of incest. Meanwhile the angry lion, seeing the loss of his family wrought destruction on adjacent villages. The son kills the father - bestiality, incest, parricide. Nothing good could be expected of the union of brother and sister with a history of bestiality and parricide. They had an offspring, Vijaya who with his murderous group of 500 friends, acted very much like his grandfather, the lion - killing and hurting innocent people. The King, Sinhabahu, banished his son and his followers. With their heads shaved they were put on a ship - the watery rebirth that symbolically eliminates the "sins" of the past. They landed in Ceylon and founded a new race - the Sinhalese, or "the lion race".

Now we can come back to the "roundabout" near Dharmapala Mawata, Colombo. Juxtaposed with the highly abstract universal ethical concepts from doctrinal Buddhism are their concrete particularistic opposites - bestiality, incest, parricide, violence. Both sets are contained within the map of Ceylon. What is being expressed here on the symbolical level in this somewhat ungainly concrete edifice?

On the one hand it represents a shift of power that has occurred on the political level - political power is effectively in the hands of the Sinhalese Buddhist population. Hence the juxtaposition of the predatory lion symbolism

(Sinhalese) with the abstract ethical concepts of a universal religion (Buddhism). Ceylon is "claimed" for the Sinhalese Buddhists, by the Sinhalese Buddhists. This of course may be denied by the other religious and racial groups, but we are not interested in that at the moment.

Secondly, let me reiterate that the Buddhist concepts are highly abstract ones from the *doctrinal* corpus, not from the cultural repertoire of the mass of peasants. They are written in their *pali* form (*pali* is a language in which the Theravada doctrines are written). This in my opinion expresses a cultural shift that has occurred concomitant with the political shift. Let me briefly explain this cultural shift.

In early British times effective control of education was in the hands of Christian mission schools. These mission schools, both Catholic and Protestant, were modelled on the lines of the English public school system and included such phenomena as "houses", prefects, cricket, "big matches" etc., as well as the public school syllabuses and curricula. Later (post 1880) Buddhist mission schools sponsored by the Buddhist Theosophical Society founded by an American, Col. Olcott, and the Mahabodhi Society founded by Anagarika Dharmapala also founded new schools. But the model they adopted was the missionary public school model - all the way from cricket to the curriculum. Even the names were based on the Christian - instead of St. Peters, St. Thomas' or Bishop's College, you had Ananda, Nalanda, Rahula or Mahabodhi. A Buddhist catechism and a Buddhist flag were devised by Olcott. The Buddhist catechism has gone out of vogue; but the flag remains as a highly cathected symbol of Buddhist national identity. Few are aware of the recent American origin of this sacred symbol. The teachers who were recruited to Buddhist schools were often originally educated in mission schools. Hence there was a dissemination of Victorian-Protestant ethical ideas into the culture of the elite Buddhists. In so far as political and economic dominance was Christian, there was motivation for the *cathexis* of these norms by Buddhists. Hence today Buddhist sexual morality, its monogamous marriage ideals, and divorce rules are highly cathected derivatives from Protestantism. Historically it should be noted that these ideals were never exclusively dominant in any period of Buddhism in any of the Theravada societies of South Asia prior to the 20th century. Alongside the cathexis of norms there was an adoption of organizational "forms" from Christianity - Young Men's (Women's) Buddhist Associations, Buddhist Army Chaplains, Sunday Schools for Buddhists (till 1965), missionary organizations and various types of Buddhist associations. Since traditional Buddhism lacked any formal modern organizational apparatus, the existent Protestant models were adopted by Buddhists. Thus contemporary Buddhism could conveniently be called *Protestant Buddhism*.

The term "Protestant Buddhism" in my usage has two meanings. (a) As we have pointed out many of its norms and organizational forms are historical derivatives from Protestant Christianity. (b) More importantly, from the contemporary point of view, it is a protest *against* Christianity and its associated



Western political dominance prior to independence. Thus, for example, those very norms that were derived from Western Victorian Protestantism were thrown back at the 20th century West — Westerners are believed to be sexually lax, and there is a general condemnation of “Western” values. Very few elite Buddhists are aware of the fact that in isolated traditional Buddhist villages, sexual morality and divorce may be far more “lax” than in many communities in Europe or the U.S.A. Whenever these facts are made known they are condemned as un-Buddhistic, immoral and even untraditional!

The intellectual protest against Christianity was facilitated by Western scholarship, specially the translation and interpretation of texts by the scholars associated with the Pali Text Society. The propagandists of the intellectual Buddhist movement were trained in mission schools. Doctrinal Buddhism was held up as a kind of Theosophy, as it is today with intellectuals; a rational religion without a Saviour or a cult, devoid of “superstitions”. This intellectual revivalist movement however had to contend with an obvious contradiction in peasant culture with its array of demonological cults, beliefs in sorcery and magic. Thus the resurrection of doctrinal Buddhism, involved a demythologising of peasant beliefs and a *rationalization* of peasant cults. I emphasize *rationalization* for it is not that these beliefs are done away with. They are elided of their “vulgar” qualities, they are made more “respectable”. Against the abstractions of doctrinal Buddhism are counterposed the concrete “needs” of the believer and their satisfaction in ritual and worship even among urban Buddhists. The predatory lion juxtaposed against the universalistic norms of *pali suttas* are only one aspect of a larger process.

