

THE AESTHETICS OF AUTHORITY: EMOTIONS, DEVOTION AND POWER IN
THE SINHALA BUDDHIST LITERATURE OF MEDIEVAL SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

The project examines the continuities and divergences in aesthetic philosophy from Pali Buddhist and Sanskrit literature to that of medieval Sri Lanka. Special attention is given to the association of moral authority with the capacity for literary and artistic production, and the means by which persons are so entitled. The project concludes with reflections on the political significance in medieval Sri Lanka of the contiguity of these themes, as well as that of the conflation the personage of king with the Buddha.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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This thesis is dedicated to India Jones – the Phoenix.

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Introduction

Both the European and South Asian intellectual traditions have historically viewed the appreciation and creation of art (or at least a certain species of “high art”) as the provenance of the upper echelons of society. In the Indian context, the perceived basis for the appreciation of art and literature grew out of sophisticated theories concerning the foundations of aesthetic experience, with the tradition tending to regard elite members of society as possessing a disproportionately greater capacity for aesthetic appreciation and artistic-literary production. Those of noble station were at the same time seen as morally entitled in their roles as adjudicators, governors, and more generally in possessing a freedom from the standards of propriety incumbent upon their social subordinates.

One might be surprised to find these tendencies represented in the literature of Buddhist Sri Lanka, being part of a tradition associated by many with egalitarianism, and at the same time dissociated from the sensuous and emotionally evocative. The following is an examination of the aesthetics and ethics of Sri Lankan Buddhist literature from approximately the 12th to 15th centuries CE. Considered are the continuities from the continental Indian literary world: presuppositions regarding the aptitude for aesthetic appreciation of the audiences of these works, their discernable (though by no means necessarily explicit) ethically educative function, as well as the distribution of moral authority within the society in which they were written, and the intersections of these themes.

I include cross-references with the canonical Pāli Buddhist scriptures (presumed to have taken their inherited form at least 1000 years prior to the period under review), considering possible historical reasons for variations from late medieval Sinhala literature. Comparison between Buddhist literature of the two eras furnishes a comparative framework yielding a number of emergent questions. While

the audience of the Pāli scriptures (and pre-medieval Sri Lankan Buddhist works for that matter) was essentially exclusively monastic, medieval Sri Lankan authors made an unprecedented attempt to reach lay audiences, resulting in the emergence of a new literary genre: the *baṇapota* or “preaching text.”

While ostensibly recapitulations of stories of the Buddha in his former lives, these texts offer a glimpse into the social stratigraphy of the world in which they were composed, permitting speculation regarding authorial intention and the ways in which texts may have configured as political instruments. Among the questions to be considered: Do these texts affirm or attempt to forge class hierarchies? How were mythological elements of the Pāli scriptures (such as the *cakravartin* or “Universal Monarch”) transposed onto the real-world political affairs in medieval Sri Lanka? Do ostensibly soteriological exhortations and themes have political significance in context of composition and reception?

Modern social scientists have suggested that the way we respond emotionally to given situations or stimuli is the product of social conditioning, as opposed to being more or less uniformly determined. I will explore recent efforts (influenced by this trend) to read Sinhala Buddhist texts as having been authored with the intention of emotionally conditioning their audiences in mind, considering the validity of this paradigm for the two genres of Buddhist scriptures detailed above. If in fact a select group of individuals were seen as better disposed or more entitled to emotionally condition others, while perhaps being a departure from the medieval Indian presuppositions that emotional response patterns are innate and intractable, this would be a confirmation of the perceived efficacy of texts to morally educate, to establish political allegiance, or to do both at once. It is around the nexus of aesthetic production, elicitation of emotions and moral authority that the project will revolve.

Chapter 1: Theories of emotionality in Indian intellectual thought and Sri Lankan Buddhist literature

Classical Indian theories of emotionality and aesthetics

The notion of *rasa*, which literally means “taste” or “flavor,” has since at least as early as the common era been employed by Indian aestheticians both as an evaluative criterion for art, and as an explanation as to why viewers are impacted as they are by various modes of presentation of visual art, poetry and drama. The “theory of *rasa*” posits eight basic emotions called *sthāyī-bhāvas*, literally “permanent fixtures” or “permanent moods” – love, mirth, grief, anger, exertion, terror, disgust and wonder – which are supposed to reside in the soul of each person. The *sthāyī-bhāvas* are experienced as one of their eight respective moods or *rasas* of the erotic, comic, compassionate, cruel, valorous, terrible, abhorrent and miraculous.¹ Certain conditions determining the activation of the *sthāyī-bhāvas* are supposed to affect each beholder in a uniform and predictable way, presuming that one is equipped with normal receptive capacity – that one is a *rasika*.² It is these determinants which the artist, poet or composer must be intimately familiar with and be able to render into his respective medium in order to be considered proficient.³ In art, these emotions are evoked by (i) determinates (*vibhāvas*), which enable the permanent moods to be experienced in the first place, (ii) consequents (*anubhāvas*), the specific

¹ *śṛṅgāra*, *hāsya*, *karuṇa*, *raudra*, *vīra*, *bhayānaka*, *bībhatsa* and *adbhuta* are the *rasas* corresponding to the *sthāyī-bhāvas* (or *sthāyīns*) of *rati* (love), *hāsa* (laughter), *śoka* (sorrow), *krodha* (anger), *utsāha* (heroism), *bhaya* (fear), *jugupsā* (disgust), and *vismaya* (wonder), to which later were added the *rasa* of *śānta* with *śama* (serenity) as its *sthāyīn*.

² The experience of a *rasa* does not afford a difference of degree, and likewise a greater level of skill of an artist does not ensure a “more intense” experience of a *rasa*. Furthermore, the experience of a *rasa* is one independent of any discursive evaluation of the art being perceived, or of any moral evaluation of the situation being depicted. See my further discussion below, also see Cooper, 194.

³ Bharata writes “the chief goal of drama is to produce *rasa*, the aesthetic emotion...emotion re-presented, distilled by art.” Quotation from the *Nāṭyāśāstra* translated by Chandra Rajan (Kalidasa and Chandra Rajan, 29). Cited in Cooper, 193.

manifestations (physical effects) of emotion on a character, and (iii) accompanying mental states (*vyabhicāribhāvas*), those transitory and specific sentiments which “accompany and help to intensify the dominant emotion,”⁴ such as the portrayal of weakness (*glāni*), apprehension (*śāṅkā*) and indolence (*ālasya*).⁵

The notion that all forms of art contain a mechanism of emotional stimulation, whereby basic propensities for emotional experience (*sthāyi-bhāvas*) are activated to the point at which one experiences aesthetic relish was first introduced in the *Nāṭyāśāstra* of Bharata, dated variously between the common era and the 2nd century CE.⁶ The theory proposed in the *Nāṭyāśāstra* was however so thoroughly developed that it is widely speculated that the work may represent the consummation of a tradition (or a series of traditions or loosely circulating concepts) which had existed for some time prior.⁷ Bharata theorized that a literary work is an object (or “body” – *kāvyaśarīra*) to be augmented with ornaments (*alaṅkāras*), such as similes (*upamā*), illustrations by figurative language (*rūpaka*), and the repetition in the same stanza of words or syllables similar in sound but different in meaning (*yamaka*).⁸ *Alaṅkāra* in the general sense of “ornament” as well as a number of technical figures used to classify literary expressions were in currency prior to the writings of Pāṇini (5th century BCE),⁹ and held a dominant place in Indian aesthetic theory for centuries following the *Nāṭyāśāstra* (though undergoing some transition in meaning). It was primarily the

⁴ Wijayawardhana (1970), 82

⁵ De (1960) offers an example: “In the case of Love as a permanent mood, the stock-examples given of a vibhāva are women and the seasons; of anubhāva, glance and embrace; of vyabhicārin, the transient subordinate feelings of joy and anxiety.” ((1960); vol.II, 22)

⁶ Ray (2004) gives the 2nd century BCE for the *Nāṭyāśāstra*, this given by many as at least a plausible terminus post quem. (see De (1960), vol. I, 18) There is however little justification for positing such an early date.

⁷ Tilakasiri, 170

⁸ De, vol. I, 26

⁹ Ibid, 3

Alaṃkāra-dominated aesthetic theories of such early authors as Bharata, Bhamaha and Daṇḍin which influenced early Sinhala poets and critics.¹⁰

Later theorists of *rasa* began to ambiguate the function of poetry, and to expand the meaning of *rasa* to include a realm of experience beyond that of mere aesthetic enjoyment. *Dhvani* theory, in ascension around the 10th century CE, posits “a sort of mystic essence of sound, *dhvani*,” thereby “eschewing the external and superficial aspects of poetry”¹¹ (i.e., the traditional notion of a *kāvyaśarīra* augmented with *alaṃkāras*). Here, the experience of *rasa* has as its essence (*camatkāra*) a “dilation of the mind” – a state of wonder and absorption, transcendental (*lokottara*) in nature through the cessation of any discursive reasoning, subjectivity being replaced solely by the experience of *rasa* itself.¹² With this expansion in significance, for some writers the experience of *rasa* took on a soteriological dimension. It was declared that, “*Rasa* is the highest plane of aesthetic enjoyment and its experience is equated to transcendental bliss.”¹³

When one thinks of the general orientation of early Buddhist thought, particularly that of the Pāli scriptures composing what has come to be known as the Theravāda canon, the value of extreme emotions – either of experiencing them or evoking them – seems far from a possible basis for religious instruction. These texts uphold equanimity (*upekkha*) as a religious ideal. In the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha assents to suggestion that he is “*a-rasa-rūpa*,” or, ‘one who lacks taste,’¹⁴ implying that he has transcended the state of being one who savors the ‘five sense objects.’ Indeed, in a discussion of the relevance of *rasa* theory to the Pāli canon,

¹⁰ The theories of *dhvani*, *vyañjanā*, and *aucitya* were not introduced until the modern, English writings of V. Raghavan, A. Sankaran, M. Hiriyanna, and S.K. De. (Sarachandra, 75)

¹¹ Tilakasiri, 172

¹² Wijayawardhana (1970), 93

¹³ Wijayawardhana (1963), 79

¹⁴ *Anguttara Nikāya* III. 288; fr. Dhadphale, 58

M.G. Dhadphala writes, “A religion which makes Peace or Dispassion (*upasama*) the only ultimate object of poetry can think only in terms of *vimutti-rasa*”¹⁵ (*vimutti-rasa* here meaning the relish of the experience of emancipation from *saṃsāra*, not of any worldly delight).

We find however certain instances in the Pāli literature of the Buddha performing acts which do evoke strong emotions, but to these we will return after having discussed the role of *rasa* in a subsequent Buddhist literary tradition, that of Medieval Sinhala poetry.

Direct influence of Sanskrit literature and aesthetic theory

Mentioned in the Sigiri graffiti,¹⁶ the notion of *rasa* as described above as a component of a formal aesthetic theory was at least to some extent known in Sri Lanka since the production of the earliest extant Sinhala literature.¹⁷ The influence of mainland Indian literary culture saw a dramatic increase following the expulsion of the occupying Cōḷa people in 1070 CE, and an influx of scholars from India and abroad.¹⁸ An intense period of Sanskrit study commenced in the mid-11th century, during which time Sri Lankan Buddhist monks seem to have familiarized themselves extensively with Sanskrit grammar, Hindu scriptures, logic, poetics and Sanskrit literature.¹⁹

The continental tradition of poetic theory and composition was adapted²⁰ in Sri Lanka to reflect the local religious and literary (and religious-literary) traditions.

¹⁵ Dhadphale, 56

¹⁶ Dating from the 5th to 9th centuries CE

¹⁷ Dhammapala, 90

¹⁸ Ibid, 10-11

¹⁹ Ibid, 18

²⁰ I say “adapted” as opposed to “received” to avoid the assumption of unidirectional (continent to island) theoretical influence.

Attributed to King Sena IV (otherwise known as Silāmēghavarṇa, reigning 954-6²¹), the *Siyabas Lakara* was the first and most influential Sinhala treatise on poetic theory. An adaptation of Daṇḍin’s 6th century *Kāvya-darśa*, the *Siyabas Lakara* explicitly states that poetry is meant to narrate the lives of the Buddha, an injunction which Sinhala poets appeared to have followed.²² The hero of epic poetry (*mahākāvya*) was thus to be the Buddha in his final or previous incarnations (as Bodhisattva or “Buddha aspirant”).²³ The work also replaces some illustrations from Sinhala (as opposed to Sanskrit) works,²⁴ and adopts some of Daṇḍin’s distinctions implying Indian regional variation in style and diction to the Sinhala/Sri Lankan context.²⁵ Nevertheless, much of classical Indian poetic theory – the notion of a *kāvya śarīra* (Sin: *kav siruru*) ornamented by *alamkāras* (Sin: *lakara*), *sthāyi-bhāvas*, *rasa*, and the regularity of stimuli and their responses – were elucidated in the *Siyabas Lakara*, and the knowledge of them was well attested in the subsequent Sinhala literary tradition.

