Aspects of SINHALESE CULTURE

Martin Wickramasinghe

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in Sinhalese

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ASPECTS OF SINHALESE CULTURE

by

MARTIN WICKRAMASINGHE

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TO

SENARAT PARANAVITANE

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M. W.

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TO THE FIRST EDITION

I have been writing for nearly forty years: it had become an itch and an obsession As a cure or a palliative for this incurable disease I resorted to writing in English, a language not so familiar to me; nor can I ever hope to write it with the same ease and facility as my own. The drudgery involved in writing in such a language, I thought, would tire me out and compel me to give up the attempt. But it has resulted in the production of this book.

I had meant these sketches to be merely a symposium of idle thoughts. But, alas, I lacked the facile pen of a Chesterton to turn these thoughts into flippant and humorous essays abounding in bold but inaccurate generalizations. And the lack of that facility has given these essays a serious tone and a veneer of pedantry.

That he who wishes to say something on Sinhalese culture should be preoccupied in research work on Pali, Sanskrit and Prakrit texts has become the slogan of scholars who talk on Sinhalese culture. I must confess, that lacking in any kind of formal training at a great seat of organized learning, I acquired the bad habit of the omnivorous reader, of pouncing upon information from any reliable source without taking the least trouble to test the accuracy of such information by comparing them with the original Pali, Sanskrit or Prakrit texts, or even with the text of the celebrated dialect called 'Paisachi', which was identified by orthodox scholars as a language spoken by a species of Indian goblins who gobbled and digested sinners but threw out the pious alive as they could not digest them.

My imaginative and anthropological approach to cultural problems has been a source of great pleasure to me. The fear of being contradicted does not prevent me from expressing my thoughts with some precision. Professor A. M. Hocart, a former Archaeological Commissioner of Ceylon, in his preface to *Kingship* says: "In science, as in politics, finance

and war, who risks nothing achieves nothing..... A method which makes sense cannot be far off the track. For he who sets out in the right direction with only the stars to guide will reach his goal sooner than one who goes in the opposite direction equipped with the most perfect compass, sextant, and chronometer."

I have risked more than a little. To my mind my method makes sense, and it is scientific if the definition of science by the famous T. H. Huxley as "organized common sense" is to be accepted. "Scientific (and other) ideas may be said to come to men," says Abel J. Jones in his book *In Search of Truth*, "like a bolt from the blue after a period of study and contemplation. In so far these ideas may be said to come by immediate apprehension they can be regarded as intuitive. It would seem, then, that for the purpose of science ordinary scientific methods are not enough, science to make its forward jumps, observation and experiment need to be reinforced by intuitive thought."

I am indebted to the late Mr. U. G. P. de Mel for helping me with criticisms and suggestions in the preparation of these essays for printing, and to the late Mr. S. Sanmuganathan for supplying me paintings of two rare Ceylon masks.

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PREFACE

TO THE SECOND EDITION

I am indebted to the Publishing Department of the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd. for the help given me in the revision and preparation of this second edition.

M. W.

INTRODUCTION

Since we gained political independence, our national culture and its revival have become familiar topics of discourse. In the Sinhalese Press it has become an important subject for articles and discussions. Contributors have begun invariably to repeat the same ideas and themes on ancient Sinhalese literature, and the art of Ajanta or Sigiriya, with an unfailing monotony and without even a reference to the present state of the development of literature and art in Ceylon.

The changed atmosphere is stimulating most of us to talk about abstractions called culture, art, literature, nationalism and internationalism. This interest in abstractions makes us dislike or be indifferent to the concrete reality which in aggregation makes the abstraction possible.

The nationalist idealizes the nation but hates the present-day individual who with others of his ilk make up the nation. The internationalist loves humanity but not the human being.

Father Zossima in Dostoviesky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov* says : "It is just the same story as a doctor once told me. He was a man getting on in years, and undoubtedly clever. He spoke as frankly as you, though in jest. 'I love humanity,' he said, 'but I wonder at myself. The more I love humanity in general, the less I love man in particular.' 'In my dreams', he said, 'I have often come to making enthusiastic schemes for the service of humanity, and perhaps I might actually have faced crucifixion if it had been suddenly necessary; and

yet I am incapable of living in the same room with any one for two days together, as I know by experience. As soon as any one is near me, his personality disturbs my self-complacency and restricts my freedom. In twenty-four hours I begin to hate the best of men : one because he is too long over his dinner; another because he has a cold and keeps on blowing his nose. I become hostile to people the moment they come close to me. But it has always happened that the more I detest men individually, the more ardent becomes my love for humanity.' "

In the same way most of us love the abstraction called art, but are quite indifferent or hostile to our individual artists and their productions.

Intelligent readers who do not take much interest in abstractions begin to treat all these monotonous talks on art and literature lightly or as futile propaganda.