Let us briefly get back to our concrete slabs to illustrate the third set of processes of change being reflected therein. The edifice has been erected at the traffic roundabout. Though strictly speaking this edifice is not an object of worship, nevertheless it is located in the “hub” of events; not in the isolation of a monastery, a cave or hill temple. Since this edifice is not one of worship it is time we left it and drove a mile towards another, even more crowded roundabout where Darley Road meets McCallum Road. Here we come across a Buddha image erected at the roundabout. This statue was erected in the 1950's; the manner in which it was erected is interesting. Near the roundabout is St. Joseph's College, a well known Catholic public school. Its one-time rector was Father Le Goc an influential Catholic priest. When he died the Colombo Municipal Council gave permission to the Catholics to erect a pillar in his memory at this same roundabout. The pillar was in fact erected, but one morning “pious” Buddhists in the area had also planted there a Buddha statue. This action, ignoring the obviously hostile motives that went into it, was illegal and created a furor. But Father Le Goc was “displaced” and the Buddha came to stay there permanently. The symbolic significance of the act is obvious: it expresses the displacement of Catholicism as a manifest public force and the substitution of Buddhism in its place. But there is a deeper implication here which we must now pursue.

We leave Colombo city and travel in the Southern direction through the densely populated West coast areas of Ceylon along Galle Road - Ceylon's major highway. Before we leave Colombo we notice that a Buddha statue and a temple have been erected at a corner of the former Turf Club - illegally by a squatter monk. As we reach Lunava, 10 miles from Colombo we see a Buddha at another roundabout; in the next town, Panadura, a huge gilt Buddha is erected at a fork in Galle Road; in Kalutara, another town, there is another cement-Buddha. The concrete edifice we spoke of earlier is no fortuitous thing; elsewhere at other roundabouts in the urban west coast, Buddha statues have sprung up. We then remember, that there is a Buddha statue erected in the premises of Radio Ceylon; another has been erected in front of the new and impressive seven storey Irrigation Department Headquarters, constructed only in 1963. Buddha statues have sprung up everywhere in urban Ceylon. Superficially there may be nothing strange in this, but for the fact that the Buddha, was never represented *spatially* in this way, traditionally. The Buddha, to put it metaphorically, has been brought to the market place.

#### THE SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE OF SPATIAL SHIFTS

The significance of "social space" has been recently discussed by Warner.<sup>15</sup> In his discussion of the organization of the American cemetery, Warner shows that the size of the grave stones reflect the relative statuses of the respective members of the elementary family. He also shows how persons who have recently moved up the class ladder sometimes remove the gravestones of their parents from lower class burial grounds to upper class ones. Similarly the movement of Buddha statues from the traditional isolated repositories to the "market place" suggests important antecedent socio-political changes in urban Ceylon, some of which we have discussed earlier.

Traditionally the ideal way of building a temple or any religious edifice is to ensure a spatial separation of the religious edifice from the human community. Analogously the incumbents of these temples - the Buddhist monks - were spatially separated from the peasant laity. For religious worship the peasants went to the temple; for certain parish tasks like participation in almsgiving rites, recital of texts (*parittas*) and funeral rites the monks went to the village. The spatial separation of the edifice and the incumbent from the human community reflects a behavioural manifestation of a central Buddhist doctrinal value. Briefly stated, the Buddha and rites associated with him deal with the other-worldly interests of the masses. Furthermore, salvation (*nirvana*) involves as its prerequisite an emancipation from the social structure, i.e. emancipation from the attachment to the world. These ideal doctrinal postulates are manifest in the spatial separation of monk and temple from the peasant and the village. It is also manifest in the *vestment* of the monk (vestment, as I define it, is the special garb of any religious specialist, which symbolises his status). The monk's patched yellow robe, his begging bowl and his shaven head symbolise the *formal ideal* of

15 Lloyd W. Warner, *The Living and the Dead*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1959, see also Lloyd W. Warner, *The Family of God*, New Haven, 1961.

renunciation of the world. If the Buddha and the associated symbolism have to do with other-worldly interests, not so with the *devas*, the powerful deities of the Sinhalese Buddhist pantheon. These beings are intercessionary deities who assist the worshipper with material well-being – good crops, health etc. in one's present existence. Then there are demons (*yakkas*) and spirits who are entirely malevolent and cause illness and misfortune on humans. The placation of *devas* and *yakkas* are by different religious specialists (*kapurala, kattadirala, adura*).<sup>16</sup> The spatial separation discussed earlier in reference to the village and the temple never occurs in the latter. The *devas* and *yakkas* are often placated in the precincts of the village; they may even inhabit, or protect the village. The religious specialists of these cults live in the village. They wear the normal garb of the peasant and have lay roles; only when they perform rituals for these respective deities do they wear a special vestment. After the ritual is over they *divest* themselves and fall back into lay statuses and roles. Thus the *devas* and *yakkas* are directly associated with the material interests of the masses.

In the urban context described above a spatial shift has occurred – the Buddha is being brought into the hub of events. What briefly are the underlying factors responsible for this spatial shift? (1) Firstly, the political changes discussed earlier – it represents for all to see the idea of a Buddhist nation; it is the national religion. The Buddha images and other edifices located everywhere are visible public symbols of Buddhist nationalism like a flag or the totem animal in Durkheim's analysis of Australian aboriginal religion.<sup>17</sup> (2) Secondly, in politics and in political controversy, Buddhist monks have had to come into the open as a political force. Their active this-worldly involvement in the political world has occurred. The Buddha in the market place expresses, on a symbolic level, the involvement of Buddhist activists in the world. (3) There is thirdly, I think, a psychological fact analogous to that described as deprivation by Barber<sup>18</sup> and Aberle<sup>19</sup> for nativistic movements. The social psychological factor involved could be (somewhat simply) described as a lowering of self-worth of the Buddhists as a result of deprivations consequent on three waves of foreign invasion. Rapidly however, political power falls into the hands of the Buddhists. An attempt is made by Buddhists to regain their self-esteem or self-worth; in the process a kind of *reaction-formation* or *overcompensation* has occurred. This is manifested in another aspect of spatial symbolism – the size of the statues. The edifices in the market place are generally huge, though aesthetically crude, constructions. Though there is traditional precedence for this in Buddhist

16 Gananath Obeyesekere, "The Great Tradition and the Little in the Perspective of Sinhalese Buddhism", see also, Gananath Obeyesekere, "The Buddhist Pantheon in Ceylon and its Extensions".