Rasa and modern theories of emotion

The position that emotions are experienced in a uniform way, and that they are induced in a regular fashion by an enumerable set of determinates, and that this is (or *should be*) the case for every person, I propose that we deem “emotional realism.”

²¹ De Silva, 58

²² Sarachandra, 74. We must however bear in mind that the extant Medieval Sinhala poetry is that which was preserved by the Buddhist *Sangha*, and therefore perhaps culled from a larger pool of literature, some of which may have been deemed unworthy of preservation on account of its secular nature.

²³ See Wijayawardhana (1963), 146

²⁴ See *ibid*, 166

²⁵ Where the *Kāvya-darśa* makes the distinction between “Vaidarbhī” and “Gauḍī” styles (*mārgas*) of composition, the *Siyabas Lakara* distinguishes between “good” (*manā maga*) and “bad” (*meruma maga*), declaring that only the “good” *marga* is to be followed in Sinhala poetry. (*Ibid*, 138; *Siyabas Lakara* I. 67) This normative distinction is not made between Vaidarbhī and Gauḍī in *Kāvya-darśa*, and reminds us that the Sinhala literary world was more geographically constricted than that of Sanskrit, lacking sufficient regional variations to warrant separate discussion of those styles (if they were in fact appreciable).

Representing emotional realism in the modern academic community are those who postulate that at least basic emotions are “feelings of physiological changes” activated under analogous conditions for all persons.²⁶ This “physicalist” perspective on emotions is informed by evolutionary biology, explaining their origin and function in terms of their communicative usefulness in social situations, and their role in emergency response behavior.²⁷ As such, the propensity for emotional responsiveness is seen as having a physiological basis, and as being hardwired from birth. While physicalists do acknowledge that we are aware of and able to name our emotions as we experience them, this cognitive element of emotion is thought to be secondary to and dependent on the autochthonic reactions of the body.²⁸

Other modern theorists, hoping to problematize the “common sense” understanding of emotionality as mechanical process of stimulus and response – “irrational rather than rational, natural rather than cultural”²⁹ – would find the notion of emotional realism unsophisticated and inadequate. “Cognitive theories” of emotion suppose some sort of mental activity – thinking, believing, judging – as precursory to and requisite for an emotional experience.³⁰ For example, if a friend asked me what sorts of unique commodities one can purchase in Sri Lanka, and I should respond “a bride,” her emotional reaction may either be horripilation or amusement. This reaction would itself be dependent on a judgment she made, rightly or wrongly, as to whether my answer was in earnest or in jest, a judgment taking into account the likelihood of brides actually being a commodity, her knowledge of my character and of a precedent of my making statements likewise absurd and facetious. According to cognitivists,

²⁶ Lynch (1990b), 4-5

²⁷ See Ekman (1973a), especially Ekman (1973b)

²⁸ See Leavitt, 515

²⁹ Lynch, 5

³⁰ Ibid, 7-8

actors understand emotions as mediating social action: they arise in social situations and carry implications for future thought and action. Emotional understandings, then, are not seen as abstract, symbolic formulations – not “thinking about feeling” so much as thoughts which are necessarily linked with social situations and valued goals that give them moral force and direction.³¹

Cognitive theories of emotion are therefore sensitive to the role of *context* in emotional formation. They are in this sense commensurable with *rasa* theory, which takes into account the significance of the mood or environment (*vibhāva*) in which literary or dramaturgical events are set when determining which *rasas* will be induced. The recognition of the role of judgment is here implicit.³²

“Social constructionism” is a cognitive theory which posits that those cognitive processes preceding and determining the registering of emotion are wholly the products of social conditioning, and therefore that emotions themselves are not necessarily evoked by the same set of determinates in each individual. Examples cited in support of this position are such facts as the relativity of what is humorous across cultures.³³ Popular among anthropologists hoping to account for “emotion’s constitution of social behavior,” this view holds that “general principles of social organization construct the size, stability, and status characteristics of the usual

³¹ Lutz and White, 419

³² Later theorists in the tradition (including Sri Lankans) propose what might be regarded as an inchoate cognitive theory: While the *Dhvani* school maintains that secondary meanings are merely indicated (*lakṣya*) or implicitly understood through the words which compose their primary meanings, the *Siyabas Lakara* claims that secondary meanings are gleaned through the process of inference (*arthāpatti*). This is something which *Dhvani* theorists explicitly deny, classing instead *vyañgya* (the suggested sense of words, bereft of any logical derivations) as *śābda*, or the valid means of knowledge. (Wijayawardhana (1964), 23-4)

³³ Lynch, 8-9

audiences for the emotional performances of individuals.”³⁴ For example, Appadurai (1985) illustrates the way in which particular expressions of gratitude are learned behaviors serving to affirm caste hierarchies in modern south India.³⁵ While not necessarily denying that emotions are subjectively experienced in the same way (i.e., that the experience of grief or amusement are in any way different between different people), social constructionism goes some length toward undermining emotional realism.³⁶

Emotion and Gratitude in medieval Sinhala Buddhist literature³⁷

In his doctoral dissertation entitled “Devotion in the Buddhist Literature of Medieval Sri Lanka,” Charles Hallisey contends that central to the concerns of authors of medieval Sri Lanka was a wish to inculcate in their audience a sufficient sense of *gratitude* (Skt. *kṛtajña*, Pāli. *kataññu*, meaning “knowing or acknowledging that which was done”) for the Buddha’s dispensation. As the Buddha is acknowledged as having passed out of the world, the tradition has tended to associate present devotional practice with ‘that which was appointed’ in the past.³⁸ For example, Hallisey cites the 13th century *Pūjāvaliya*, which contains a metaphor equating the Buddha to a mother, who offers the *Dharma* like the milk of her breast. Calling the passage “emotive” in its intention, Hallisey writes, “The metaphor “moved” the

³⁴ Lutz and White, 420

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Lynch summarizes one important aspect of emotions accommodated by both social constructionism and emotional realism: “Emotional appraisals are constitutive for the individual and deeply involve, even more, the self in its relationships to social others, things, or events. We speak of our deepest emotions as meaning-ful. The feeling does not move us, rather, the emotional appraisal is so full of meaning that it constitutes a moving experience for us.” (1990b), 9

³⁷ Deegalle (1997) delineates the “late medieval” period of Sri Lanka as spanning from the beginning of the Polonnaruva period to the fall of the Kandyan kingdom to the British, 993-1815. Nearly all of the Sinhala literature under review in this thesis will fall between the 12th and 15th centuries. Exceptions will be noted.

³⁸ As opposed to theistic religious systems which so often orient devotional practice and liturgy around prognostication (and the incumbent *expectation*).

authors, and other beings, from being alone, without protection or care, to being children who are loved and protected.”³⁹ These emotive elements serve to precipitate a sense of self-involvement in the ongoing history of the consequences of the Buddha’s dispensation among those who read and hear the texts, thereby reinforcing their devotional attitude, two things which Hallisey to some degree equates: “when the strategies of self-involvement bring to bear the resources of both thought and emotion to construct the impression, “I am involved,” then this self-involvement should be called “devotion.”⁴⁰

In conjunction with his work on the Sinhala *vamsas*, Steven Berkwitz (2001, 2003, 2004) pursues Hallisey’s argument, investigating at some length the mechanics and function of emotional evocation. In so doing, Berkwitz posits a theory of emotional responsiveness which ostensibly contravenes the most fundamental assumptions of *rasa* theory. Following contemporary social constructionist theorists of emotion, Berkwitz argues that some Sinhala literature should be interpreted as an effort to forge emotional associations with the Buddha through a process of actively associating devotional practice with the Buddha’s long-ago dispensation.

Berkwitz argues that more than simply ‘inspiring’ devotion through fabulous accounts of the Buddha’s past deeds, the Sinhala *vamsas* work to associate ritualized activity with the notion that devotees are recipients of acts of generosity of the historical Buddha and other virtuous agents of the past.⁴¹ The thought is that the texts render explicit the connection between the past deeds of the Buddha and the ability of readers/listeners to recognize and pursue soteriological fruits, thereby inducing a sense of gratitude and obligation. The ritual of *pūjā* is then configured as an appropriate exhibition of this gratitude, thereby forging a connection to the past

³⁹ Hallisey (1988), 258

⁴⁰ Ibid, 57

⁴¹ Berkwitz (2001), 161; Berkwitz (2003)

which, “can be considered ‘ethical’ in that [it] display[s] a cognitive understanding of being a beneficiary of the past who is morally obligated to acknowledge one’s dependence on the Buddha for the ability to imagine and attain various Buddhist felicities.”⁴²

Berkwitz’s primary example is the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*, a 13th century putatively historical chronicle attributed to Parākrama Paṇḍita, wherein we read of kings realizing the Buddha’s foresight in ordaining that his relics might be spread far and wide, such that “the many beings who make offerings [to them] will enjoy the happiness of the divine world.”⁴³ This realization prompts the kings to build monasteries on the order of tens of thousands (Aśoka), or to build a *poṃa* hall “resembling a divine mansion for the monastic community.”⁴⁴ While the average devotee cannot of course afford such generosity, simple acts of veneration (such as the *pūjā*) are substituted as being appropriate displays of gratitude in the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*.⁴⁵ The text presents acts of veneration as acts of reciprocation towards the Buddha, and describes those readers and listeners who undertake veneration with this meaning in mind as having been transformed into *satpuruṣas*, or “virtuous persons.”

On account of this, according to Berkwitz,

we can locate the origins of emotions not in the passive experience of an individual’s physiology but rather in the views and appraisals that people are endowed with in the course of submitting themselves to cultural practices...the readers and listeners of Buddhist history are subjected to

⁴² Berkwitz (2001), 158

⁴³ *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*, 72-3; (Berkwitz (2001), 161

⁴⁴ As Duṭṭagāmuṇu did upon learning that *arahant* Mahinda had predicted (ordained?) his ascension over a century earlier. (*Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*, 144; (Berkwitz (2001), 162)

⁴⁵ Berkwitz (2004), 271

certain emotions as a result of encountering historical narratives that describe the world and their place in it. The *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*, in this way, works to inscribe particular emotions by supplying appraisals to situations in which their readers and listeners find themselves in relation to the past. (Berkwitz (2004), 242-3)

The thought seems to be that, upon learning of the gratitude of kings towards the Buddha as described in the texts, devotees are conditioned to feel likewise, having made the same associations between the Buddha's historical acts of generosity and their own situation as beings privy to the teaching of the Buddha, and its various attendant felicities. Therefore,

The frequent descriptions of emotional experiences felt by groups of devotees suggests that rather than being intensely personal, natural events, emotions are frequently crafted and conditioned by cultural appraisals of what people experience.⁴⁶

This should strike us of course as being directly opposed to the fundamental assumption of *rasa* theory that specific emotions are uniformly evoked by specific determinants (i.e., *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas* and *vyabhicāribhāvas*). Though it seems philosophically suspect to claim that *all* emotions are the product of social conditioning,⁴⁷ this is what Berkwitz appears to assert. Though there are descriptions

⁴⁶ Berkwitz (2004), 242

⁴⁷ Supposing that a person is born *tabula rasa* with respect to emotional response, and that she acquired such responsiveness solely through socially learned associations, would involve a conditioning process on order of: Emotions arise haphazardly and without antecedent cause – a certain person, place or event would have to be presented at the same time as one such emotion arose, and some form of positive or negative reinforcement would have to be simultaneously issued to sustain this association.

of the Buddha in the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* which mimick the style of *alaṅkāra*-influenced Sanskrit poetry, Berkwitz denies that these are simply intended to “please the minds of the audience.” Significant are the emotional responses of the *characters within the narrative*, from which the audience (the real audience – the readers and hearers of the text) is to take its cues (reading for example in one instance that a character possessed “a mind that was pleased by considering the various similies”).⁴⁸ Though the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* contains “some expressions that strongly resemble the *alaṅkāras* of Sanskrit poetics,”⁴⁹ Berkwitz urges us

not to take the theories of Sanskrit poetics [alluded to in the text] at their word and simply conclude that the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* and analogous texts worked to “evoke” or “elicit” latent feelings of joy and gratitude from within the “hearts” of late medieval Buddhist devotees.⁵⁰

He suggests alternatively that we interpret the emotions displayed by characters within the text “as dispositions that are crafted [in the reader or hearer] by the narrative itself.”⁵¹

* * *

The following chapter will explore the relevance of presuppositions of emotional realism and emotional constructivism to Buddhist ethics, and their prevalence within both early Pāli and medieval Sinhala literature.