The people who join in this incessant talk hold different ideas on the meaning of the word "culture". To many the word means the "refinement", acquired by the appreciation of art, religion and literature. Those who take this subjective view can contribute little to a discussion which requires an objective analysis of culture.

Culture, as now used in anthropology is a technical term. Many people will refuse to admit the motor car, the electric bulb, the gun, the safety razor, the printing press, the fork and spoon, as cultural elements, or that they have anything to do with culture as they understand it. Even in the sense they attribute to it, they will have to admit such elements as cultural equipment that go, together with particular responses evoked by them. to

create culture. The older anthropologists treated the material aspects of culture as material culture, but the present-day ones call them cultural equipment

"Printed words themselves are material equipment used in association with behaviour," say Gillin and Gillin in their *Cultural Sociology*. Verbal language is a kind of behaviour. What is called "refinement" is also a form of behaviour. Without material equipment no person can acquire any kind of learned behaviour, which is called culture.

According to anthropologists, even breathing is a form of inherited behaviour. Hence it is an inherited trait of culture. But the Buddhist monk who practices contemplation will have to acquire the particular pattern of breathing according to the instructions laid down in the Buddhist system of psychology, and his breathing then becomes learned behaviour or culture. The Buddhist system, whether printed or oral, is the material which act as a stimulus to evoke that particular behaviour-pattern.

Since we gained independence there has undoubtedly been a cultural recrudescence. I call it recrudescence; because the revival is confined mostly to the spread of material elements of Western culture which can at first evoke but crude responses from the majority of the people of Ceylon. The spread of material elements of Western culture with an accelerated speed is, in fact, due to the economic improvement of the people as a result of political freedom and the last war.

Canned food, the motor car, European dress, and English education are becoming far more

popular in Ceylon than was ever thought possible a few years back. The electric bulb is used even in rural areas because of the power supply provided by urban and town councils. Night clubs and ball-room dancing were confined in the days of the colonial government to Europeans and a small coterie of men and women of the upper classes. Now they are common among the middle-class also.

The increased popularity of this particular aspect of Western culture is due to the war, but its spread, in spite of the hopes of our politicians, is due to our regaining independence.

The spread of material elements of Western culture and the responses to them on the part of the people are inevitable. Economic improvement, the shedding of an inferiority complex, and a feeling of release that came naturally in getting rid of the direct authority of the foreigner are some of the causes of this cultural recrudescence.

If it goes hand-in-hand with education, intelligence, discipline and self-control, which help to modify, assimilate, and make the new cultural elements homogeneous or, at least, homologous parts of our own culture, it can be treated as cultural development or national evolution. But, unfortunately, there is hardly any such correlation. No sensible attempt has been made by the educated sector to make such a correlation possible. One direct attempt made by nationalists is their appeal to religion or tradition. Religion and tradition are parts of culture, but in themselves obstacles rather than aids to rational adjustment in a fast-changing environment. Nevertheless, this appeal to religion and tradition serves a useful purpose by making the people conscious of their individuality and tradition and by inducing them to provide

a mechanism of adjustment to avoid the disintegration of their own culture and consequent demoralization of the people who inherit that culture.

Education is the greatest indirect contribution of the Government towards cultural revival. The Government is spending a vast sum of money, which no colonial government would ever have spent on education. But still the system of education has not been completely purged of its defects and tendencies inherited from the previous regime. The introduction of a bilingual education is one of the best attempts made to adjust the system to an independent Ceylon. But it is still being put into operation in a half-hearted and evasive way.

Dr. Margaret Mead says: "When we look about us among different civilizations and observe the vastly different styles of life to which the individual has been made to conform, to the development of which he has been made to contribute, we take new hope for humanity and its potentialities. But these potentialities are passive not active, helpless without a cultural milieu in which to grow. . . . . .

"No child is equipped to create the necessary bridge between a perfectly alien point of view and his society. Such bridges can only be built slowly, patiently, by the exceptionally gifted. The cultivation in children of traits, attitudes, habits foreign to their cultures, is not the way to make over the world."

Our intelligent children are forced by education to cultivate traits, attitudes and habits foreign to them. But the adults, not excluding the highly sophisticated, wish them to conform to traditional or conventional habits and attitudes. The adults

themselves have no great regard for traditional habits and attitudes except when they resort to them as political expedients.

The English-educated adults of the present generation are ignorant of their own language and tradition. The younger generation is more intelligent, have a somewhat better critical knowledge at least of their tradition, and are showing an interest in creating a cultural milieu by a fusion of heterogeneous elements. But the personal ambition and the narrow selfish interests of the educated adults are driving the younger generation to the wilderness and to anarchy.

As Herbert Read says: "It is dangerous for a society to be too conscious of art." Direct intervention of the Government or the too conscious talk of culture by social groups will not create a cultural revival. They will only help to promote and popularize a shoddy and cheap form of hybrid culture and make a Harlem of Ceylon.