17 Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Glencoe, The Free Press, 1915.

18 Bernard Barber, "Acculturation and Messianic Movements", *American Sociological Review*, Vol. VII, 1941, pp. 663-669.

19 D. F. Aberle, "A Note on Relative Deprivation Theory as applied to Millennial and Other Movements", Sylvia L. Thrupp (Ed.) *Millennial Dreams in Action, Supplement II-Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Mouton 1962, pp. 209-214.

sculpture, the large number of these huge edifices constructed in one generation suggest an attempt at overcompensation. For example, a statue, which is said to be the largest in the world has recently been erected in Matara, South Ceylon. In Colombo the tallest building was a Protestant Church; recently a national Buddhist organization erected an edifice to supercede this. In Kurunegala the Protestant Bishop had an impressive church built; another Buddhist organisation has now decided to erect a huge Buddha statue on top of a hill adjacent this church so as to completely dwarf the latter. Thus the size of edifices is an attempt to regain the self esteem of the Buddhists through overcompensation, manifest in spatial symbolism. Incidentally the "model" for emulation is once again Christian. Christian missionaries planted churches in centres of Buddhist worship all over Ceylon.<sup>20</sup>

It would be argued that the statues planted in public places, are indicative of the "public character" of contemporary Buddhism as the national religion and does not signify any real attitudinal change on the part of urban Buddhists. That the spatial shift that we have described is indicative of a change in attitude is suggested very strongly if we shift our focus from the "market place" to the home. Here too a symbolic shift has taken place. Buddha images are enshrined in a special part of middle class houses, called by English speaking Sinhalese as a "shrine-room" or in Sinhalese, as "*Budu ge*", (lit. "Buddha house"). The shrine room is an important innovation and a departure from tradition. Traditionally Sinhalese peasant households lit coconut oil lamps in domestic shrines for the *devas* every evening, or on Wednesdays and Saturdays, the special (*kemmura*) days, for *pujas* for deities. The idea was to seek the protection of the *deva* for the inmates of the household. Thus the *devas* were also domestic deities, presiding over and protecting the inhabitants of a household. The Buddha was never a domestic deity in this sense; he was never propitiated or represented in the household shrines. His images were in temples spatially isolated not only from the village but also from the household. Instead of the Buddha, pictures of the *arhat* Sivali were kept in the household; it was Sivali and not the Buddha who was viewed as capable of bringing material prosperity and blessings for the household. But Sivali has been displaced and the Buddha has taken his place in the domestic shrine.<sup>21</sup> If the movement of the Buddha statues to the market place indicates the involvement of Buddhism with the world and the acquisition of political power in the hands of the Buddhists, the shrine in the home indicates that an attitudinal change has occurred among urban Buddhists. Urban Buddhists subjectively perceive that the "Buddha" is somehow involved in the affairs of the world. This practice is near universal with middle-class Buddhists. That the change is a dramatic one is apparent when

20 This is not unique to Buddhism and Christianity but probably true of any proselytising religion in a position of dominance.

21 There were many pragmatic reasons why the shrine room could not have occurred traditionally. The shrine room has pictures and images of the Buddha. Traditionally this would be rare, since cheap mass produced pictures and plastic images of the Buddha are a modern phenomenon. In my opinion even pictures of the *arhat* Sivali are an early 20th century innovation.

we compare urban Buddhism in respect of this change with peasant Buddhism. In two traditional peasant villages in which I have done extensive field work—Madagama in the Southern Province and Laggala in the Central Province—there were no domestic shrines for the Buddha. In one village—Ihala Biyanwila—only fifteen miles from Colombo there were domestic shrines for the gods Skanda and Huniyan but rarely for the Buddha. This change I believe does not imply a change in respect of how the Buddha is perceived. In both urban and rural Ceylon people know, on the conscious level at least, that the Buddha cannot grant favours, or intercede on behalf of the worshipper. The prayers uttered before domestic shrines are no different from those uttered in temples. What then does the domestic Buddha shrine signify? It signifies, in my opinion, the emergent political and social self consciousness of urban Buddhists. The model, it should be noted, is once again Christian—in this case Catholic. It is also very likely that the idea of the *Budu ge* was popularised if not introduced by the Anagarika Dharmapala, whose role we shall discuss later.

### THE ROLE OF THE MONK

That the symbolic shifts that we have described are more political and social rather than economic are apparent when we examine the role of the monk. The involvement of Buddhism with the world does not imply so much a developing economic ethic—though this may eventually occur—but a developing political and social ethic. With increasing involvement with the world one would expect a greater “parish orientation” in the role of the urban monk. This is indeed the case, for monks are increasingly involved in political roles (“right” and “left”), and also in social services, and missionary activity. However a great deal of ambiguity exists in respect of economic activity, for economic development and technological advances are perceived as aspects of Western scientific materialism and therefore devalued. Thus while there is a strong positive political involvement of Buddhism, the attitude to economic development is either ambiguous or negative.

The involvement of the monk in the world is an intensification of the traditional parish roles he had to perform. From the point of view of the public this produces an ambivalent and paradoxical attitude towards the monk. This has to do with the contradiction between the ideal norms of world renunciation as a measure of piety, and the contradiction of that ideal in the actual urban monk role. The ideal of renunciation is a continuing value in Buddhist society; traditionally as well as today the ideal monk is one who has retreated into a forest hermitage, engaged in solitary meditation. The monk who lives in the village temple, performing his normal parish roles, is viewed as being ritually inferior to the ascetic monk. With the greater political involvement of the urban monk, there is a greater public criticism of his virtue. Thus during the last general election campaign the right wing group continually condemned the left wing monks as *dussila* (unvirtuous), while the left wing used the identical epithet to characterize right wing monks. It is likely that as far as the general public is concerned both left and right wing monks are considered *dussila*. In conversa-

tion with middle class Sinhalese Buddhists one is struck by the open contempt and abuse directed against politically active monks, and the highly salacious gossip that circulate about their "immorality".