⁴⁸ Berkwitz (2004), 240

⁴⁹ Ibid, 238

⁵⁰ Ibid, 240

⁵¹ Ibid

Chapter 2: Aesthetic responsiveness and moral consciousness: an historical survey

Kāvya, Rasa and the ethical import of literature in South Asian intellectual thought

The tension between the perception of art and literature as possessing a practical, educative function and of being purely objects of aesthetic enjoyment have made fertile ground for creative distinctions and theoretical subtleties in South Asian intellectual thought. Of specific relevance for the present section is the place accorded to the morally educative function of art and literature, which was seen as wholly distinct from, and indeed incommensurable with, the actual act of aesthetic appreciation. Offering a (perhaps essentialized) summary of the position of ancient Indian aestheticians, Coomaraswamy writes,

Of course, a work of art may and often does afford us at the same time pleasure in a sensuous or moral way, but this sort of pleasure is derived directly from its material qualities, such as tone or texture, assonance, etc., or the ethical peculiarity of its theme, and not from its aesthetic qualities: the aesthetic experience is independent of this, and may even, as Dhanamjaya says, be derived in spite of sensuous or moral displeasure.⁵²

This is so because the experience of *rasa* is accompanied by a state of ‘self-forgetfulness,’ or, on the interpretation of those advocating most extremely the religious functionality of art (e.g., Abhināvagupta), a state of transcendence of one’s own subjectivity.⁵³ The presumption seems to be that discursive reasoning, which is

⁵² Coomaraswamy (1924), 32

⁵³ See Cooper (1997)

required for ethical judgment making, cannot take place at the height of aesthetic relish.

This is not to say however that literature (*kāvya* – that is, prose and poetry as distinct from for example *itihāsa*, historical works, or *śāstra*, treatise) was not perceived as having an ethically educative function. It was thought to do so not by means of the aesthetic experience which it invoked, nor by direct didactic means, but rather through its potential to stimulate reflection upon morally educative situations. Sheldon Pollock tells us that *kāvya*

does not expressly enjoin or define appropriate action, nor adduce an actual account of such action from the past as authority. Its specificity resides precisely in the self-sufficiency of the utterance [*ukti*] itself.⁵⁴

Rather, literary works came to be perceived as expressing moral injunctions through their narratives taken as a whole. Bhojarāja (a philosopher and aesthetician who ruled the central Indian kingdom of Malwa during the first half of the 11th c.) states in his *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* that, “The literary work is a sentence totality which causes us to understand what we should and should not do.”⁵⁵ Bhoja’s thought was that the gestalt of a literary work composed of words, sentences, and plot themes (each composed atomistically of the previous, and none themselves having a determinate real-world referent or ethical import) had at least one moral point, which was a literary instantiation of one or more absolute moral imperatives. (i.e., The Rāmāyaṇa enjoins the reader to “act like Rāma, and not like Rāvaṇa,” which affirms the wrongness in general of theft, adultery, etc.) For Bhoja, literature was morally educative in offering

⁵⁴ Pollock (2003b), 50

⁵⁵ Pollock (2001), 218; Śṛṅgāraprakāśa, 194.6

particular examples which allow readers to cultivate a ‘moral consciousness.’ This Bhoja supposed to be

the sole cause of attaining the four life-goals,⁵⁶ and [that which] undergirds the cosmos. It might rightly be called the beginningless and endless *śabdabrahma* transformed into the form of verbal meaning.⁵⁷

Jagannātha, a poeticist of the mid-seventeenth century, departing from the ethical esotericism of Bhoja gives intriguing expression to the precise nature of the moral imperatives implicitly affirmed (and in turn “promulgated” by) literary works. In literature, the inappropriateness of a given character relationship or narrative event is “something people understand from social practices (*vyavahārataḥ*).”⁵⁸ Faults in literary composition amount to “transgression of the social order measured against a set of social norms.”⁵⁹ For Jagannātha, literature, and particularly the sentiments (*rasas*) embodied by certain character motifs, represented a “promulgation of an ideal-typical social order.”⁶⁰ This may seem at first to give way to a kind of moral relativism, with literature reflecting only the mores and expectations of the culture in which it is composed. We must be sensitive to the fact however that Sanskrit literati including Jagannātha believed there to be only *one* correct and immutable social order, ensuring the efficient governance of society and the most fulfilling lives for its members. Perforce, *kāvya* was seen as expressing injunctions as to how to best fulfill

⁵⁶ By which he means the four *puruṣārthas* – dharma (righteousness), artha (wealth), kāma (physical pleasure), and mokṣa (spiritual emancipation) – the four achievements corresponding to the four life-stages which constitute a rightly lived life.

⁵⁷ Pollock (2001), 217-8; Bhoja, 471.16ff.

⁵⁸ *Rasagaṅgādhara*, 118

⁵⁹ Pollock (2001), 213

⁶⁰ Pollock (2001), 214. Pollock refers to this sentiment as “social-moral aesthetics,” which had a long history with varying degrees of explicitness among Indian literary theorists “extending from Bharata to Jagannātha.” (2001), 215

one's social role in the "ideal-typical" order, and through becoming an accomplished reader, one cultivates an appreciation for one's role and moral responsibilities in that order. Pollock explains:

when one learns what literature is, how it works and the canons by which it may be said to represent what is valid and invalid, when one learns to be a good reader, a *rasika* or a *sahṛdaya*, one is learning what is normative in the everyday world. To produce readers in Sanskrit literature is to produce certain social subjectivities.⁶¹

It remained of course up to the audience to detect such compositional faults themselves. Just as aesthetic receptivity was supposed to be universal and innate in *rasa* theory, so was sensitivity to the moral import of literature according to Indian philosophers and poeticists. The following quotation from Bhoja is representative of this sentiment:

It is a particular kind of insight (*pratibhāviśeṣana*) as to the moral right and wrong generated in a person with innate receptivity (*upahītasamskāra*) by the act of contemplating the meanings of a literary work.⁶²

⁶¹ Ibid, 215. Bharata early on affirms this supposition: "*arthaḥ pratiyojanaṃ ca prītipurassaraṃ vyutpattimayaṃ*," ("The 'meaning' [of poetry] also signifies its purpose, which is moral instruction through a pleasurable experience.") *Nāṭyaśāstra*, 265; Pollock's translation (2001), 227 n.45

⁶² Pollock (2001), 217-8; Śṛṅgāraprakāśa, 471.16ff.

Narrative ethics and moral naturalism in early Pāli Buddhist literature

In their discussion of the canonical Pāli Buddhist scriptures, Charles Hallisey and Anne Hanson observe the manner in which these narratives express abstract moral truths while also fostering a “moral consciousness” operative on account of the reader’s own empathy. Hallisey and Hanson offer an example from the Pāli commentary on the *Dhammapada*, a collection of aphorisms and stories included in the Pāli Buddhist canon. The tale is of a barren woman who, having become a servant in a noble household, out of jealousy poisons the madam of the home during three successive pregnancies, causing two miscarriages and finally the noblewoman’s demise. Having realized servant’s deceit at the moment of her death, the noblewoman vows to haunt the servant in her next life, ensuring that she too will not successfully have a child. The servant is reborn as a hen, and the noblewoman as a cat who eats all of the hen’s eggs. The hen vows revenge in her next life, and is reborn as a tigress who eats the fawns of a doe (the noblewoman). The cycle of revenge continues as the servant is reborn as a noblewoman and the noblewoman as a demoness (named Kālī), who devours two of the servant-now-noblewoman’s children. The servant-now-noblewoman, fearful of the same fate for her third child, brings him to the Buddha where she lays him at his feet. The Buddha then requests that the noblewoman hand over the child to the demoness, whom he has summoned. The terrified noblewoman complies, astonished that the demoness having caressed and returned the child to her begins to weep.⁶³

Hallisey and Hanson point out that the re-birth and revenge segment of the story expresses a general “moral truth” expressed in aphoristic form elsewhere in the *Dhammapada*: “Hatreds can never cease by hatred” (*Dhammapada*, v.5). They contend further however that the conclusion of the narrative offers a moral lesson

⁶³ Hallisey and Hanson, 314-15

through what comes to be the reader's involvement in the story and empathy with the demoness. The narrative exacts a "transfer in the imagination" from the reader to "a person who is morally opposite" them.⁶⁴ Such narratives serve as exercises for cultivating just this sort of capacity for imagination which is, according to the two authors, "essential for ethical action."⁶⁵ This is so for two reasons: Firstly because narratives and the imagination they nurture "can help us better perceive the generic nature of persons, such that we are better able to perceive universal obligations and rights in a world characterized by social diversity." Secondly because "narrative form portrays "complex nets of deeds and attributes"⁶⁶ [of others] in a manner that inevitably requires sympathy on our [i.e., the readers'] part,"⁶⁷ so that when we are in turn confronted with real-world situations requiring us to make judgments involving moral appraisals we will for example be restrained in our censure of another by first being compelled to empathize with his or her life-circumstances.

The ethically educative component which Hallisey and Hanson extract from early Pāli Buddhist literature corresponds to that of Sanskrit literature in that the ethical import of both genres – the particular lessons and general maxims in the case of Sanskrit literature, and the particular lessons, general maxims and "moral consciousness" in the case of early Buddhist literature – is derived by the reader *after some amount of conscious reflection on the narratives as a whole*. That is, the lessons and maxims of Sanskrit literature, and the maxims and imaginative reasoning involving the "complex nets of deeds and attributes" emerge only when the narratives in which they are contained are read in their entirety (or at least in all essential detail)

⁶⁴ Ibid, 315

⁶⁵ Ibid, 316

⁶⁶ Their quotation from Carrithers, 82

⁶⁷ Hallisey and Hanson, 316

and considered – not through sporadic or epiphanic realization at intermittent points within the narrative.

* * *

In an innovative reading of early Pāli Buddhist Literature, Maria Heim discerns therein a conceptual framework for understanding the mechanics of emotion which parallels the most fundamental assumptions of *rasa* theory. The Buddha’s acts of inordinate self-sacrifice in previous incarnations described in the Pāli Jatakas are intended make a visceral impact upon the reader, sometimes to the point of horripilation (as for instance the Bodhisattva’s memorable “gifts of body” (*dehadāna*) – in one incarnation as King Śibi giving away his eyes to a blind Brahmin, in another slicing up his own body to give to a group of hungry ogres as food). The visceral intensity of these actions is sometimes registered not only by other characters in the story, but also by unusual natural phenomenon, such as earthquakes and the rolling of the oceans. Heim identifies in this what she calls “moral naturalism” – the notion that “the world is so ordered that it responds to moral acts.”⁶⁸ This she associates with the presupposition apparent in the literature that likewise all individuals possess uniform receptivity to certain types of acts – or at least that we should if we are to recognize morally praiseworthy actions, and/or, as will be discussed shortly, if we are to be receptive to the renunciatory impetus given by such passages.

Though similar to the notion of innate receptivity (*upahītasamskāra*) to the moral import of narrative as discussed by Bhoja, an important difference must be stressed: the moral receptivity which Bhoja and other Indian poeticists referred to took place *only during reflection upon the totality of the narrative at hand*. The moral realization of the witnesses to the virtues of the Buddha (presumably meant to

⁶⁸ Heim, 541

be the appropriate response of the reader) happens *instantaneously*, and in a fashion *automatically*, requiring no time for any discursive reflection on narrative context, etc.

Emotional realism may be shown to have significant relevance to Buddhist ethical considerations. Firstly and most straightforwardly, alerting one to actions which are of immense meritorious quality further alerts one to the fact that the performer of these acts is one of advanced spiritual stature, and worthy of reverence (though perhaps not always to be imitated, as in the case of sacrificing one's body to hungry demons). The second is the moral reflection which intense emotions can induce after the fact. Such emotional reactions are enduring, both in the mind of the individual reader/hearer of the narrative and within the Buddhist community through which the narratives are transmitted. Commenting on a passage in which Nagasena points out that the Bodhisattva's deeds of many years past are still being recounted today, Heim remarks, "The moral power of fame is also in evidence here. Emotional impact is not conceived as fleeting or transitory but, rather, endures for a long time and thus stimulates memory, ideals, and moral deliberation."⁶⁹ Quoting several examples from Buddhist Pāli texts, Heim illustrates how the feeling of fear may "replace complacency with [religious] urgency,"⁷⁰ or *samvega*, impelling one on the path to renunciation. She comments,

It is a feeling that the [Buddha] delivering his speeches inspires among deities in the heavens in exactly the same way the lion's roar causes brutes of the forest to quake in fear. The gods realize their impermanence and vulnerability, which is a moment of fear and agitation.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Ibid, 546

⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷¹ Heim, 546

Heim does not address the counter-possibility that the passages in question are meant to be *prescriptive*, that is, that they may be intended to instruct the reader in an appropriate mode of response to a certain event, as opposed to merely reflecting the presumed normal response (as Berkwitz assumes to be the case for passages in the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa*). While I cannot definitely establish an emotional realist orientation in early Pāli literature (and some evidence in chapter three may contravene this possibility), the thought is given credence in the notion found in canonical texts that there is a correct way to augment or “flavor” a discourse in order that its “true meaning” (its substantive, philosophical/soteriological import (*attha*)) may be discerned. In the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha exhorts that the “True Law” (*saddhamma*) will be preserved when a monk is “in full possession” of a discourse, “with well put verses and flavorings (*sunikkhittehi pada-vyañjanehi*): for, [Oh monks], if verses and their flavorings are well put, the practical meaning is likewise easy to follow.”⁷²

Developments in Medieval Sinhala Buddhist literature

We turn now to the Sinhala literature of the 13th to 15th centuries CE, a period which saw a revival of the vernacular literary tradition in Sri Lanka, and during which a prodigious amount of Sinhala prose literature was produced. In the literature of this period we find a departure from the notions of the innateness of aesthetic and moral receptivity found in the antecedent Pāli and Sanskrit literary traditions. Possible socio-historical causes for this apparent change in sentiment will be the subject of the next chapter. Here I will offer instances from various literary genres of the period

⁷² *Aṅguttara Nikāya* II.141; Coomaraswamy (1939), 175

which suggest that suitable moral and aesthetic responsiveness to literature must be cultivated.