In the sketches that follow I have attempted to discuss certain aspects of Sinhalese culture and the process by which they have changed and are changing under the influence of other civilizations.

1 SINHALESE CULTURE : IS IT A REPLICA ?

There is a notion that Sinhalese culture is a replica of that of India, and English writers not infrequently refer to the Sinhalese as Indians. Even when European orientalists refer to ancient Java or Ceylon, they say that their sculpture and painting have been borrowed from India. That these countries have an ethnological affinity is correct, but it would be inaccurate to say that Indian culture is dominant in these countries. Borrowing is not copying, and the early influence on the plastic arts of Java and Ceylon is Buddhistic. As Buddhism and the culture that originated and developed with it disappeared a long time ago from India, it is important that this distinction should not be ignored. Buddhist culture had affinity to Vedic culture of an early epoch, but little to that of the later synthetic Hinduism. Because of their racial and geographical identity with Hindus, Buddhists especially the Andhras of South India and the Sinhalese have failed to gain any credit for their own distinctive culture, especially in its impress on their sculpture. The Buddhists of Andhra were later converted to Hinduism, and their early culture, developed under the influence of Buddhism, disappeared. The Sinhalese, however, have been able to retain their cultural independence in spite of the infiltration of popular Hinduism and its culture. The insular position of the Sinhalese, and their religion, must have been responsible for preserving their cultural independence. Therefore, in an account of Sinhalese culture the distinction between the ethnological and cultural aspects cannot be over-emphasized.

There are critics who say that the Sinhalese have no independent and original art and literature; only that which was borrowed from India. Those who meekly accept this taunt are not keen and discriminating students of our past. They may see around them Buddhists who are themselves devotees of Puranic Hindu gods, but this is no evidence of a copyist culture. In architecture, sculpture and painting they recognize their Indian origin, but ignore the peculiar development these arts underwent in Buddhist Ceylon. In our old literature, they see the imitation of Sanskrit models, and therefore imagine that the only literary activities of our writers were copying from Sanskrit models. They even justify it as a legitimate occupation, quoting in support from later Sanskrit writers, who themselves imitated earlier ones. But the fact is that these Sanskrit writers might justify themselves, for they were imitating the works of earlier writers, who were undeniable geniuses. Their imitation of their predecessors does not justify imitation of predecessors everywhere and indiscriminately.

There are some nationalists who, having accepted the point of view that our culture is a copyist one, think it is derogatory to us. For they hope by insisting on this point to preserve the indigenous culture from indiscriminate Westernization to which they fear, it is exposed on all sides. Others, however, more daring and independent, wish to overcome the stigma of such an account of our culture, by inventing for the Sinhalese, hypothetical ancestors who lived nearly 20,000 years ago and founded one of the greatest civilizations. They base their invented history on the story of a king who lived in a mythical city called Lanka. This story has been related in the great Indian epic *Ramayana*, which

symbolized good in Rama, the hero, and evil in the demon king, Ravana, the villain. According to the students of mythology, the origin of the Indian epic must have been an agricultural myth.

Those who attempted to prove the originality and greatness of their culture with the help of a myth, elaborated by the great Indian poet Valmiki and later rewritten by Jainas to attack Brahminism, argue that Ravana was the great king of Lanka who subjugated the Aryans of India. Some of these enthusiasts, making what they call researches into the legends of India and Ceylon to supply corroborative evidence for the above discovery, have ridiculed the opposing views of Dr. Paranavitane and other archaeologists. They have gone to the extent of claiming that even the Greeks borrowed words and cultural elements from the Sinhalese.

Without resorting to esoteric knowledge, it is possible, with the help of the prosaic science of cultural anthropology alone, to assert the independence and originality of Sinhalese culture. According to students of cultural anthropology, there is no advanced culture in the world which did not borrow from every available source. This would explain the static or stagnant nature of the culture of the Veddas of Ceylon.

Originality in cultural invention is nothing but the change, partial or complete, of a borrowed element in readaptation. The cause for the change may be man, or environment, or both. Creation or invention does not mean making something out of nothing. An idea or a material thing has a history. This history of the idea or the thing becomes the borrowed element in the new creation or the invention. The adage, "there is nothing new under the sun" is true but it is not always true. To be

completely true, it ought to be as follows: "There is nothing new under the sun, but many things become new as a more or less perpetual change is taking place."

"Every invention is a partial borrowing," says Professor Malinowski. The borrowers modify and reinterpret what they have taken over. They also readjust and modify their own heritage in the process. "No culture is a simple copy of any other," says Malinowski, "no historian of present-day European culture would dare to assign it to any one original source. He knows perfectly well that we have borrowed from everywhere, from ancient Greece as well as China and Japan, from India and aboriginal America, and that out of the mixture we have evolved an entirely independent and homogeneous culture."