To sum up, the political involvement of the urban monk has intensified greatly the public ambivalence that even traditionally existed towards the "temple" monk. But this involves a paradox, for the monk is perceived as the visible symbol of the Buddhist political nationalism and therefore respected. Many Buddhists attempt to resolve the ambiguity by saying "we respect the yellow robe (the "vestment") but not the person"; but it is doubtful whether this rationalization resolves the underlying psychological ambivalence. My own view is that recent trends in public attitudes to the monk are one of increasing disrespect for his this-worldly orientation, rather than respect towards him as a symbol of political nationalism. In fact there is a group known as the *vinaya vardhana samitiya* (society for rejuvenating the discipline) with fair support in the more urbanized villages, which has as its avowed objective the purification of the *Sangha* (order of monks) by attempting to enforce the *vinaya* (traditional rules of discipline).<sup>22</sup>

The statement "we respect the yellow robe but not the person", implies the public perception of the importance of the *vestment* of the monk. The monk's vestment – the robe that is "patched" and the begging bowl are symbols of the ideal of world renunciation. Twenty-five years ago it was a common sight in the morning for monks to go out begging for alms as it is today in Thailand and Burma. "Begging for alms" was a public symbolic validation of the ideal of renunciation of the world; it did not imply that the monastery was not self sufficient in terms of food. It was a "cultural performance" of an ideal role. Today hardly anywhere in Ceylon can one see monks on the "alms round"; the begging bowl and the alms round as public visible symbols of renunciation are absent. Though there are many factors at work here, one important factor is probably the increasing involvement of the monk in the world, specifically a political involvement. Thus with the changes in role there is a concomitant change in the vestment.

### **THE "ANAGARIKA" SYMBOL AND THE "ANAGARIKA" ROLE**

The ambivalence towards the monk, we said, was based on the contradiction between the ideal of renunciation on the one hand and the increased this-worldly parish and political roles of the urban monk on the other. This contradiction is largely eliminated in the lay Buddhist role, because the layman, according to both doctrinal and behavioural norms, is not expected to renounce the world. How is it possible, without any contradiction or ambivalence, to effect a this-worldly ascetism, congruent with the changing political and economic landscape of Ceylon? The bridge is effected in the symbol of a great political

<sup>22</sup> Ames, "Ideological and Social Change in Ceylon".



and religious leader of modern Ceylon—the Anagarika Dharmapala. If ideally the symbol of the monk represents world renunciation and the layman world involvement, the *anagarika* represents an attempt to renounce the world while living in the world. The *anagarika* (meaning “the homeless”) has a special vestment, a white robe, but worn differently from that of the monk. However his head is not shaved unlike that of the monk—symbolising his greater involvement with the world.

The *anagarika* like the monk is *brahmacari*, i.e. committed to sexual abstinence; he also practices the ascetic renunciation (the ten *silas*) incumbent on novices. Yet he is neither novice, nor monk; his unique status permits him to engage in certain types of this-worldly activity difficult in theory for the monk to perform: political, social service and missionary activity. The *anagarika* role also resolves the moral ambivalence associated with the temple monk. He has given up the lay life nevertheless and the mundane satisfaction associated with it—his is a this-worldly asceticism reminiscent of Calvinism. However the social context in which the *anagarika* role is performed is different from the Calvinist, so that the asceticism of the *anagarika* is directed towards social and political goals. The *anagarika* status is also an innovation in Sinhalese Buddhism and its significance can best be appreciated in the context of the socio-political changes outlined earlier.

The first person to adopt the *anagarika* role was Anagarika Dharmapala, who within thirty years of his death, has become transformed into a symbol of modern Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism. Anagarika Dharmapala was born in 1864 as Don David Hevavitharana, the son of a wealthy furniture dealer belonging to the *goigama* (farmer) caste. He was educated in leading mission schools in Colombo. In 1881, coming under the influence of the theosophists, Col. Olcott and Madame Blavatsky and prominent Buddhist monks who were engaged in a famous religious debate with Christians, he adopted the role of *anagarika*. He changed his “Western” name and adopted the name of Dharmapala (“guardian of the doctrine”). Ten years later he founded the *Mahabodhi Society*, the goal of which was resuscitation of Buddhism in India and in Ceylon. In 1906 he founded the *Sinhala Baudhaya*—“the Sinhalese Buddhist”—an influential Sinhalese news paper. In Ceylon his avowed goal was to rehabilitate Buddhism and the Sinhalese race which had become denationalized, de-religious, and degenerated owing to Western conquest and Western influence. A hard hitting, vitriolic polemicist he was fluent in both English and Sinhalese. He ridiculed mercilessly Sinhalese “upper classes” who had become “Westernized” and idealised the glories of the Sinhalese past. His goals, idealism, polemicism, and nationalism are part of the current ideology of modern Buddhism. Today a special day of the year is allocated to him—Dharmapala Day—when processions carrying his image are paraded in practically every large city. Streets all over urban Ceylon have been named after him. Though in the last years of his life he became a fully ordained monk and adopted a new name—Sri Devamitta Dharmapala—he is known and remembered as Anagarika Dharmapala. His symbolic significance is not as monk but as *anagarika*.