I must first make clear that while such emotional and moral constructivism appears as something new during the medieval period, it is not to the total exclusion of the former sentiments of emotional realism and moral naturalism. Reminiscent of those Heim discusses from the early Pāli literature, we find a passage from the early 13th century *Amāvartura* in a section recounting the conversion of the god Śakra adapted from a Jataka story:

‘blessed are we that have given [the Buddha] a spoonful of gruel or a ladleful of rice,’ and they rejoiced and were glad, and with hair that rose up on their bodies, as it were in blossom, they stood and worshipped, with their hands clasped above their heads.”⁷³

In addition, like the Sanskrit literature which was believed to convey essential truths about morality and the means by which to live one’s life to the fullest (i.e., the four *puruṣārthas*), Sinhala literature of the period provided knowledge of some essential laws of governance (both of oneself and of others) and pedagogy. Consider the following quotation from Mayūrapāda Buddhaputra, wherein he explains the usefulness of his *Pūjāvaliya* – an assemblage of stories of the Buddha’s life in Sinhala prose (the last two chapters being a history of Sri Lanka) written in the early to mid-13th century – to ‘deputy kings and ministers, who might learn the

laws of the king (*rājanīti*), laws of the world (*lōkanīti*), laws of the teaching (*dharmanīti*), conventions of the world (*lōkavyavahāra*),

⁷³ Reynolds, 83

conventions of the teaching (*dharmavyavahāra*), and conventions of land (*deśavyavahāra*), and about this and other worlds.⁷⁴

However, Sinhala Buddhist literature of the medieval period contains noticeable shifts in its presuppositions regarding the innateness of aesthetic responsiveness and possibly also the universality of the moral imperatives advocated by some texts. These shifts are contemporaneous with an apparent emerging self-awareness within the texts of the roles of author and audience, and the means by which authors acquire the skill and authority to impact the audience aesthetically, and to educate them morally.

To take an example from an historiographic text, according to Steven Berkwitz, “The *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* claims for itself the aesthetic capacity to effect certain emotional and ethical responses in an audience,”⁷⁵ as the text “supplies us with several hints as to how persons are expected to react when they read or listen to a recital of its narrative.”⁷⁶ Though declaring that the *Thūpavaṃsa* “gives rise to emotions that are productive of a moral subjectivity in those who encounter its narrative”⁷⁷ (a statement seemingly reminiscent of the claims of Hallisey and Hanson regarding early Pāli literature), Berkwitz refers not to emotions triggered *automatically* by the narrative, but to those which the narrative attempts to configure, and to a “moral subjectivity” which is not the “ethical imagination” of Hallisey and Hanson (which is a means to realizing universal (i.e., “objective”) standards of morality), but rather a “subjective” understanding (i.e., understood from the

⁷⁴ Deegalle (1997), 190; Pūjāvaliya, 18

⁷⁵ Berkwitz (2001), 155

⁷⁶ Ibid, 156

⁷⁷ Ibid, 155

standpoint of the subject (the reader)) of one's reciprocative obligations as they are established by the narrative.

The ambivalence between the primacy of the innate as opposed to the acquired ability to compose aesthetically stimulating literature seems to have been decided in favor of its acquired character among medieval Sinhala literati. The *Siyabas Lakara* (see chapter 1) holds that though one may be deficient in inborn genius (Sin. *piḷiban*, Skt. *pratibhāna*) one may become a great poet through study and exercise. Tarrying from the medieval period slightly, but to a text which reflects much of the literary sentiment of the preceding era, the 16th century *Subaṣita* of Alagiywanna Mukeveti likens the learning process involved in creating great poetry to the trial of childbirth:

Only great poets know good and bad with respect to versification,
Could the mediocre and fraudulent have such education?
Women having borne children only know labor's pain,
Could childless young women be on the same plane?⁷⁸

Again the *Siyabas Lakara* asks,

How can those who have not studied the *śāstras* distinguish between
what is excellent [*guna*] and what is a blemish [*dosha*]; does the blind
person have the capacity to perceive the differences in visual objects?⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Adapted from Perera's translation of *Subashita*, v. 8

⁷⁹ Hallisey (2003), 701; *Siyabas Lakara*, I. 9

Medieval Sri Lankan literati saw this formal knowledge of literary composition as associated with progress on the path to emancipation – both for authors and for their audiences. The following passages are adjacent to the above:

Language is like a wish-conferring cow that gives what is desirable to those who can use it in the proper manner, but for others it will only impart bovine qualities...

Therefore the learned men of old who were driven by the desire to enlighten the world composed treatises for those who were bringing forth [entering] the beautiful path [*visituru magga*; Skt. *vicitra mārga*].⁸⁰

According to the *Siyabas Lakara*, it is receptivity to universal features of the aesthetics of language – a receptivity acquired through careful study of “learned men of old” – which fulfills one’s wishes, ultimately precipitating one’s journey on “the beautiful path,” the path to enlightenment.

⁸⁰ Hallisey (2003), 701-2; *Siyabas Lakara*, I. 8, 10

Chapter 3: Literature, cosmopolitanism and kingship in medieval Sri Lanka

A sermon for the common man (and woman)

Whereas nearly all of the antecedent Buddhist literature – canonical and exegetical – had been composed in Pāli, the 12th century brought the composition of Buddhist texts in the local Sri Lankan language of Sinhala. While some of this vernacular literature strictly adhered to the established formats of Sanskrit treatise and poetry, the period also saw the ascendance of a new and unique type of Buddhist literature corresponding to that of a new mode of Buddhist preaching: *baṇa*, the public reading from Sinhala texts known as *baṇapot* (‘preaching texts’).

Rather than doctrinal exegesis, the principle subjects of these *baṇapot* were the Jātakas of the Pāli canon – the stories of the Buddha Gotama in his previous incarnations as humans of all walks of life, and even as various animals. The translation of the nearly 550 Jataka stories of the canon into Sinhala was itself considered a *baṇapot*.⁸¹ The texts served to valorize the Buddha in many aspects – his wisdom, his compassion, and at times in his lives of martial and royal leadership. *Baṇapot* emphasized the necessity of reverence for the Buddha, and frequently extolled the immense karmic benefits of even small offerings (such as a withered flower or old piece of fruit) to the Buddha, and small gifts (a bowl of rice or a piece of cloth) to the Sangha (the community of monks).⁸²

The primary intended audience of *baṇapot* were “unlearned, virtuous people” (*no viyat hudījana*) as declared for example by Guruḷugomi in the *Amāvatura*, the

⁸¹ Deegalle (2006), 17

⁸² In the narratives of the *baṇapot* these are given to the historical Buddha and his Sangha, but the obvious implication is the admonition to give alms to the current Sangha, and to make offerings (*pūjas*) to icons of the Buddha, his relics, and his other physical representations such as Bodhi trees. These practices continue in Sri Lanka to the present day.

first known *baṇapot* composed in approximately 1200.⁸³ According to Mahinda Deegalle, the term used here for unlearned, *noviyat*, “referred to people who neither knew several languages nor had accumulated knowledge through formal studies under a teacher.”⁸⁴ According to Sorata Thera, the term for virtuous, *hudī*, derives from the Sanskrit *sudhī*, which has both the substantive and adjectival meanings of ‘a wise or learned man’ or ‘a religious or pious person,’ or ‘wise’ or ‘pious.’⁸⁵ Though interesting to note here the close association of notions of piety and learning, to avoid contradiction with *noviyat* it seems preferable to take *hudī* in the sense of merely ‘pious,’ or, more broadly and in accordance with other applications of the word, as ‘virtuous.’ *Hudīkusalkam* refers to the “meritorious deeds of virtuous people,” and a *hudīpīrimnī* to a “virtuous man.”⁸⁶

Sorata Thera gives the term “virtuous person” (*satpuruṣayā*) itself as an equivalent to *hudī*.⁸⁷ Thus we may infer that the intended audience of *Amāvatura* were those “virtuous people” into which the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* hoped to render its audience according to Berkwitz (see chapter 1). However, a passage from the *Pūjāvaliya* (a *baṇapota* nearly contemporary to *Amāvatura*) suggests the contrary while raising some interesting issues. The author enumerates eight groups of people by whom *Pūjāvaliya* should be read or heard, along with the direct benefits specific to

⁸³ The complete quotation reads: “Having selected the term *purisadammasārathī*, I shall narrate briefly in the vernacular [*siyabasin*, ‘my own/one’s own language’; i.e., Skt. *svabhāṣā*], for the edification of the virtuous and unlearned, how the Buddha, having fulfilled the perfections, attained enlightenment and then accepted the Devram monastery, and how living there he traversed the three worlds and subjugated various beings and directed them to nirvana.” Wijemanne, 4; see *Amāvatura*, 1

⁸⁴ Deegalle (2006), 71

⁸⁵ Sorata Thera, 1171; Deegalle (2006), 71; Monier-Williams, 1225

⁸⁶ Deegalle (2006), 71

⁸⁷ Sorata Thera, 1171. The reference for this specific translation Sorata Thera gives as being from the *Dhampiyāatuvāgāṭapadaya* [sic], the oldest surviving Sinhala glossary on a Pali book (in this case the *Vinaya Pitaka*), attributed to King Kassapa V (913-923 CE). See Godakumbara (1955).

each of them. The last mention is of “pious men and women in remote provinces,” concerning whom it is explained:

Because pious (*śraddhāvanta*) men and women, who live in very remote provinces (*prayanta*) do not have an opportunity to see any virtuous person (*satpuruṣa*), it is very difficult for them to listen to *baṇa* and thereby to know about this and other worlds. Therefore, they can obtain a book of this sort which describes the virtues of the Buddha (*buduguṇa*) and can ask persons who are able to read to read them this text (*akṣarābhāsaya ātiya vun lavā kiyavā*). By listening to such readings, they can know correctly (*nirvyākula*) the virtues of the Buddha in their own language (*svabhāṣā*).⁸⁸

These men and women are presumably also the “virtuous but unlearned” to whom the *Amāvatura* was directed (being illiterate they are clearly unlearned, and recalling the connotation of piousness contained in *hudī* we may infer that *śraddhāvanta* here carries a similar implication). The “virtuous person” specifically referred to in the passage is the *satpuruṣa*, who appears to be a denizen of a more cosmopolitan climate. Obviously there must be more implied by the term than mere literacy, as the passage assumes that illiterate men and women have contact with those who can read, but not with *satpuruṣas*. But apparently too there is more intimated by the term than

⁸⁸ Deegalle (1997), 191 (punctuation modified); Pūjāvaliya (1965), 19. In the story of the monk Cakkhupāla from the *Saddharmaratnāvaliya* recognize that the chance to listen to sermons is “something so rare for us who live in rural areas.” (R. Obeyesekere (1991), 16)

virtuousness qua mere pious receptivity (which, the passage indicates, men and women in remote provinces already possess).⁸⁹

The other seven categories of intended recipients of the *Pūjāvaliya* Buddhaputra names as (1) kings; (2) the “world of women,” meaning here women of status such as noble women and queens; (3) the deputy king and the ministers; (4) senior monks (*Mahāsthaviras*); (5) meditators, referring to monks who are “unable to master the ways of reading and writing (*akṣarābhyāsa*); (6) eloquent preachers (inscriptional evidence indicates that these could be either monks or laymen⁹⁰); and (7) “virtuous worldly (*kalyāṇa pṛthagjana*) people who are able to master the way of reading and writing.”⁹¹

Expectations, great and small

Whether or not one is willing to concede that medieval Sinhala texts such as the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* were composed with the intention of conditioning the emotional responses of its readers, it is certain that the literature of the period – historiographic, liturgic, and poetic – emphasized the importance of emotional involvement in religious practice over meditation and doctrinal study. Berkwitz’s comment that the *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* “emphasizes the cultivation of productive emotional states and the performance of meritorious acts over the practice of meditation as a means for many people to secure greater happiness and eventual release from the world of *saṃsāra*,”⁹² might be extended to Sinhala *baṇapot* as well.