The Sinhalese borrowed many cultural elements from India; but the borrowed elements changed in the process of readaptation. I will give some instances from Sinhalese folk culture of borrowed elements having undergone changes in readaptation. Buddhists at a very late stage in their history borrowed the Vishnu image from India, and it found a shrine in their temple. But they do not worship the new god or offer flowers to him. They merely ask favours and make offering of tokens, or bribes. Vishnu is an immortal god of the Hindus. But the Buddhists made him a mortal god by readaptation. To make an immortal god mortal, requires, I believe, originality as daring as that required for creating an immortal god for a pantheon, if not more so. Again Buddhists offer metal figures of the peacock, bull and other animals to the powerful god of Kataragama. The offering of these metal figures is, perhaps, a substitute for animal sacrifice. This

substitution of a metal figure for a live animal is a creative invention of the Sinhalese, showing the plasticity of their mind, and their realistic and practical attitude to life. Animal sacrifice is prohibited by their religion. And it is more economical for them to offer a metal figure than a live animal. Besides, the substitute relieves them of the need for carting a live animal to a distant place.

Another instance of cultural adaptation by the Sinhalese is in regard to magical rites borrowed from India or other sources. At the exorcizing ceremony, instead of sacrificing the fowl, the Sinhalese exorcist punctures its comb and offers to the particular devil a drop of blood. C. E. Thurstan, writing on the customs of South India, says: "The Malabar exorcist, dressed appropriately, sucks the blood from the neck of a decapitated fowl."

These examples suffice to show the inventive originality of the poorly educated Sinhalese in readapting the elements of folk culture from India or from other sources, without doing violence to the tenets of Buddhism and placing them within the framework of their Buddhist background.

I am aware that Westernized Sinhalese and many sophisticated nationalists treat their folk culture with contempt, and are ashamed to admit it as a part of their greater culture. It is true that in our highly sophisticated urban culture many folk elements are meaningless and silly survivals. But most of them are still functional elements in our rural culture, and contribute to its stability and solidarity. Professor Goldenweiser says: "Primitive culture is compact. We know how restricted are its geographical and historical horizons. Though notorious for its limitations, localism has its compensating virtues. Living in familiar surroundings, dealing

with familiar things, seeing familiar faces, may not be conducive to intellectual breadth or adventurousness of spirit, but attitudes are genuine, convictions strong, knowledge is solid. Reading of the 'far away' in newspapers and of the 'long ago' in books may lend the average modern a certain veneer of sophistication. The spread is wide, but the substance is thin, the resulting knowledge little more than presumption and affectation. There is little sham in primitive culture. What it means it means, and the primitive is very much of one piece with it."

The popular notion that the ancient Sinhalese borrowed their culture from Hindu India is not strictly correct. They borrowed cultural elements mostly from Buddhist India which now does not exist. There is very little evidence that painting and sculpture had been adapted for religious needs by Rig-Vedic Aryans. Such an adaptation, as far as we know, was after Buddhism. The Buddha image was first made in India by Buddhists. It was perfected probably by the Buddhist artists of Central India, and Ceylon borrowed it and in course of time developed it further.

Eric Newton in his *European Painting and Sculpture* says: "Behind every Western carving of a human figure is the implication of a human portrait; behind every oriental statue is the implication of a mood. The idea of serenity has never been quite so intensely caught and held by any European sculptor as it has by countless of the cross-legged Buddhas of Ceylon."

The degree of serenity of every cross-legged Buddha figure is not the same. The perfection of this mood in a Buddha figure was, I believe, achieved by the Ceylon sculptor. Ananda Coomaraswamy

in his *Dance of Siva* says: "This figure of the seated Buddha yogi, with a far deeper content, is as purely monumental art as that of the Egyptian pyramids; and since it represents the greatest ideal which Indian sculpture ever attempted to express, it is well that we find preserved even a few magnificent examples of comparatively early date. Amongst these the colossal figure at Anuradhapura is certainly the best."

The ancient artists had to work within fixed conventions to express their individuality and creative genius. The conventions were conditioned by the nature of the medium and the use to which it was put. In the case of the plastic medium of sculpture, when used for religious interpretation, certain conventions arose. The sculptor of Ceylon made use of these conventions. Therefore the sculpture of Ceylon represents the phases and external features of sculpture in India.

For example, in the opinion of Professor Hocart, the most remarkable achievement of the Sinhalese is the tank and the irrigation system. Yet the tank is not technically an original device. It is by readapting it for agriculture that the Sinhalese asserted their own genius and originality.

Only unprogressive nations, to hide the sterility of their souls, seek indigenous or supernatural origins for their institutions and culture. Progressive nations borrow cultural elements from everywhere and assert their virile genius in remoulding and re-creating them.