The Anagarika Dharmapala was a tireless advocate of political and social reform. "I have to be active and activity means agitation according to constitutional methods".<sup>23</sup> He held up the past glories of the Sinhalese as an ideal worth resurrecting. "No nation in the world has had a brilliant history than ourselves".<sup>24</sup> "There exists no race on the earth today that has had a more glorious, triumphant record of victory than the Sinhalese".<sup>25</sup> The present degradation is due to evil Western influence – both missionary and colonialism. The country, as he perceives it, is a Sinhalese Buddhist one – there is hardly a place for Tamils and Muslims who are viewed as exploiters. The Christians are condemned as meat eaters of "low caste". "The country of the Sinhalese should be governed by the Sinhalese".<sup>26</sup> While he held up the ideal of Christ himself, the general bias in his polemics is for a Sinhalese Buddhist nation.

In reading the published writings of Anagarika Dharmapala one is struck by the complete contrast between his style and the impersonal tone of the Buddhist *Suttas*, and the almost clinical detachment of the *Abhidhamma*. Dharmapala's style is much like that of Protestant missionaries in its tone of personal involvement and invective.

I quote several examples:

- (a) In 1902 he writes: "The sweet gentle Aryan children of an ancient historic race are sacrificed at the altar of whisky-drinking, beef-eating belly-god of heathenism. How long, Oh! How long will unrighteousness last in Ceylon".<sup>27</sup>
- (b) "Practices which were an abomination to the ancient noble Sinhalese have today become tolerated".<sup>28</sup>
- (c) "Arise, awake, unite and join the army of Holiness and Peace and defeat the hosts of evil".<sup>29</sup>

Thus the *anagarika*, trained in mission schools has imbibed along with his hatred of the missions, a dialectic used by the missionaries to castigate Buddhism. He set the style for a dialectic that has become a norm among Buddhists nationalists today.

<sup>23</sup> Anagarika Dharmapala, *Return to Righteousness: A Collection of Speeches, Essays and Letters of Anagarika Dharmapala*. A. Guruge: editor, Government Press, Colombo. 1965, p. 735.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 566.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 481.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. LVII.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 484.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 494.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p. 660.

The *anagarika*'s scattered writings have just been collated and reprinted in part. His significance for contemporary Buddhists is however not as a person but as a symbol of (a) a Sinhalese Buddhist rejuvenated Ceylon (b) an asceticism directed towards this-worldly activity. His transformation is much like the transformation of Lincoln, the individual, into the symbolic Lincoln.<sup>30</sup> The *anagarika* symbol is a product of the times; had he been born in a different era he would have vanished without making any impact. In 20th century Ceylon, Buddhism provided the focus of national unity. In the process it was inevitable that it had to get involved in the world. The model for this involvement was a Protestant model: the *anagarika* symbol is the modern Sinhalese Buddhist analogue of an early Calvinist type of reformism with its increasing this-worldly asceticism. Though Anagarika Dharmapala is more a symbol than a person for most contemporary Buddhists, the *anagarika* role is a function of a specific socio-political context. In the Buddhist Pali texts, the term *anagarika* (homeless) was exclusively applied for monks. *Anagarika* and monk were equivalent; the resurrection of the term *anagarika* by Dharmapala in 1881 to designate a specific status intermediate between monk and layman was an innovation. Its popular acceptance was due to "need": in this case the necessity for a "homeless life" (*anagarika*) while living in the world.

The life and work of Anagarika Dharmapala anticipated much of contemporary Buddhism. In his Sinhalese writings his audience was never the peasant; it was an educated Sinhalese speaking or bilingual intelligensia. He enhanced their sense of self worth and, in the political changes of the mid-century, provided a "charter" for modern Buddhism. Let us consider some aspects of the charter he provided for contemporary Buddhists.

#### (a) A this-worldly asceticism

He castigated the laziness of the Sinhalese, emphasized thrift, saving, hardwork. He exhorted people to reject the propitiation of *devas*; to worship the Buddha daily at home and every week in the temple. He exhorted parents to get their children interested in meditational (*sil*) activity (generally accepted in contemporary Buddhism, but an innovation at that time for, traditionally, such activity was confined to old persons). He condemned again and again the consumption of meat and alcohol (though singularly silent about fish).

#### (b) A code of lay ethics

Buddhist doctrine has no systematic code of lay ethics, though the rules of conduct for the order (*sangha*) are minutely regulated, great emphasis being placed on personal decorum, good manners. As far as the layman was concerned only broad generalizations were available in texts like the *Sigalovada Sutta*. This absence of specificity regarding lay ethics facilitated the spread of Buddhism among peasant societies with diverse and even contradictory moral codes. How-

30 Warner, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 248

ever in 1898 the Anagarika Dharmapala laid down a systematic code for the laity in a pamphlet published in Sinhalese entitled "The Daily Code for the Laity". The nineteenth edition appeared in 1958: 49,500 copies of this work were sold. Rules on the following subjects were minutely regulated.<sup>31</sup>

- 1 The manner of eating food (25 rules)
- 2 Chewing betel (6)
- 3 Wearing clean clothes (5)
- 4 How to use the lavatory (4)
- 5 How to behave while walking on the road (10)
- 6 How to behave in public gatherings (19)
- 7 How females should conduct themselves (30)
- 8 How children should conduct themselves (18)
- 9 How the laity should conduct themselves before the *Sangha* (5)
- 10 How to behave in buses and trains (8)
- 11 What village protection societies should do (8)
- 12 On going to see sick persons (2)
- 13 Funerals (3)
- 14 The carters' code (6)
- 15 Sinhalese clothes (6)
- 16 Sinhalese names (2)
- 17 What teachers should do (11)
- 18 How servants should behave (9)
- 19 How festivities should be conducted (5)
- 20 How lay devotees (male and female) should conduct themselves in the temple (3)
- 21 How children should treat their parents (14)
- 22 Domestic ceremonies (1)

A total of 200 rules guiding lay conduct under twenty two heads have been devised by the Anagarika. In examining these rules several conclusions could be drawn.