This was true at least for the primary audience of *baṇapot*: the pious and virtuous but unlearned. As has been discussed already in brief however, the

⁸⁹ Ames comments that the *satpuruṣa* in Sri Lankan Buddhist society refers simply to a “self-perfected individual,” i.e., one who has attained an advanced state in meditative practice. (p. 25)

⁹⁰ See Deegalle (1997), 185

⁹¹ Deegalle (1997), 189-91; Pūjāvaliya (1965), 17-19

⁹² Berkwitz (2004), 264

Pūjāvaliya indicates expectations of varying sophistication for different audience demographics. Here, the complexity of one’s task seems correlated with the depth of one’s learning. Just by reading *Pūjāvaliya* deputy kings and ministers will learn “laws of the king (*rājanīti*), laws of the world (*lōkanīti*), laws of the teaching (*dharmanīti*), conventions of the world;” elder monks will awaken their “moon-like wisdom;” and eloquent preachers will “decorate their own rivers-like-power-of words (*vākpatha*) in their preaching.”⁹³ A relevant discussion of the expectations and duties of kings in medieval Sri Lanka will follow below.

Deegalle refers to the admonitions of *baṇapot* for the pious, virtuous unlearned – presumably the peasantry – as “easy methods of worshipping.”⁹⁴ While we might differ from using such a strongly normative description, the point seems clear. The *Pūjāvaliya* reveals something of a hierarchy within the medieval Buddhist world, if in no other terms than an ideal-type. Along with the conspicuous political hierarchy of kings, administrators and peasantry, there is a corresponding hierarchy based on literacy, expectation to further engage in Buddhist teaching/preaching, and, as the above discussion of the *satpuruṣa* suggests, of moral authority and geographical location (urban or rural).

The emergence of these hierarchies, along with the popularization of the emotional sentiment and devotional worship which permeate the literature will be explored at greater depth in the subsequent two chapters. Relevant will be the notion of devotional sentiment as a means to emancipation (*bhakti yoga*) – whether or not this was explicitly stated or even believed in the Sri Lankan Buddhist context – which held significant prominence in the Indian religious world during the Sri Lankan medieval period.

⁹³ Deegalle (1997), 189-91; *Pūjāvaliya* (1965), 17-19

⁹⁴ Deegalle (2004), 85

The literature of the period also revealed a conspicuous need for the continuation of the Teaching in the absence of the teacher. The next two sections will address responses to this dilemma. This set of considerations will involve the role of the Buddhist king – both the idealized personage of literature and actual kings of history – as a substitute for the Buddha qua teacher and ruler.

The Buddha as Lord of Sages

To understand the role and expectations of teachers as portrayed in the Buddhist literary world, we must first understand the Buddha as teacher.

As early as the canonical Pāli scriptures the Buddha's instruction was described as having been exceedingly pleasing to listen to – he was repeatedly referred to as “Best among speakers” (*Vadataṃ varo*). His sermons were “charming in the beginning, charming in the middle, charming in the end, rich in content (*sāttḥaṃ*) and form (*savyañjana*).”⁹⁵ According to Buddhaghōṣa, the famed 5th century Pāli commentator, “*sāttḥaṃ* is the clarification, enunciation, illustration, analysis, elucidation, assertion and being consisted of words appropriate to the meaning.”⁹⁶ It in other words refers to the conceptual precision of the Buddha's speech. (He was said to be a “keen analyst of concepts” (*vibhajjavādī*) and adept at introducing the finer shades of meaning of words.⁹⁷) *Savyañjana* literally means “possessing ornaments,” in this case denoting “figurative expression” perhaps in the sense of the Buddha's accumen for teaching through parables, and his sensitivity to the receptivities and backgrounds of his audiences (as opposed to “rhetorical embellishment” or *alamkāra* (see chapter 1)).

⁹⁵ Deegalle (2006), 22. This description occurs a number of times within the Pali canon: at Vin.I.35, 242; DN.III.267, 285; MN.I.179, SN.I.105, IV.315; AN.I.180, II. 147, III.113, 135, 262.

⁹⁶ Takakusu and Nagai, 127; Deegalle (2006), 23

⁹⁷ Dhadphale, 7

While his speech is described as “pleasant and delightful” (*sammodaniyā* and *sārānīyā*), the Buddha of the Pāli canon warns of the danger of rhetorical embellishment occluding the philosophical aspects of discourse. With a tone of ominous clairvoyance he declares in Aṅguttara of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*:

Like the Āṅka drum of the Dasārahas, in which the drum-head vanished, leaving only the framework of pegs, even so it is with the suttantas [i.e., the *sūtras* or discourses] of the Tathāgata which are deep in meaning. They lie neglected and forgotten while men turn their attention to the suttantas of poets and the utterances of the disciples, full of words [*cittavyaṅjanā*]; these they will learn and master instead of the Buddha’s own teachings.⁹⁸

It was the *savyaṅjana* character of the Buddha’s preaching which was emphasized in the subsequent Pāli and medieval Sinhala literary traditions. Later authors had few reservations about ascribing to him profound rhetorical artistry, and in his eloquence he was likened to a poet:

With a voice sweet [*miyurasa*] like the song of a cuckoo,
The ocean of wisdom and virtue [*guṇa*] uttered these sweet words,
Which had various parts well decorated with ornaments of sounds and meaning
[akaratlakarin, Skt. śabdālaṅkāra arthālaṅkāra].
Then the multitude of monks, who were delighted and keen on hearing more,
Begged for that [*jātaka*] story. The Omniscient One presented in a language
shared by all [*siyalā hā bas*; i.e., Pāli]
this sermon imbued with transforming flavor [*rasa*],

⁹⁸ Dharpale 14-15; Saṃyutta Nikāya, ii. 222

with words resplendent with color and clarity
and pure with their finish of the Four Noble Truths like a painting.⁹⁹

The notion of the Buddha’s ability to discern the receptivity of his audience to ideas of various levels of abstractness (and thereby to instruct in the most effective way possible) was retained from the Pāli scriptures, though exaggerated to hyperbolic lengths. He preached after

having discerned the minds of all the people [in his audience] in an instant, in a span shorter than the blink of an eye, in the audience which [was so large that it] extended up to the Brahma-heaven.¹⁰⁰

As the “Lord of sages,”¹⁰¹ he was described as knowing every language of every creature of the world, “capturing the minds of each” with his eloquence in Tamil, the “Brahmin language,” Malaysian, Chinese, etc., and the languages of fish, elephants, bears, horses, and cows., etc.¹⁰²

King as Buddha, king as preacher, king as poet

We have seen in the above section the soteriological importance ascribed to the Buddha’s aesthetic sensitivity in both early Pāli and subsequent texts. There was however a recognition among Sri Lankan Buddhists of the medieval period that the

⁹⁹ *Kāvyasēkhara* 1.127-28; Hallisey’s translation, (2003), 705. Late Pali Buddhist literature also employed sophisticated poetic devices as illustrated in the *Subodhālaṃkāra*, a 12th century Sri Lankan treatise on Pali figures of speech in verses pertaining to the Buddha (none of them drawn from the Pali canon however, presumably on account of its overall stylistic simplicity). See Dhadphale, 7.

¹⁰⁰ Butsarāṇa, 45. I am grateful to Prof. Anne Blackburn for her assistance with the translation of this text.

¹⁰¹ Sasa Da Vata, v. 175

¹⁰² Butsarāṇa, 45

Buddha had long since passed out of the world, and that while his teachings, his “*Dhamma*,” were preserved in the form of scripture, new teachers were required to actually communicate it (something which the Buddha was perceived to have done so well). Thus the task of religious instruction fell upon others, the ranks of whom the above discussion of *baṇa* preaching began to unfold. The *Pūjāvaliya* mentions for example “eloquent preachers,”¹⁰³ and the somewhat vague *satpuruṣa* whom we may infer to be an individual able in religious instruction, and somehow “virtuous” in more than the provincial sense.

It was however the king who was to replace the Buddha more than any other figure in Sri Lankan Buddhist literature, both in his capacity as ruler and as teacher. The canonical Pāli literature introduces the ideal Buddhist king through the character of the *cakravartin* – the “universal monarch” (literally a “wheel-turner”). While the term has a more ancient Sanskrit history, the *cakravartin*¹⁰⁴ is first given Buddhist expression in the *Cakkavatti Sihanāda Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*. Here the Buddha recounts the tale of Mahāsudassana, a king who, having retired to the upper story of his palace to observe the *uposatha*, the monthly Buddhist holy day, looks out to see his city beleaguered with licentious behavior. At this point a heavenly wheel appears before the king, which he is able to instruct, saying “Roll onward, O my Lord the wheel...go forth, and overcome.” The wheel rolls one by one through the four surrounding regions, wherein the ruling King of each submits to Mahāsudassana, saying, “all is thine, O mighty king! Do thou, O mighty king be a Teacher to us.” Mahāsudassana then teaches them the five Buddhist precepts of morality after which

¹⁰³ The “great Paṇḍits skilled in preaching and learned in the various doctrines of the Buddhist *sūtras*” (*no ek sūtrāntayan igeṇa baṇa kīmehi dakṣa vū maha paṇḍivarayan*). My translation of Pūjāvaliya (1999 [1953]), 18.

¹⁰⁴ Which Zimmer translates as he who “sets the wheel of the world-pacifying monarch in motion.” (S. Tambiah, 2)

they abdicate and become his willing subjects.¹⁰⁵ This bloodless consummation of the *cakravartin's* rule is known as the *Dharma-vijaya*, or “righteous conquest.”

In the Pāli literature, the *cakravartin* is repeatedly conflated with the Buddha himself. In the *Mahāpadāna* and *Mahāparinibbāna* suttas, both the Buddha and the *cakravartin* are said to possess the same 32 auspicious bodily marks, and to both be “lion-like” and to possess a “lion’s roar.”¹⁰⁶ According to the tradition, it was predicted at his birth that Siddhartha Gotama was either to become such a “universal monarch” (*cakravartin*) or an enlightened one (a “Buddha”).

The *cakravartin* appears in medieval Sinhala literature as an archetypal ideal of kingship, but one in relation to which the historical Buddhist kings of Sri Lanka are portrayed through panegyrics and historiography as representing closely in some respects. Relevant to note also is the conflation of historical kings with the Buddha himself. For example, a 10th century inscription commissioned by King Mahinda IV declares that none but future Buddhas will become kings of Sri Lanka.¹⁰⁷ King Nissaṅka Malla, who ruled in the late 12th century, declared that the appearance of an impartial king should be understood and welcomed as an appearance of the Buddha.¹⁰⁸

Chapter two concluded by noting the contiguity of the themes of learnedness with respect to the rules of composition and the capacity for emancipatory attainment (i.e., escape from the suffering of *saṃsāra*) in medieval Sinhala literature. In the case of poems and panegyrics concerning kings, capacity as a just and efficacious ruler and as a teacher of the means to emancipation was associated with these two

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 11-12; Having the Dhamma as his master, the *cakravartin* “dwells having conquered this sea-girt land without stick or sword, by the law.” (Dīgha Nikāya (1947) iii, 58)

¹⁰⁶ S. Tambiah, 7

¹⁰⁷ Ganawardhana, 57; Epigraphia Zeylanica, Vol. I.(p.)237. The *Cūlavamsa* records several Sri Lankan kings to have achieved the virtues of a Bodhisattva, presaging too that “none but Bodhisattvas would become kings of prosperous Lankā.” (Gunawardhana, 57; Cv. 37.109; 37.180)

¹⁰⁸ Ariyapala (1968 [1956]), 44; Epigraphia Zeylanica, 2.3.121

accomplishments. Kings, both the historical subjects of eulogy and those of the extended *kāvya* poems supposed to be accounts of the Buddha’s life in previous incarnations, were depicted as possessing remarkable skill in oration – one capable of inducing bliss in any who hear, and one intimately associated with their efficacy as rulers. The ideal king of Sinhala literature Charles Hallisey identifies as a stereotyped character: the ““world-conqueror” (*cakravartin*), able to transform the world affectively and practically through the skillful use of refined literary techniques.”¹⁰⁹

The *Pārakumbasirita*, a fifteenth-century poem, records of King Parākramabāhu VI, “Listening to [his] entirely enjoyable words [*numutu rasa bas āsuva*]brings at once the bliss of heaven.”¹¹⁰ In another panegyric of the same king by the same author we read:

Knowing the Lord of Sages’ threefold word [*te valā munindu baṇa*], he put aside evil.

He crossed the ocean of poetry and drama and the arts of war [*avi sip*],
crushed the pride of fierce foes with his knowledge of strategy [*upā nāṇa*];

Skt. *upāya jñāna*],

and brought all of the island of Lanka to the shelter of a single parasol.¹¹¹

The passage succinctly reveals the ability of a grasp of a concentrated knowledge (the “threefold word”) to at once achieve competence in poetry and drama, to conquer foes in battle, to unify the kingdom politically, and to achieve religious emancipation. Crossing “the ocean of poetry and drama and the arts of war” recalls the simile of

¹⁰⁹ Hallisey (2003), 718

¹¹⁰ Hallisey (2003), ff.701; *Pārakumbasirita*, v.29

¹¹¹ Hallisey (2003), 708; *Sālahihinisandēsāya* v.3 in *Siri Rahul Pabanda*

‘crossing the ocean of *samsāra*,’ which the king does “knowing the three fold word” – the triple gem of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha.