2 THE PATTERN OF SINHALESE CULTURE

Ruth Benedict, in *Patterns of Culture*, which was a best seller in America, describes and analyses three cultures as examples in support of her hypothesis of the configuration of culture. By the term "configuration" she means the genius of the culture.

A culture is built up of elements and traits. But these elements and traits undergo integration which gives significance to a particular culture as a whole. Different traits influence the individuals of a society which is the heir of the culture. At the same time the total pattern of the configuration of that culture also exerts an influence over the individual in shaping his behaviour. "The whole," says Ruth Benedict, "as modern science is insisting in many fields, is not merely the sum of all its parts, but the result of a unique arrangement and interrelation of the parts that has brought about a new entity."

E. Adamson Hoebel in his *Man in the Primitive World*, explaining the configurational hypothesis, says the bricks that go to make a fireplace, a cesspool or a garden wall are similar. But the arrangement and the interrelation of bricks in each of them are different. As a result of the arrangement and relational differences three constructional entities, different in shape and function, arise.

The elements of two well-integrated cultures may be similar, but differ in their total pattern or genius. Applying this configurational hypothesis, Ruth Benedict defines the culture of the Pueblos of

New Mexico as Apollonian, and those of the North-West coast of America and Dobu as Dionysian. The characteristics of Apollonian culture are these : it is a culture that stresses restraint and orderliness in behaviour ; avoidance of emotional excess and display in personal experience and ritual, rigorous suppression of individual initiative and innovation, with quiet co-operation in group endeavour. Those who are under the influence of the Apollonian ideal emphasize the middle-path way of life that avoids all extremes of sense-behaviour. The Apollonian ideal tends to distrust and suppress individualism as a disruptive unbalancing force. Economic wealth is of little cultural interest to those whose behaviour patterns have been moulded by the Apollonian ideal. Food is important, but they are not obsessed with its worth.

Some of the characteristics of Dionysian culture, as enumerated by Ruth Benedict, are: Those who are under the Dionysian ideal value all violent experiences, all means by which human beings may break through the usual sensory routine, and to all such experiences they attribute the highest ideal value. They seek vision by hideous tortures. They go without food and water for extreme periods. They seek in every way to achieve an order of experience set apart from daily living. The vision-experience is sought openly by means of drugs and alcohol.

Among the Indian tribes of Mexico, whose culture is defined as Dionysian, the fermented juice of the fruit of the giant cactus was used ceremonially to obtain the blessed state which was to them supremely religious. The priest drank first, and then all the people, "to get religious". Intoxication, in their practice and in their poetry, is a

synonym of religion. Self-torture is specialized as a technique for obtaining states of self-oblivion during which one obtained a vision. Marriage and death are occasions for elaborate rituals and extravagance.

Anthropologists who criticize the configurational method point out its defects. One of them is that it tended to ignore certain traits and exaggerate others of a given culture in classifying it as Apollonian or Dionysian. But the critics admit the usefulness of the method for deeper understanding of human behaviour. Hoebel in his *Man in the Primitive World* says: "The configurational analysis of culture, pioneered by Benedict and Mead, is stimulating the development of a deeper understanding of human behaviour. Benedict's recent analysis of Japanese culture and national character shows the benefit of more careful use of a more fully developed technique."

My intention in giving the above précis of Ruth Benedict's method of study of culture is to make an attempt to explain the attitude of the village voters in regard to current political ideologies.

Sinhalese culture in the villages, in spite of all variations and mutations under Western influence, still survives as an integrated whole. It is Apollonian in its pattern: all extreme forms of behaviour are excluded from Sinhalese culture. Birth and marriage ceremonies are very few and simple and free from ritual and extravagance. Their funeral rites are the most simple. They have no customs to encourage the individual or the family to excess and violence in grief, and elaborate rituals for the dead. The middle path is their way of life. Seeking vision by self-torture or by means of drugs, alcohol, sex mysticism, and witch-hunting, and

other forms of excesses have been shunned by the Sinhalese villagers as the lowest forms of vices. Most of these, however, are integrated elements of Hindu culture, because Hindu religion embraces the highest and noblest forms of mysticism with the extreme forms of self-torture, blood sacrifice and sensual indulgence by which the individual is encouraged to seek the vision of reality. A Tantric text says: "Without the help of spirituous liquor, vision of reality is impossible."

Hindu culture is Dionysian with a mixture of Apollonian elements. Its Dionysian pattern encourages excesses and the assertion of individuality. Sinhalese culture is purely Apollonian with its suppression of individuality and its emphasis on traditional behaviour patterns. The development of Dionysian elements in Hindu culture can be seen in the sculpture of later Hindu Temples depicting erotic scenes which have been characterized by many modern Indians as obscene.

The display of personal vanity in dress, wealth, marriage and death are borrowed behaviour-patterns which were not encouraged by the old Sinhalese culture which was influenced by an agricultural economy.