(1) The pamphlet is addressed to a literate Sinhalese intelligensia: the kinds of proscriptive rules are those that peasants are generally given to, e.g. 'bad' eating, dress, and lavatory habits, indiscriminate betel chewing, use of impolite forms of address (though the Anagarika uses those same terms in a letter to one of his servants). This is a code of conduct for an "emerging Sinhalese elite".

(2) Alongside traditional norms of conduct are many Western norms. Even the condemnation of peasant manners is based on a Western yardstick. That is, the Anagarika attempted to formulate a code based on traditional as well as on the norms prevalent in the wealthy society in which he was reared. Here is an aspect of the larger process we have mentioned earlier; Protestant and Western norms have been cathected and assimilated as pure or ideal

31 Anagarika Dharmapala, *Dharmapala Lipi*, Govt. Press, Colombo, 1963, pp. 31-46.

Sinhalese norms. In the case of the Anagarika it was specially interesting for his avowed intention was to reject Western ways. Yet regulations about the correct manner of using the fork and spoon are also given! Elsewhere, his admiration for the West breaks through the polemic and comes out into the open. "Europe is progressive. Her religion is kept in the background for one day in the week and for six days her people are following the dictates of modern science. Sanitation, aesthetic arts, electricity etc., are what made European and American people great. Asia is full of opium eaters, ganja smokers, degenerating sensualists, superstitions and religious fanatics. Gods and priests keep the people in ignorance".<sup>32</sup>

### (c) Missionary Activity

The Anagarika Dharmapala, as pointed out earlier, was not only interested in rejuvenating Sinhalese Buddhism, but also in conquering the world for the Buddha *Dhamma*. However, he realized eventually that the Western barbarians were beyond hope, and confined missionary activity to India with fair success. The goals of the Anagarika were consistently realistic; in this respect they must be contrasted with the proselytization goals of the contemporary Buddhist missions. Contemporary missions are convinced that the West is waiting to be converted; the more realistic goals of converting Indians are neglected. One would have thought that conversion of the Hindu and Catholic population in Ceylon would be considered an urgent necessity by Buddhist missionaries, from their point of view. But little attention is given to this; Europe and America have to be converted. This is again an aspect of the "overcompensation" phenomenon noted earlier.

The Anagarika Dharmapala provided a 'role model' for a this-worldly asceticism for Buddhism. In his own day his influence on constitutional reform was negligible. His influence was with the "not yet emerged" Sinhalese elite (the village monk, the school teacher, the notary and the Ayurvedic physician) who, according to Wriggins, spearheaded the 1956 election which brought about a radical shift of power in Ceylon's politics. For them he provided a model for emulation—a national consciousness, a nativistic sense of past glory and present degeneration, and very importantly, an ascetic involvement in this-worldly activity, not of an economic, but of a socio-political nature. Few people since his day have actually adopted the *anagarika* status with its associated vestment. But the *anagarika* role has come to stay. A this-worldly asceticism comprising of the puritan type code of morality is part of the higher code of urban elite Buddhism—a greater commitment to the doctrine, an emphasis on a "rigid" moral code, meditational activity for young and old, an intolerance towards other faiths, an identification of Ceylon with Buddhism and the Sinhalese language, and an involvement in social and political (though not economic) activity. However there is one important difference between the *anagarika* role symbolized by Anagarika Dharmapala and the contemporary adoption of that role. The *anagarika*

32 Anagarika Dharmapala, *Return to Righteousness*, p. 717.

status is a "bachelor" status; the contemporary "puritanism" by contrast is for all, including married persons. The Anagarika Dharmapala emphasised the doctrinal aspects of Buddhism; in accordance with the doctrine, he scorned the intercessionary powers of *devas* and demons. For elite Buddhists of today involved in the family and the larger society this is not easy, for the Buddha is not a conventional deity granting favours. Thus among the latter there is a greater dependence on *devas*, contradicting the doctrinal position which devaluates the power of these beings. Here we are dealing with an important psychological variable – a need for the *devas*. This is the subject of the next section of this paper.

### POLITICAL CHANGE AND THE RELIGIOUS PANTHEON

The formal organization of the traditional Sinhalese Buddhist pantheon was based on feudal ideas. Since I have described the structure of the pantheon elsewhere,<sup>33</sup> it will suffice here if I briefly sketch its general outlines. The Buddha is the presidential deity of the pantheon; he is perceived as pure benevolence, yet he has no intercessionary role in the affairs of the world. Below him are the guardian gods of Ceylon – Vishnu, Skanda, Nata, Vibisana, Saman and Goddess Pattini. They are protectors of the faith, and conventional deities who grant material favours to the devotee. Below them are lesser provincial deities; then there are malevolent demons, and lower down in the hierarchy mean spirits, ghosts and goblins. The pantheon is structured very much on the lines of the traditional feudal order. The lesser deities have *varan* (warrant) to do good or harm from the superior deities, as the officials of the feudal system had *varan* from their superiors. All *varan* ultimately devolves on the Buddha in the religious realm; as it devolved on the King in the political realm. Each deity has his *sima* (area of jurisdiction and authority) like feudal governors and officials. The lesser deities are viewed as a retinue of the greater deities. The kind of ritual (*tevava*) performed for the gods is practically identical with the traditional court ritual, also called *tevava*.

In the city, among the urban "middle class", conspicuous changes in the pantheon have occurred. These changes are broadly of two types:

- (a) formal changes in the structure of the pantheon.
- (b) the "rationalization" of the cults associated with the worship of gods and demons.