As recorded in a number of sources, preaching the Buddhist *Dhamma* was expected of Sri Lankan kings, and something they appear to have actually done. An inscription of Nissaṅka Malla’s enjoins kings, as proper Buddhists, to perform daily ten items of meritorious action (*dasa pinkiriya vat*), including among them *baṇa* preaching (*baṇa kīma*).¹¹² The *Mahāvamsa* records that as early as the 1st century BCE King Duṭṭhagāmuṇu attempted to preach the *Maṅgalasutta* to a group of monks, though he was unable to ‘on account of reverence for the brotherhood [of monks].’¹¹³ A slab inscription records that King Kassapa V (ruling in the early 10th century) “preached that same *dhamma* in the presence of his esteemed teacher, and extolled the virtues of the Buddha in his own language.”¹¹⁴

In addition to being the primary patrons of learning and the arts, kings themselves were in many cases accomplished scholars and authors. A number of notable treatises and poems are attributed to Sinhala kings of the medieval period. Among these is the 12th century *Kavsilumiṇa* attributed to King Parākramabāhu II. This work, regarded as one of the greatest accomplishments of Sinhala poetry, will allow us to explore further the *cakravartin*’s related knowledge of compositional aesthetics and statecraft.

The *Kavsilumiṇa* was composed in Sinhala in a style imitative of Sanskrit court poetry (*praśasti*). Laden with lyrical and phonetic acrobatics, these *mahākāvyas* were richly evocative in content – from their portrayals of vivid bacchanalia to triumphal military campaigns, the *rasas* induced by these poems were anything but *vimutti*.

¹¹² Ariyapala (1968 [1956]), 48-9; Epigraphia Zeylanica, 2.3.119

¹¹³ Ariyapala (1968 [1956]), 49; Mahāvamsa, 32.42

¹¹⁴ Ariyapala (1968 [1956]), 49; Epigraphia Zeylanica, 1.2.43. Italics added. The Sinhala reads, “*ājara hamuyehi eme dham desum viyakhan kaḷa siyabasnen bud guṇa vānū.*”

The *Kavsilumīṇa* portrays the Buddha in a former birth in as Prince Kusa, the immensely gifted but physically repulsive heir to a vast kingdom. Inclined towards the renunciant life, Kusa agrees to marry only if his parents are able to find a bride of beauty matching that of a statue which he himself sculpts, one so lifelike that it is repeatedly mistaken for a woman of goddess-like appearance. Having launched an extensive search, Pabhāvati, the daughter of King Madra, is decided upon as an adequate suitor. Kusa and Pabhāvati are married, though on account of the legerdemain of Kusa’s mother never actually see one another. The remainder of the story recounts Kusa’s desperate attempts to win Pabhāvati’s love, she having discovered his true appearance. Kusa’s exploits involve his attempts to woo her with his superlative skills in music, pottery, weaving, gardening, and cooking. His amorous advances are however repeatedly foiled by his ineptitude in actually speaking to her. When, feigning injury lying in Pabhāvati’s lap she finally warms up to him, he opens his eyes not to address her but to accidentally (?) spit in her face.

In a variation from the Pāli Jataka tale on which the *Kavsilumīṇa* is based, Kusa receives a gem-necklace from the God Śakra after which he is possessed with a “lions-roar,” powerful enough to paralyze the armies advancing to King Madra’s gates with fear, and to bring the opposing kings to his feet, cowering in submission.¹¹⁵ Kusa’s conquest makes “the dancers of joy and delight dance on the dance-floor of [Pabhāvati’s] mind.”¹¹⁶ In the original Pāli story, the gem is presented to Kusa only after the battle has been won, and seems to be intended solely as a remedy for his physical appearance.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Elsewhere in the Jatakas Sakka’s jewel is described as being passed down from a lineage of worthy kings.

¹¹⁶ Ariyapala (2004), 735 (p.122)

¹¹⁷ As, after donning the gem he and Pabhāvati are described as “alike” and “fair,” as “neither outshone the other.” (Jātaka, 312 (p.164))

The jewel, which dangling around Kusa’s neck recalls the *Viśuddha cakra* of Yogic symbolism so intimately connected with the power of voice, here endows Kusa with the power to humble his enemies with his voice alone, again recalling the intimacy of oratory power and statecraft.¹¹⁸ Indeed we make take the variation in the Kusa story from its Pāli original as a recasting of the significance of the jewel-boon in light of the personage of the *cakravartin* which emerged in medieval Sinhala literature: a ruler privy to knowledge of the essentials of aesthetics and statecraft, equipped with sufficient force of character to put such knowledge to use. The *Kavsilumiṇa* goes on to introduce a new thematic element into the equation: Kusa is clearly possessed with a thorough knowledge of the essentials of the visual arts – he is clearly a *rasika*.

The aesthetics of statecraft

One gets the sense that the *cakravartin* as we encounter him in the medieval Sinhala literary milieu is a deserving and rightful heir to power, but that the galvanizing power of language he possesses is in some sense transferable – it is passed down from learned men of old or bestowed as a boon from a divine source, a boon which can be imparted time and again (thus the symbolism of the jewel). Indeed, the actual royal regalia inherited from one Sinhala Buddhist king to the next was thought to possess magical powers. Described in the *Culavaṃsa* are the king’s garb captured by the Cōḷas when they had overtaken the last king of Anuradhapura. They were “the diadem that had been inherited, the priceless diamond that had been inherited, the

¹¹⁸ It is interesting to note that the *Kavsilumiṇa*’s rendering, so interpreted, restores the jewel-boon its purpose in the *Mahāsudassana Sutta*, wherein the *cakravartin* (*Cakkavatti*) receives a “gem treasure” “which when raised aloft casts light and enables the fourfold army to “march out in the gloom and darkness of the night.”” (S. Tambiah, 12)

priceless diamond bracelet, which was believed to have been the gift of Gods, the unbreakable sword and a fragment of the belt of Buddha.”¹¹⁹

* * *

Pollock (1998) argues that in the cases of many empires historically, whether real empirical power operated or not, the perception of such power was maintained with a “language of cosmopolitan character and transethnic attraction, transcending or arresting any ethnoidentity the ruling class themselves might possess.”¹²⁰ Sinhala, of course, was a “vernacular” and not a cosmopolitan language. But the medieval Buddhist kings of Sri Lanka – those of real life and those of fictional representation – were in the same way Pollock suggests mediators between the local and the trans-local, and links between the present (their present) and the distant past (the time of the Buddha). The conflation of the king with the Buddha (more about which will be said in the following chapter) and the notion of an inherited or otherwise transferable license to rule and literary aptitude provided a connection (in the case of the fragment of the belt of the Buddha, a tangible one) to the Buddha himself. That a Buddhist king of Sri Lanka in the 10th – 15th centuries should be said to have eloquent mastery of Sinhala, Tamil, Pāli and Sanskrit may be seen as in some ways functionally equivalent to the claim that the Buddha possessed eloquent mastery of every language of the known world. Sri Lankan kings were after all presiding over dominions which included non-Sinhala speakers. To be truly a “universal monarch” was to have the capacity to communicate with and instruct all of one’s subjects. It also required that one be attuned to trans-local cultures: fluency in Pāli was the means to do this with respect to the Buddhist world of the region, while Sanskrit was the gateway to the

¹¹⁹ H.W. Tambia, 302; Geiger’s translation of the Culavamsa, XLIV, vv. 127-8

¹²⁰ Pollock (1998), 13

cosmopolitan (and Pollock (1998) would argue, secular) culture of broader South Asia.

Chapter 4: Elite and popular aesthetics and morality

Aesthetics and morality in court life

In *Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early India*, Daud Ali draws on historiographic and literary sources to reconstruct a general picture of social life in Indian royal courts from the Gupta period to the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, from approximately 300 to 1200 CE. Ali includes a discussion of intimate relationship between the cultivation of aesthetic taste and the refinement of moral character.

Discussing the medieval Indian conception of associates of the court, Ali details the way in which individuals were regarded as being “ornamented” with physical traits such as anatomical perfection, gestural grace and bodily movement, as well as personality traits and aptitudes such as playful demeanor and eloquent speech, and also, importantly, moral traits such as “stainless conduct” and “truthful speech.”¹²¹ It was then as if persons existed only as some diaphanous substratum, completed only through the augmentation of particular attributes. (This being not unlike the long-standing belief among aestheticians that poetry consisted of a “body” (*kāvyaśarīra*) which was to be furnished with linguistic ornaments (*alamkāras*)).

The view may have been that such physical, affective and moral attributes were the compliments to other various innate or unalterable conditions of one’s life. Consider the following excerpt from a 13th century Kannada inscription describing a minister whose “abundance of brilliant bounty ([was] an ornament) to fortune, [whose] stainless conduct ([was] an ornament) to youth, [and whose] widespread fame ([was] an ornament) to age.”¹²² Life circumstances (such as fortune, youth, and age)

¹²¹ Ali, 176-9

¹²² Ibid, 178-9

enabling the cultivation of virtues are conditions beyond personal control. These worldly attainments and moral attributes (material bounty, stainless conduct, and fame) were beyond the capacity of those whose life trajectory did not place them within the auspices of the court, a fact to which Ali is sensitive:

beauty, like so many other virtues, was viewed not merely as a set of attributes (though it was this too), but a capacity, partly bestowed by birth, which was to be realized through individual agency. It was deemed beyond the aspirations of common people, but, within the society of the good, it formed a ceaseless and life-long vocation.¹²³

Virtues were thus to be “acquired” by noble persons as “badges” of their station in life.¹²⁴

The substance-accident conception of ornamentation extended beyond the realm of the personal to encompass almost any “complete relationship of two elements of any kind which was thought to be proper and good.” The jewels of the court were the best of the king’s retinue, kings and ministers were “ornaments” of their family or lineage, wells, tanks, palaces and gardens were decorations of the city, and cities were ornaments of the earth.¹²⁵ Thus,

¹²³ Ibid, 143

¹²⁴ According to Ali, this was done at one level by taking into consideration one’s “character” (presumably one’s disposition which is separate from accidental virtues and unalterable), and selecting from a “list” of virtues which would best accord with one another to yield the most adequate gestalt personality. (p.179) This is however a rather ponderous interpretation of the notion of “ethical ‘refinement’” and it is hard to imagine how such an undertaking would be performed in real life. Perhaps, at least in the case of living noblemen and women, “ethical refinement” meant largely an adaptation to one’s expected role as a courtier, minister, etc., as different roles within the court had attendant lists of necessary qualities (often formally enumerated). Ethical conduct would in this sense be “performative” in the way in which Ali suggests that public displays of emotion were within the court. (See Ali, 185.)

¹²⁵ Ali, 177

The great chain of being which linked all the elements of the universe into a coherent set of relationships was thus typically represented in courtly sources as a vast ‘ornamental order’. The king, particularly in his role as the worldly embodiment of a cosmic overlord, often formed the centre of these representations, his sovereignty itself conceived of as adhering to his person like a vast array of ornaments.¹²⁶

Popular vs. elite aesthetics and morality

According to Ali, medieval Indian courtly culture afforded noblemen and women a certain freedom from the standards of propriety of non-nobles. Appreciation of erotic visual art, drama, dance and literature was an expected preoccupation for elites.¹²⁷ As indicated by such words descriptive of noble comportment as *vilāsa*, *ramaṇa*, *lalita* and *līlā*, courtiers and kings were permitted freedom of “mirthful spontaneity” and “charming insouciance,”¹²⁸ the terms also carrying undertones of sexual permissiveness.

Ali claims that nonchalance and spontaneity were actually requisites of social interaction within the court. He argues that it was presupposed that nobles possessed an uncanny ability to generate emotions, or specifically what he calls “commonly held dispositional states,” and would do so in permitting social contexts as a means of playful communication with likewise enabled peers, all of whom were receptive to the outward (i.e., bodily) manifestations of the dispositional states and the severity or

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ ‘Proficiency in viewing dramas and court narratives’ is mentioned as one of the sixty-four arts of the urbane man or courtier according to the *Kāmasūtra*. (Ali, 189) This implies that there is some degree of skill involved in aesthetic appreciation.

¹²⁸ Ali, 15

levity of the communicative context at hand.¹²⁹ This capacity (which Ali terms a “subjectivity”):

allowed both a reposeful delectation of emotions *and* a strategic itinerancy which enabled men and women to negotiate more effectively the relations of alliance, loyalty and antagonism which structured the affiliations of their lives.¹³⁰

While the conjuring of emotional states to facilitate social intercourse may strike the modern reader as insincere and frivolous, this practice (along with blatant sexual liberality) was thought to embody “the highest form of self-control and discipline,” for a “cultivated spontaneity or playfulness...operated well within the protocols of respectability and received expectations of bodily carriage” for the elite.¹³¹

Non-nobles for whom (1) cultivation in the aesthetic manners of the court was unachievable, and (2) whose births and life trajectories did not permit the cultivation of moral perfection and worldly attainment, were both thought to be inept in the appreciation of art and expected to abide by a more restrictive moral code. Returning to the context of medieval Sri Lankan literary culture, we find parallels in the putative suitability of erotic *kāvya* and temperate prose work for elites and non-elites.