If we accept the pattern of Sinhalese culture as Apollonian, we can understand the motivation and behaviour of the Sinhalese villagers in regard to current politics.

Revolutionary political ideas and ideals and violent means to attain them are not only new to the villagers, but are opposed to the pattern of their culture. Their hostile reaction to extreme political ideas and ideals is not due to their religion but to the pattern or genius of their culture which

encourages them to reject all extreme forms of behaviour.

Under the influence of industrialization, political ideologies and Western art and literature, the culture of the urban Sinhalese population has changed. It is gradually adapting the Dionysian elements of modern Western civilization. The assertion of individuality in its extreme form is encouraged by capitalism, modern European art and literature, and violent experience and religious fervour in politics by Communism. The urban Sinhalese culture is still in the process of change, adapting and reintegrating these new elements. But the culture of the villagers, though gradually changing, still refuses to admit Dionysian elements, because they are opposed to its configuration.

3 DIGGING UP OUR PAST

The mummified remains of the dead in Egypt have been the greatest source of archaeological treasures that have attracted the attention of the world. Archaeologists, with the help of these materials, have reconstructed a vivid account of the people of ancient Egypt. The whole history of Egypt has been recovered by archaeological work, and in astonishing detail. "I suppose," says Sir Leonard Woolley in one of his B. B. C. talks, "we know more about ordinary life in Egypt in the fourteenth century before Christ than we do about that of England in the fourteenth century A. D."

The early Aryans of India buried the dead with their articles of every-day use; and probably with their wives buried too, to accompany their husbands to the next world. But that later Aryans evidently knew no burial and such rites is shown by a contemptuous reference to them in one of the *Upanishads*. *Chandogya Upanishad*, one of the oldest, refers to the funeral customs of the Asuras, who were probably a non-Aryan race of India, in the following words:

"Their dead are besmeared with aromatics and adorned with ornaments and costly raiment, and they think that thereby they will win yonder world."

There were very few mysterious rites for the dead among the people of India and Ceylon in the historical period. They held austere and rational beliefs about the dead, and the bodies of kings and priests were cremated with simple rites. Their

tombs gave to the archaeologists, caskets containing only the ashes of the dead and a few trinkets of plaques.

The archaeological finds of India and Ceylon did not attract the attention of the world as those of Egypt. Their work is known only to students of history and art, and to ethnologists. But the life of the people of ancient India and its history have been completely reconstructed with the help of archaeological materials. The Indians have no written authentic history except legends narrated in *Puranas* or epic poems. The Sinhalese have a comparatively accurate history of Buddhism and the lives of the kings written in the sixth century. The earlier part of the *Mahavansa* is legendary, but the latter part is accurate history. The Ceylon archaeologists have excavated and conserved a vast amount of valuable material which would supply to the diligent student a fund of information for reconstructing the life of the ancient Sinhalese and producing a history of their culture. But we have still only two or three short histories of ancient Ceylon written for secondary schools.

After Bell and Hocart, the greatest contribution to archaeology and the ancient culture of Ceylon has been by Dr. Paranavitane. But the valuable materials discovered by him and his predecessors are lying either in the ruined cities to be worshipped by pious Buddhists, or in museums as curiosities, but otherwise ignored.

The discovery of a few Buddha figures made of metal, and gold ornaments by a religious society in the course of restoration work at the Ruvanvelisaya attracted the attention of the Buddhists all over Ceylon because of its religious significance and the impetus it gave to political propaganda.

Dr. Paranavitane has been excavating and conserving very important and significant ancient monuments, but they have received little attention. Of course their importance for any reconstruction of the history of the Sinhalese people cannot be grasped by the average man. But the educated, who talk so much of culture and its renaissance, should show greater interest in them than they have shown hitherto.

Dr. Paranavitane's deep knowledge of Sanskrit and Sinhalese literature, Buddhism and Buddhist culture has enabled him to show greater insight and imagination in digging up our past than some of his predecessors. His monumental work *Sigiri Graffiti*, will undoubtedly place him in the ranks of the greatest of critical scholars Ceylon has known. His restoration and conservation of the Royal Pleasure Garden at Anuradhapura and the excavating of a massive stone structure—the remains of a shrine — at the feet of the colossal Buddha figure at Avkana are evidence of his imagination and foresight.

The baths and chambers, the canals and the sluice from which water was supplied to the baths of the Royal Park have been restored, and the imaginative reconstruction of the park is being extended to the planting of all varieties of trees mentioned by the ancient poets in describing such parks, and enumerated in detail in ancient Indian works on horticulture.

The stone masonry of the baths is of finished workmanship and the chambers facing the baths have been cut out of rock and then constructed with stone masonry into architectural shape and symmetry. One side of the park is studded with huge boulders on which still remains evidence of

pavilions that have stood on them. On the other side of the boulders are the remnants of oblong lakes which are now being reconstructed (plates XX, XXI).