In the cults of the *devas* (gods) practised in the city, a conspicuous feature is the remarkable rise of one major deity in the traditional pantheon – Skanda – at the expense of practically every other deity. The cult of Skanda is so

33 Obeyesekere, "The Great Tradition and the Little in the Perspective of Sinhalese Buddhism"; see also, "The Buddhist Pantheon in Ceylon and its Extensions"

popular today and it is possible that he will eventually displace all other *devas* in the pantheon. I believe one can relate the ascendancy of Skanda to the rise and spread of the new urban elite described by Wriggins, Ames and Singer. The choice of Skanda as the predominant deity is also interesting, because none of the Buddhists texts, even the late ones, mention Skanda at all. The life of Skanda, a son of Siva, is depicted in the Hindu text, the *Skanda Purana*. Here he is depicted as a powerful god, the slayer of the *asuras* (the enemies of the gods). In the Sinhalese Buddhist pantheon he is not viewed as Hindu, but Buddhist; what is remarkable however, is the *choice* of Skanda as the leading deity for Buddhist urbanites and intellectuals at the expense of deities like Vishnu, to whom according to myth was given the task of protecting Buddhism in Ceylon, and Nata who is viewed as the future Buddha Maitriya. I shall sum up the importance of Skanda for the urban elite in the following manner. Since he is the most powerful of deities in the traditional pantheon – the slayer of the *asuras* – he is viewed as capable of assisting the worshipper to overcome the most difficult of mundane problems. With the rise of the new elite many difficult problems have emerged – problems pertaining to status aspiration, success in business ventures, and politics. Skanda, it is believed, can give the worshipper success, and he is pre-eminently the deity of the upwardly mobile man – the businessman and the politician, the student studying for his examinations, the bureaucrat waiting for his promotion. His power is so great that even Protestants and Catholics propitiate him. Practically every person going abroad on a scholarship visits the main shrine of Skanda in Kataragama, South Ceylon, to seek his aid for success and safe return. Political leaders of all parties make vows to him for victory at the elections, and motorcades, of both right and left wing, go from Colombo to Kataragama to seek the help of the vanquisher of the *asuras*. Let us illustrate with an example the typical *political* use of Skanda. It should however be remembered that the political use of Skanda, is one aspect of his larger social uses brought about by the kind of problems that a rapidly changing society is facing.

I refer to a political pamphlet written in Sinhalese entitled ‘How Sirima’s Government Fell’ (63 pages). ‘Sirima’s Government’ refers to the left-wing coalition government of Mrs. Sirima Bandaranaike, the former Prime Minister. The Government fell in December 1964, when the Leader of the House, Mr. C. P. de Silva crossed over to the Opposition with thirteen other M. Ps. The author of the tract, a journalist, states that the fall of Mrs. Bandaranaike’s government was entirely due to the intervention of Skanda. The sequence of events according to him was as follows.

- (a) The God Skanda in a dream told the writer, a former supporter of Mrs. Bandaranaike, to start an opposition newspaper entitled *Vinivida* (‘The Piercer’); the ‘piercer’ presumably refers to the golden arrow of Skanda.
- (b) The god mustered enlightened public opinion through the medium of this newspaper, cautioning the people against the evils of dictatorship, the ‘red Chinese menace’, corruption and nepotism.

- (c) The author promised the God several offerings and *pujas* if he broke "Sirima's Government".
- (d) The author was aware that the left coalition were also imploring the aid of the same deity, but he says, the deity scorned the coalition government. Before forming her left wing coalition, Mrs. Bandaranaike, according to the author, consulted a female spirit medium. Skanda, through the medium, had encouraged the then Prime Minister (Mrs. Bandaranaike) to form the coalition government. But, says the author triumphantly, Skanda had deliberately got a mean spirit to utter the benediction, because he (the God) knew that if the coalition was formed Mrs. Bandaranaike's government would fall! "The whole assembly of Gods asked God Skanda to wield his sword and finish the whole business", so unpopular was Mrs. Bandaranaike with the deities. But Mrs. Bandaranaike thought otherwise because for a period Radio Ceylon started their programme with a *puja* for Skanda, hoping thereby to win people over to the coalition point of view. But Skanda was unimpressed because the sound waves of Radio Ceylon penetrates into "unclean and filthy nooks and corners", says the author.
- (e) On December 3rd 1964 the Government fell. It is worth quoting the author in full.

The Great Powerful Deity residing in the great *devale* (temple) made his kill with his golden arrow. The flaying is now left for our masses. You should pray that God Skanda achieve future Buddhahood and do your duty to your country. On the third of December Sirima's Government fell. On that day the leader of the Opposition Mr. Dudley Senanayake (the present Prime Minister) and Mr. C. P. de Silva, the leader of the House (the present Minister of Lands and Irrigation) with a group of M. Ps. visited straightaway the Skanda temple at Bambalapitiya. I was there already from dawn performing *pujas* and breaking two thousand coconuts, till Sirima's government fell . . . . .

The God Skanda, slayer of *asuras*, was responsible for foiling a red Chinese plot, for preventing a dictatorship and for the preservation of democracy!

Along with the choice of Skanda as the major deity for urban Buddhists is the rise of the demon of sorcery (*kodivina*) known as *Huniyan Yaka*. According to the traditional pantheon he was a demon (*yaka*); the myth of his ancestry, the "impure" foods offered to him suggest his inferior status.<sup>34</sup> In traditional rituals of counter-sorcery he is tricked, cajoled, threatened and banished from the patient possessed by him. On the urban level the anxieties concerning sorcery exist; the cognitive belief in sorcery as a causative factor in human misfortune also exists. But the older ritual technology is being displaced; new

<sup>34</sup> Paul Wirz, *Exorcism and the Art of Healing in Ceylon*, Leiden, Brill, 1954.



temples (*devale*) and more "dignified" rituals for Huniyan are emerging in the cities. Moreover his status in the pantheon is different; he is no longer a *yaka* (demon) but a *devata* (a higher class of supernatural being). The cognitive belief in sorcery and the personal anxieties associated with it are as dominant on the urban level as on the peasant. But a rationalization of the cult has occurred. The "vulgarity" of the peasant ritual has been elided and the status of the deity elevated.