* * *

Parākramabāhu II, a great patron of Buddhist learning institutions, established a code of rules (the *Dambadeṇi Katikāvata*) with the assistance of a senior monk

¹²⁹ Ibid, 203-4

¹³⁰ Ibid, 206

¹³¹ Ibid, 158

(Āraṇyaka Mēdhaṅkara) in the 13th century.¹³² This codified manual included provisions governing proper subjects of academic instruction, enjoining that “despised arts like drama and poetry should not be taught to others or learned.”¹³³ This was on account of the perceived danger that the stimulative imagery would present a distraction for Buddhist monks whose soteriological progress depended on withdrawal from the sensual realm. According to the *Dambadeṇi Katikāvata*, monks should also not compose or recite verses (*ślokas*) for laypeople.¹³⁴ These admonitions were extended to laypeople in their primary source of religious instruction, *baṇapot*. The *Saddharmaratnāvalīya* for example advises readers to “give up such useless studies as poetry and drama.”¹³⁵ Motivating the prohibition was once again the association of poetry and drama with the highly sensual realm of court aesthetics.¹³⁶

We have explored the reasons why non-elites were not regarded as having the accumen to appreciate poetry, drama or other high art in medieval Indian society. Although in the medieval Sri Lankan context the *prohibition* against partaking in high art was religiously motivated (i.e., it was thought to be soteriologically deleterious to do so), our study thus far has found dichotomies in medieval Sinhala literary culture associating aesthetic aptitude, virtue, literacy and social status which reflect those of Ali’s portrayal of medieval India. Recall the discussion of the *satpuruṣa* from the previous chapter. Also, the *Kavsilumina* (see chapter 3), one of the three extant Sinhala *mahākāvya* poems, offers some confirmation of these parallelisms. Though taking as its subject a former life of the Buddha, the poem was composed in a court

¹³² Ariyapala (1968 [1956]), 9

¹³³ *gṛhasthayaṅṅa solō ādiya bānda nokiya yutu; kāvya nāṭādī garhita vidyā tamā nūgatayutu, anunut nūgānviya yutu*. Ariyapala (1968 [1956]), 278.

¹³⁴ Hallisey (2003), 712, n.90

¹³⁵ Ariyapala (1968 [1956]), 278

¹³⁶ There was a continuity of court culture from the post-Gupta India to the medieval period of Sri Lanka. Kings underwent a similar coronation ritual, had similarly structured administrative systems, and kept large harems. See Ariyapala (1968 [1956]) and H.W. Tambiah (1963).

(putatively by a king, no less) and catered to the sensibilities of those versed in the norms of epic poetry (being replete with the obligatory *varṇanas* or descriptions of the royal city, seasons, battle, etc.) while eschewing many aspects of traditional “Buddhist” morality. It affirms instead the “morality of the court”: relish of physical beauty, sexual permissiveness and the necessary victory of imperial might – all of this while eliding the details of the Pāli *Jātaka* on which the poem is based, wherein Pabhāvati is portrayed as an unfortunate obstacle to Kusa’s (the Buddha’s) renunciation, and Kusa’s ugliness serves as a reminder of the futility of romantic endeavor.

The following section addresses the emergence of *Buddhabhakti* and the devotional expectations for the lay audiences of *baṇapot*. Texts advancing *bhakti* as a soteriological strategy contain an ethic and an aesthetic oriented towards non-elites, affirming the supremacy of the Buddha as “king” and requiring absolute submission to him.

***Bhakti* and aesthetic attitudes towards the Buddha**

As was addressed briefly in chapter three, the *baṇapot* tradition was temporally associated with (and itself propagated) the rise of a new religious sentiment among Sri Lankan Buddhists: devotionalism. The notion of performing rapturous “loving service” to a divine being as a means to religious emancipation (*bhakti-mārga* as a means to *mokṣa*) had a likely origin before the common era,¹³⁷ coming to ferment in the “*Bhakti* movement” beginning in South India in the 8th century CE.¹³⁸ Dhammapala speculates that *bhakti* religiosity, both in its Mahāyāna

¹³⁷ Rob Reed (1977) argues that sectarian devotionalism dates at least to the 4th century BCE, and that the notion of *bhakti-mārga*, along with other elements of the *Bhagavad Gīta*, were reactionary to the growing Buddhist movement in India around the beginning of the common era.

¹³⁸ G. Obeyesekere, 463

Buddhist and Vaiṣṇavite manifestations, gradually diffused from India to Sri Lanka in the latter part of the first millennium, having its influence accelerated with the Coḷa invasions of the island in the 9th, 10th, and 11th centuries.¹³⁹

Portions of the canonical Pāli scriptures were antagonistic to dogmatic theistic devotion, and explicitly discouraged reverence for the body of the Buddha himself. The *Vakkali Sutta* of the *Samyutta Nikāya* recalls the story of a Vakkali, a fatally ill monk whose dying regret was that he was unable for some time to see and pay homage to the Buddha in person. Having sent his attendants to request his visit, the Buddha rebukes Vakkali saying, “Why do you want to see this foul body? One who sees the Dhamma sees me; one who sees me sees the Dhamma.”¹⁴⁰

The *baṇapot* tradition, along with other Sinhala and Sanskrit texts of the medieval period in Sri Lanka, encouraged acts of devotional offering, the generation of strong emotions toward the Buddha, while portraying the Buddha in exalted physical form and as possessing a near god-like status. In many cases the texts sought to exact a transferral of devotional sentiment from Brahmanical “Hindu” deities to the Buddha himself by way of *Buddhabhakti*. Indeed the Buddha undergoes something of an apotheosis in the Sri Lankan literary tradition. Though the appellation “king of the Gods” is reserved for Śakra, the Buddha is presented as supreme over other deities and as receiving their reverence. The *Jinālaṅkāra*¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ See Dhammapala, 110-11

¹⁴⁰ *Samyutta Nikāya*, III. 87. Reverence for the physical body of the Buddha is however elsewhere in the canon recommended. The *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* gives an account of the Buddha advising Ananda on what is to be done after his death. He establishes that the body of a Tathāgata is to be treated like that of a universal monarch – it should be given special funerary procedures, cremated and its remains enshrined in a *stupa*. The Buddha claims that those who offer “garlands or incense or sandalpaste,” or who pay reverence to the *stupa* will experience well-being and happiness for a long time. (T.W. and C.A.F. Rhys Davids (2000 [1910]) vol. II, 155-6; *Dīgha Nikāya*, ii. 142)

¹⁴¹ A Sanskrit Sri Lankan Buddhist text dated by James Gray to the 4th or 5th century BCE. (Malalasekera, 18) Malalasekera claims that there is no historical evidence to confirm such great antiquity. (Ibid) The *Anuruddhaśataka*, the other surviving Sri Lankan Buddhist Sanskrit text espousing such devotionism, dates to approximately the 11th century CE.

describes the Buddha as able to “walk inside a mustard seed and over-shadow the universe by his own figure,”¹⁴² promising that,

One who is attached to the glorification of the Buddha and to his memory,
with beliefs in his Buddhahood, may overcome all sins and attain
Nibbāna.¹⁴³

The *Sasa Da Vata* envisions the subjugation of a number of important figures of the Indian pantheon:

Maha Brahma capable of illuminating
The entire world, just by raising a finger,
When in the presence of the Buddha
Was like a firefly before the Sun.

As Vishnu and Kuvera bowing down in worship
Before the Buddha were engulfed in the effulgence
Of rays emanating from [his] toe nails
Their wives looked at them in bewilderment.¹⁴⁴

In a passage suggesting that there was some contest between Buddhist and Brahmanical systems in Sri Lanka at the time, the *Saddharmaratnāvaliya* calls for strict devotion to the *tisarāṇa*, the “three refuges” of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha:

¹⁴² Dhammapala, 115

¹⁴³ Ibid, 116

¹⁴⁴ vv.180, 181

Without *bhakti* towards [Hindu] gods such as Viṣṇu-Maheśvara but having *bhakti* only in the three refuges, virtuous people should engage themselves in virtuous activities in order to realize *nirvāṇa*.¹⁴⁵

It warrants notice that the devotionalism embodied in these sources calls for absolute deference and submission. Viṣṇu and Kuvera are portrayed as unworthy of even the feet (traditionally the most inauspicious part of the body) of the Buddha as they were “engulfed in the effulgence of rays emanating from [his] toe nails.”

The *Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa* encourages ritualized worship of the Buddha and his relics principally by way of offerings (*pūjā*). Berkwitz explains the tacit reasoning behind the act: “venerating the Buddha is depicted as being highly efficacious since it confirms one’s dependency on him and entitles one to merit and the enjoyment of felicities in the future.”¹⁴⁶ Devotional attitude and the merit derived from devotional acts were seen as both soteriologically necessary and sufficient. According to the *Saddharmaratnāvaliya*,

Just as ants are unable to pierce a mountain of diamond, and “stream-winners” are unable to engage in *akuśala* which leads to hell, and the blind man is unable to go without his staff, so it is not possible for ordinary people of lesser intellect to understand the characteristics of existence (*lakṣaṇa*) through the medium of these characteristics, without having done any merit.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Deegalle (2006), 65

¹⁴⁶ Berkwitz (2004), 286

¹⁴⁷ *Saddharmaratnāvaliya*, 1:2; Hallisey (1988), 197

Devotion thus ensured the possibility of receptivity to the salvific force of the Buddha’s teaching (i.e., the “characteristics of existence”). Small acts of generosity were thought to produce great soteriological and material benefits themselves. *Butsaraṇa* assures the reader that poor women who had made small donations of food, cloth or flowers even on only one occasion to the Venerable One were assured the “prosperity of heaven and the good fortune of Nirvāṇa.”¹⁴⁸

The portrayal of devotion as at times necessary and at times sufficient for emancipation reveals tension in the *baṇapot* tradition involving the amount of exertion and expenditure – both in physical/material terms and by way of abstract reasoning – required on behalf of the devotee to exact their own emancipation. The contrast of passages such as that mentioned above from *Butsaraṇa* with those such as the one given above from the *Saddharmaratnāvalīya* and with stories such as that of the demoness Kālī (the recapitulation of the Jātaka story discussed by Hallisey and Hansen (see chapter 2) in the *Saddharmaratnāvalīya*) call into question (respectively) the amount of understanding of abstract doctrine and moral reflection required for individual emancipation. In the case of *Butsaraṇa*, Nirvāṇa seems to be the outcome of a rather mechanical, syllogistic process: ‘Give and thou shalt receive.’ Stories such as that of the demoness Kālī and others seem to promote intense moral reflection while affirming the importance of life experience for soteriological progress.

The story of Kāṇā given in the *Saddharmaratnāvalīya* illustrates the close relationship between acts of devotional generosity and material and soteriological fruits. Kāṇā, travelling home to her husband from her Mother’s house stops to offer the honey cakes she has brought (to give to her husband) to different monks whom she passes on four separate occasions. Her arrival is consequently delayed to such an extent that her husband takes another wife in the meantime. Blaming the monks for

¹⁴⁸ *Butsaraṇa*, §9

her loss, Kāṇā not only ceases her customary almsgiving but abuses any monk she sees to the point that they are afraid to approach her street altogether. The Buddha hears of this and meets Kāṇā at her mother’s home, subsequently prompting her to realize that the monks have not wronged her, and that she is not justified in so treating them. The Buddha then delivers a sermon to her, thus setting her on the Path as a *sōvān* (a *Sotāpanna* or “stream-enterer”), “having called forth devotion in her.”¹⁴⁹ The king of the land learns of the story and, seeing that though Kāṇā’s mind “was now adorned with the ornaments of a *sōvān* her body was unadorned,” grants her the rank of “eldest daughter,” declaring to the Buddha,

Your Reverence, you have given her the otherworldly blessings of Spiritual Attainments [*lovuturā sāpatin*], but I will give this person who is depressed because she has lost her material benefits, the blessings of the world too.¹⁵⁰

The king grants Kāṇā a palace with four entrances from which she can “invite in any monk or nun who happened to pass” in order to offer alms of their daily needs, or to give them an opportunity to preach. The story ends with a parable and injunction:

Just as the moon is first glimpsed with difficulty and after much effort, so engage [tirelessly] in Acts of Merit, acquire material wealth, and finally attain nirvāṇa.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ “*sādāe* [i.e., *śraddhā*] *āti karavā*” (Saddharmaratnāvaliya, 546)

¹⁵⁰ R. Obeyesekere (2001), 115; Saddharmaratnāvaliya, 545

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 116

The story affirms the importance of almsgiving and devotion without eliding the role of ethical reflection in soteriological progress. (Before the Buddha delivers his sermon to her, Kāṇā must acknowledge that the monks to whom she gave the oil cakes had not taken what was not given.) While this ethical reflection plays a decisive narrative role, the entire story revolves around Kāṇā's generosity and devotion: she loses her appreciation for the Sangha and perforce the Buddha's teaching when she abandons almsgiving. Her devotion is greatly intensified and her generosity resumes many-fold when her faith is restored (quite single-handedly) by the Buddha himself.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

The early Pāli Buddhist literary tradition contains thematic elements which seem to both presuppose and deny emotional realism. The prospect of a tacit “moral naturalism” in the Pāli Jātakas and other canonical literature (see the discussion of Heim (2003) in chapter two) concords with emotional realism in extending the uniformity of response to certain actions from the natural world to the human emotional world. If, however, we are to read these narratives as expressing a *prescriptive* rather than *descriptive* attitude towards human emotions, this would seemingly evince the exact opposite conclusion: it would appear that the texts *intended to condition* readers to respond a certain way to certain actions, rather than presupposing that they would (i.e., before readers had encountered such narratives).