Dr. Paranavitane in an article in the R. A. S. C. Journal says: "The two baths and the chamber form together a well-balanced architectural group. The keynote of the whole composition is its simplicity, characteristic of Sinhalese architecture at its best. Ornamentation is reduced to the minimum and is nowhere applied inappropriately; the proportions of the various parts of each structure and of the different structures in relation to one another are harmonious. The lines are perfect and the stone work exhibits the finish and a technical excellence of high order."

One chamber in front of another bath has an exposed rock surface on either side. Each rock surface is adorned with a very appropriate bas-relief representing a group of elephants sporting in a lotus pool. "This bas-relief has to be counted among the best productions of the plastic art of the ancient Sinhalese," says Dr. Paranavitane (fig. 1, 2).

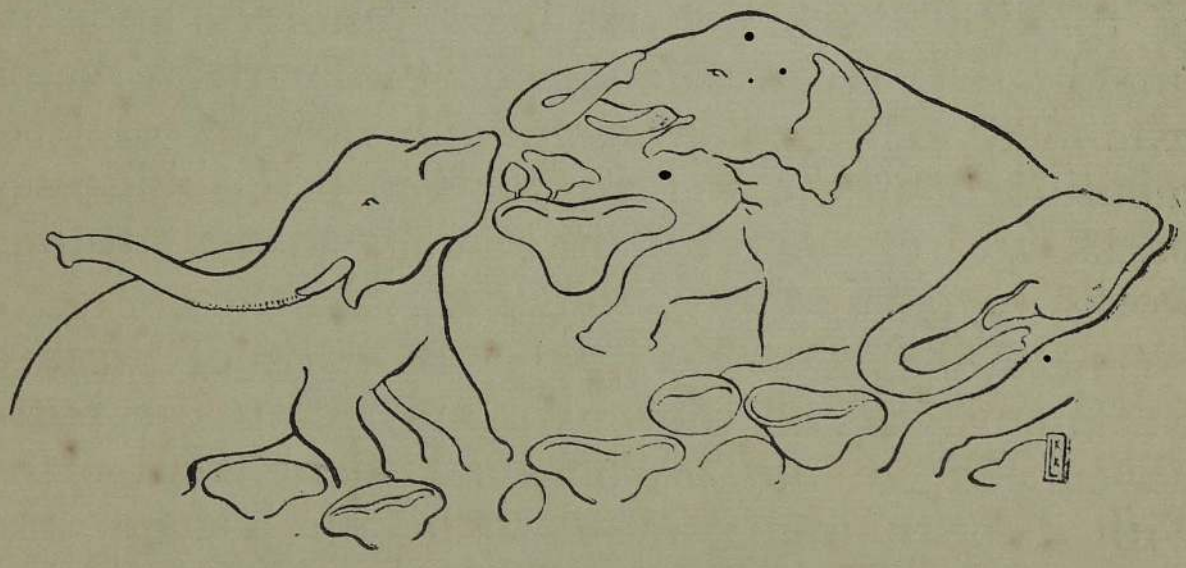

Fig. 1. Bas-relief: Sporting Elephants

Dr. Paranavitane, relying on the reference in a Sinhalese inscription to *Ran-masu Uyana* which literally means 'Goldfish Park', conjectures that there was a tank of goldfish in the above park. On the top of one of the boulders there is a circular basin to hold water. He suggests that this rock-cut basin must have been the receptacle for the goldfish from which the park received its name. He gives at the end of his article a note supplied by the Director of the Colombo Museum in which he identifies *ran-masu* as the imported Chinese goldfish. The note says: "The view expressed by Dr. P. E. Pieris that *Ran-Masu*, which means goldfish, refers to imported Chinese goldfish is very probable as there is no indigenous fresh-water species either with such a name or with any approach to such a colour, although, as suggested by him, the *Bulath Sapaya* (*Puntius Negro Fasciatus*) which has three black blotches, and fins, is sometimes suffused with crimson on the sides."

The inscription that refers to the Goldfish Park is of the tenth century, and the park must have been in existence much earlier. But the domestication and the breeding of goldfish seem to have originated in China much later than the tenth century.