The implications of the preceding analysis are important for they seem to contradict a common sense assumption that with the increased emphasis on doctrinal Buddhism there must be a concomitant decrease in what Ames would call "magical-animism" and the placation of *devas*. My contention is precisely the opposite. Firstly, with the increased "frustrations" due to political and social change, traditional deities, selectively chosen, are used to overcome these frustrations. Indeed their projected capacities to alter events — e. g. to make and break governments — are of magnitude rarely paralleled in traditional belief. This however only indicates the magnitude of the modern situation as against the traditional. Secondly, doctrinal Buddhism we noted had few of the accoutrements of mass religiosity. If so, with an increased doctrinal emphasis there must also occur on the level of behaviour (howbeit "urban" or "educated") a greater reliance on magic and astrology. There is a cognitive reordering of these beliefs so as to make them fit the urban ethos. This cognitive reordering of traditional belief I shall call the *rationalization* of the religious life.

We have only depicted the ongoing process of cognitive reordering, not its stabilized final form. Rationalization occurs on two levels. Firstly, there is an increased emphasis on the doctrinal corpus; Ames has highlighted this nicely. The behavioural correlative of this increased doctrinal emphasis is a this-worldly asceticism directed towards political, social and religious goals. If the emphasis is on doctrine one would expect logically a devaluation of the worship of *devas*; for the exaggerated intercessionary powers attributed to the *devas* by the urban elite contradicts the doctrinal assertion that these *devas* have no power. They, like humans, are themselves *karma* bound. This logically expectable attitude is found among a few *virtuosi* among the urbanites, who, like Anagarika Dharmapala and the cases quoted by Ames scorn the *devas*. Yet contrary to logical expectation, the *devas* are practically universally believed in by the urbanites, with a seriousness never seen in traditional peasant worship. This trend is an index of the enormous frustrations and personal anxieties among the urbanites. There is an interesting change also on the level of social action. In urban Ceylon there is an increasing community worship of the Buddha: the worship of the *devas* by contrast is highly individual. This is almost a reversal of peasant trends where group propitiation of the *devas* and the individual worship of the Buddha was more common. This change on the action level is not surprising: Buddhist doctrinal values provide the focus of national unity; whereas the

placation of the *devas* is to resolve the frustrations whether social structurally or personally engendered — via the individual. The worship of the Buddha is a public affair: the worship of the *deva* is private.

The rationalization of the religious life on the urban level poses several problems. The resurrection of the Buddhist *doctrinal* values poses few cognitive problems, and follows pretty much the pattern of other world religions facing the impact of modern science and technology. There is a de-mythologizing of peasant beliefs, e. g. the *jatakas*, or birth stories, were myths to the peasant whereas they are fables that point a moral to the urbanite. There are attempts by university dons and intellectuals to advance “proofs” for the “existence” of *karma*, and an attempt to reconcile Buddhism with science. But this is not easy with astrology, magic and the propitiation of *devas*. Peasant magical practices are being increasingly substituted by the recital of Buddhist texts called *parittas* by monks; the notion is that the very recital of the texts banishes evil spirits and brings blessings on householders. But what about astrology and propitiation of *devas*? One rationalization has occurred—worship is elided of the elaborate paraphernalia of peasant ritual with their music, dance, song, prescribed obscenities. Simple *pujas* (rituals) have been substituted. The traditional song and music associated with *deva* and demon worship is now displaced into the worship of the Buddha in an innovation known as “Buddhist carols”. These songs are called *bhakti-gi* (devotional songs) self - consciously modelled on the lines of the Christmas carols. The traditional prayers to the Buddha were highly formalized *pali gathas* devoid of song. By contrast *bhakti-gi* are devotional songs with musical accompaniment. The element of song and music traditionally associated with the “lower cults” are now transferred into the context of Buddha worship. The “model” is once again Christian, but the adoption of the model by Buddhists is necessitated by the changes that have occurred in urban Ceylon.

### CONCLUSION

The position I have adopted does not imply that these indicators of change are unique to our period in history. Earlier periods of our history, when confronted with similar historical events, may have produced concomitant changes of a similar nature in the religious system. For example, in times of national crisis monks had come into the forefront of events, and had moved out after the crisis was over. At other times, when monks had become too world-involved, reform movements had occurred to check them. However, the scale and intensity of the socio-political changes that have occurred in contemporary Ceylon find no parallel in any one period of our history; concomitantly the changes in the religious orientations of the people are of a previously unparalleled scale. One result of these changes is concentration of power in the hands of the Sinhalese speaking Buddhists. Sinhalese is the official language, and Buddhism, for all practical purposes, the official religion. These changes could not have taken place without the involvement of Buddhists in the affairs of the world. The problem of the paper was: what was the nature of this involvement, and what changes and

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innovations in the religious system, on both symbolic and action levels have occurred as a result? We have examined the following indicators of change:

- (a) Spatial shifts symbolising the entry of Buddhism into the "world".
- (b) Emergence of a leader who provides a charter for change, a model for emulation and becomes a symbol of a new order.
- (c) Role shifts, specifically a this-worldly asceticism directed to political and social goals.
- (d) Finally a rationalization of the religious life. The last involves a paradox owing to the unique nature of Buddhism. There is a revival of the doctrinal corpus but the Buddha though worshipped, has no intercessionary role and cannot help humans, unlike a monotheistic or any other deity. Hence, deities from the doctrinally unsanctioned "lower cults" are selectively used to assist the worshipper to overcome the enormously complicated problems a changing society is confronted with.