While the question of the significance of “moral naturalism” vis-a-vis emotional realism remains ambiguous, the repeated mention of the Buddha’s sensitivity to the receptive capacities (i.e., their aptitudes for receiving instruction in abstract concepts, and their varying likely responses to given narrative events) appears *prima facie* to suggest against emotional realism (in that, if emotional responses to certain stimuli were uniform, this aspect of the Buddha’s teaching ability would not receive such highlight). We should not be hasty in concluding however that the recognition of varying levels of aesthetic receptivity is incommensurable with the possibility of a normative, “optimal” receptivity of the sort. The thought could be that while some are predisposed to comprehending the *Dhamma* through an assortment of didactic methods – from the direct to the allegorical – others lack such receptivity (in part, aesthetic/emotional receptivity), on account of both learning in one’s lifetime and, perhaps, one’s innate condition (the result of karma?). This would not discount the possibility of an *ideal* of emotional receptivity, supposing that optimally (for the

sake of comprehension of the *Dhamma*) we *should* each respond the same way to certain stimuli. The supposition in the canonical literature that there is a correct way of “seasoning” or “ornamenting” abstract doctrine to make them more palatable to the average person confirms to some degree a normative understanding of aesthetic responsiveness. (Recall from chapter two that it is claimed that the “True Law” (*saddhamma*) will be preserved when a monk is “in full possession” of a discourse, “with well put verses and flavorings (*sunikkhittehi pada-vyañjanehi*): for, [Oh monks], if verses and their flavorings are well put, the practical meaning is likewise easy to follow.”¹⁵²)

The literary traditions of medieval India and Sri Lanka evidence more conspicuously defined presuppositions regarding the innateness of aesthetic receptivity. Concordant in many respects with the attitudes of Gupta and post-Gupta continental court culture, medieval Sinhala Buddhist literature concatenates aesthetic sensitivity (both in appreciation and artistic production), moral authority, and the ability to politically govern as traits of ruling class persons. Elites – kings, associates of the court, the *satpuruṣas* – were distinguished from the illiterate and less cosmopolitan by the types of literary works directed to each, and by the expectations described of them in those works. Elites were presented as possessing both freedom from the strictures of lay morality and also immense responsibility for preserving the well-being of their polity. The expectation of the “average” man or woman was, generally speaking in the medieval Sinhala Buddhist context, devotion through pious veneration. Devotion was presented as soteriologically necessary and sufficient: one could not appreciate the meaning of the Buddha’s teaching without a devotional attitude, and small acts of devotion and generosity were sufficient for soteriological fruits. The ethics of *bhakti* literature thus appear quite simple: accepting the Buddha

¹⁵² *Anguttara Nikāya* II.141; Coomaraswamy (1939), 175

as the moral person *par excellence* and possessing gratitude for his long-ago dispensation makes one a moral person.

While this attitude may appear to represent a contraction in the sphere of subjective freedom of thought from early Pāli Buddhist (and Indian Sanskrit) literature, (wherein moral points are ascertained only after reflection on narratives in their gestalt), as the stories of the demoness Kālī and Kāṇā reveal, the *baṇapot* tradition affirms the importance of moral reflection for the soteriological progress of the characters of the story, and thus for the reader herself. The story of Kāṇā illustrates within a single narrative the importance of *both* devotional acts (in this case, that of pious generosity) and of moral reflection (realizing that the monks had not taken what was not given) in the acquisition of soteriological fruits (Kāṇā's entrance to the Path of the *sōvān*).

While this example is complex in its implications for the ethical matrix of *baṇapot* tradition, we cannot ignore the quite straightforward statements in texts such as *Butsaraṇa* which seem to advance a syllogistic formula for the attainment of Nirvāṇa. The repeated affirmation of the soteriological efficacy of mere devotional sentiment and action is one indication that literature promoting *Buddhabhakti* intends to emotionally condition the reader or hearer of the text (as Berkwitz argues to be the case with historiographical literature affirming dependence on the Buddha for present felicities and soteriological opportunities). In the case of this *bhakti* literature, “loving devotion” is to be evoked in the presence of the Buddha, either as literary character, icon or as some other representation.

Such blunt affirmation of a single figure's moral superiority (and its attendant “emotional conditioning”) may have served a practical purpose beyond the realm of the soteriological. The depiction of the Buddha as a moral exemplar and sovereign has structural parallels with affirmations of political allegiance. The ritual

manifestations of *bhakti* such as *pūja*, veneration of iconography of the Buddha (and his other physical representations – *stūpas*, bodhi trees, relics, etc.), and verse recitation are reminiscent of a pledge of allegiance to a nation or political figure. The homage of the Hindu deities to the Buddha in *Sasa Da Vata* (which is performed as the Buddha is seated on a throne, guarded by the four Vedic *Lokapalas*) carries obvious symbolic weight. There are also strong monarchical associations involved in the notion of *pūjā* as Berkwitz presents it – here offerings are akin to tithe paid affirming dependence on the king as one ‘confirms dependence on the Buddha.’

Indeed, we have seen the Buddha conflated with the king in incipient and occasional references in the earliest Pāli scriptures with the imagery becoming more pronounced and sophisticated in later Sri Lankan literature of both local (Sinhala) and trans-local/cosmopolitan (Sanskrit) languages, and in both the “devotional” and metropolitan literature (literatures composed for both popular and educated/court associated audiences). This conflation involves the legitimation of authority on two levels:

1. That of actual living kings, legitimating themselves through a variety of means. In the Pāli and Sinhala *vaṃsas* the right to rule of kings was presented as having been ordained in the distant past. Other sources associate king’s capacities for governance with those of the Buddha.
2. The legitimation of the Buddha himself (i.e., over figures representing competing theistic systems). The Buddha as teacher and orator par excellence validated him¹⁵³ as

¹⁵³ Or perhaps rather, his instruction (the *Dhamma*), since the Buddha was believed to have passed out of the world.

the governor of all men. (Indeed the Buddha as ‘tamer of men’ was an important theme of much medieval Sinhala literature, most notably the *Amāvatura*.)

Historically the legitimation of the king and Buddha may have gone hand in hand in a real struggle for political dominion in Sri Lanka. Hallisey (1988) explores the confluence of causes which motivated what he calls attempts at “vertical integration” of Buddhist society by the ruling class.

Prior to the 9th century, Buddhist literature in India and Sri Lanka was directed to its audience “horizontally” – it was composed by Buddhist monks for other Buddhist monks in a lingua franca (Pāli) shared (perhaps nearly exclusively) by their community. Though there are scattered references to exhortations for lay behavior in the Buddhist literature of this period, they are scant. The dichotomous relationship of regent and subject which figures so prominently in the Sri Lankan medieval period was also not to be found.

An increasingly feudal medieval India brought efforts by rulers, allied with religious institutions, towards the “vertical” social integration of their polities. “Imperial cults” were established in the 8th century with a Hindu deity being either conflated with the king or perceived as in some way licensing his reign.¹⁵⁴ Clergy thus were drawn into the sphere of political concern as legitimators of the ruling elite, encouraged to make the religious ideology of the “cult” accessible to subjects of the polity (i.e., “downwards” on the vertical scale of social hierarchy). The influence of this new strategy of political governance as well as an influx of competing religious systems invited efforts of similar “vertical integration” by medieval Sri Lankan rulers.

In addition to influence from the political climate of medieval India, the contraction of Buddhist influence on the sub-continent and invasions and raids by

¹⁵⁴ See Hallisey (1988), 187

“Hindu” peoples from South India contributed to a perceived need for self-preservation among Sinhala Buddhists. The Pāṇḍya, Pallava and Cōḷa dynasties came to power at various times in various locations in South India in the 5th and 6th centuries, each intent on eliminating Buddhist influence in the region. Their efforts, augmented by the Persian invasions of the late first millennium precipitated the collapse of Buddhist centers of learning on the sub-continent, meaning that “one supremely important religio-cultural link between South India and the Sinhalese kingdom was severed.”¹⁵⁵ De Silva speculates that during this period, Tamils in Sri Lanka became increasingly self-aware of their own ethnic, cultural and religious identities, and thus became sources of support for South Indian (Tamil) invaders.¹⁵⁶

Sri Lanka was increasingly exposed to “Hindu” theistic systems (both Vaiṣṇavism and particularly Śaivism) largely as a consequence of the Cōḷa invasions of the 9th – 11th centuries (the Cōḷas having secured rule of the northern portion of the island through the 10th and 11th centuries). With greater religious pluralism came greater exclusivity within the Sinhala Buddhist community. Buddhist monastics who depended upon lay patronage were forced to compete for resources with Śaivite monastics – these religious groups having been instrumental in effecting vertical social integration in medieval India.¹⁵⁷

Following the expulsion of the Cōḷas in 1070, Sinhala Buddhist kings attempted to restore the island-wide centralized authority which had been sustained for the millennium prior to the 9th century (the “Anurādhapura period”). These efforts, most successfully attempted by Vijayabāhu I (1055-1110), Parākramabāhu I (1153-86), and Niśsaṅka Malla (1187-96), involved the establishment of a more centralized bureaucracy than was in place during the Anurādhapura period, which had

¹⁵⁵ De Silva, 20

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 20-1

¹⁵⁷ Hallisey (1988), 192

permitted a substantial amount of sovereignty to local fiefdoms.¹⁵⁸ As in medieval India, the consolidation of political power in Sri Lanka was facilitated by the identification of the king with a figure already representing authority (albeit religious, not political authority), immanent in the minds of the populous.¹⁵⁹

There was then an incentive both for rulers and monastics to elevate the figure of the Buddha above competing religious icons. For kings this elevation was a means of legitimation of their rule for the reasons described above, and for monastics it meant greater security of material provisions. While formerly the reading and discussion of liturgy had been under the providence of monastics (and, as early *vaṃsa* references to preacher-kings indicate, also royalty), Buddhist literature for the first significant time was now addressed to lay people outside of the ruling class. Hallisey contends that, “Vertical integration of the Buddhist community in medieval Sri Lanka was in fact an attempt to make an elite religion “popular.””¹⁶⁰

Importantly, the means of legitimation to rule were presented as the same for both kings and the Buddha. Their moral authority is perpetually presented contiguously to their aptitude for aesthetic production. Participating in an extension of the same courtly and literary world as post-Gupta period India, medieval Sri Lanka seems to be interpretable with Ali’s paradigm regarding the association of these themes.

Pollock (1998) argues that knowledge of a trans-local language was symbolic of (though perhaps not actually effective in) license to rule over a diverse (and therefore expansive) populous.¹⁶¹ In portraying the Buddha as knowing all the languages of all

¹⁵⁸ See De Silva, 60-3

¹⁵⁹ For a detailed study of the identification of medieval Sri Lankan kings with the Buddha, see Holt (1991).

¹⁶⁰ Hallisey (1988), 201

¹⁶¹ A cosmopolitan language had to be one “capable of making translocal claims – however imaginary these were – that defined the political imagination of the world.” Pollock (1998), 13

the creatures of the world, *Butsarāṇa* makes the Buddha in a sense *the embodiment of cosmopolitanism*. As the fit South Asian king was to be versed in Sanskrit (and, in Sri Lanka, traditionally five other languages as well), so the Buddha as Lord of the World was to be knowledgeable of the language of each creature within his dominion. The image of the Buddha as cosmopolitan king then works to integrate both horizontally and vertically: possessing moral authority and the knowledge of the means to emancipation he is positioned to rule over the less knowledgeable, and knowing how to communicate with a vast array of beings, his license to rule extends “horizontally” over all the potential subjects of the world.

Given this context, we might envision that the affirmation of the aesthetic, moral and linguistic capacities of the elite (of which there are numerous contiguous references in the Sinhala literature and which, according to Ali, went hand in hand in medieval India) was a means of self-affirming political authority and license to govern. The transferability, albeit exclusive transferability, of the empowering command of language was symbolized in the royal regalia adorning the fictional kings of poetry and those real kings of Sri Lankan history. The impossibility of obtaining such aesthetic aptitude and of cultivating the “subjectivity” afforded to court associates precluded the engagement of non-elites with the power structure of the court and, a fortiori, their ability to be political rulers themselves.

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