Professor E. W. MacBride in his *Introduction to the Study of Heredity* (Home University Library) refers, in support of Lamarckism or the theory of inheritance of acquired characters, to the study of goldfish by a German zoologist. In the course of the discussion MacBride says: "All the domesticated races of this fish (*Carassius Auratus*) come from China ; for although some have been imported from Japan, the Japanese themselves admit that they have derived all their goldfish from China. According to Chinese records, the goldfish was

discovered in 1,200 by which is obviously meant that it was then that the characteristic 'gold'

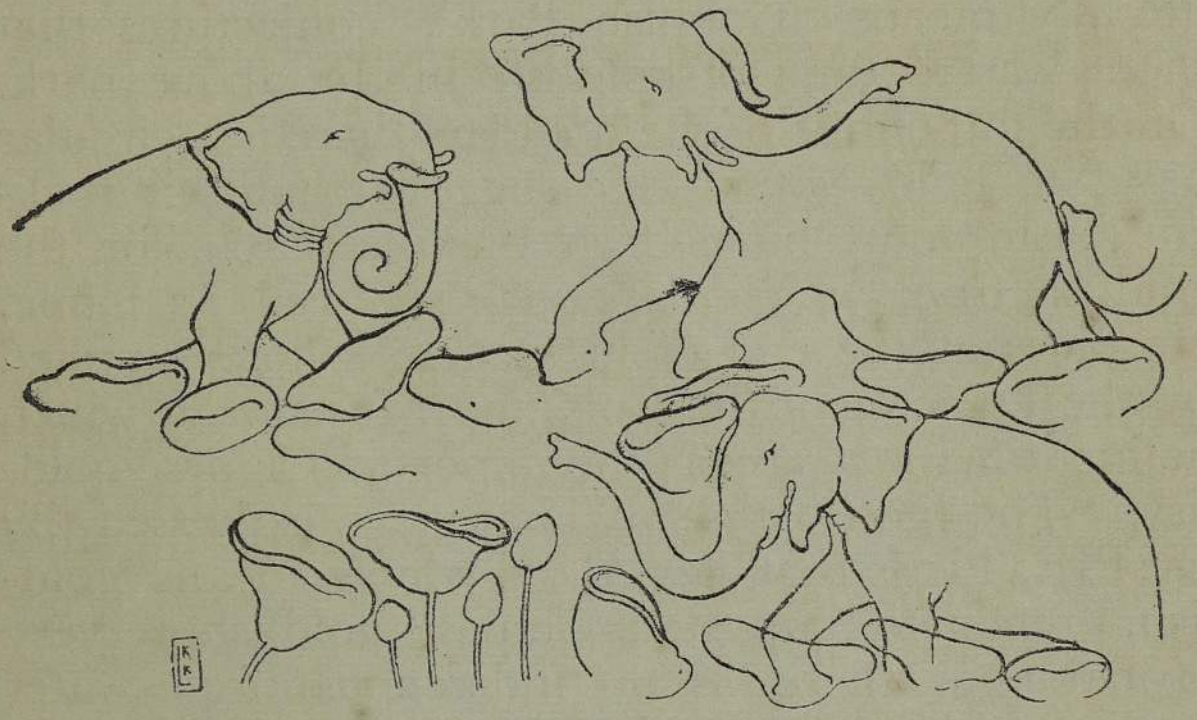

Fig. 2 Bas-relief: Sporting Elephants

colour turned up amongst the specimens of wild grey Carassius that were being kept in tanks."

If Professor MacBride is right, goldfish could not have been bred in China before the end of the twelfth century.

4 PRIMITIVE ELEMENTS IN FOLK CULTURE

In any advanced culture there are not many elements which could be definitely said to have been independently invented by the community which developed that particular culture. Not only the cultures but communities have migrated, and it is not possible to trace to its remote origin the history of a given people and their culture.

The Sinhalese are descendants of people who migrated from India. Aryans and Dravidians are migrants to India. All the existing races have been interbreeding from a remote antiquity. There are social, religious and geographical restrictions to interbreeding, but very few to limit the diffusion and mingling of cultures. Geographical conditions may have been limitations in the diffusion of cultural elements in the past, but not after the invention of the steamship.

Yet some of our nationalists resent the assertion that Sinhalese culture is made up of and developed from elements borrowed and readapted. The readaptation of foreign elements is a sign of the originality and the virility of a given culture rather than a weakness. In this process of readaptation certain elements get absorbed and others exist as externals which disappear in course of time. There are many such elements in Sinhalese culture.

I wish to call attention to some of them that seem to have migrated from the Pacific Islands, or some other primitive source.

There is a Sinhalese folk tale called *Naga maroo ala* or "The yam that killed the sister". (The Daffodil Orchid—*Ipsea speciosa*) We have many different and contradictory versions of this story, which fact in itself is evidence of the migration of the tale from some other country:

There were a prince and a princess who were brother and sister. They started on a long journey, and when they were passing through a forest they felt tired. They sat on the ground, and the prince stuck his sword in the earth. Later, with the tip of his sword, he took a bit of chunam from his chunam-box and gave the ingredient to his sister for her chew of betel.

After the chew, she developed an infatuation for her brother, and began to make advances. Alarmed at the heinous offence and finding it difficult to escape from the temptation, the prince killed his sister.

The infatuation of his sister was caused by the property of an underground yam, with which the tip of his sword had come in contact when it was stuck in the ground.

This is the gist of the *Story of the yam that killed the sister*. Certain Sinhalese physicians use this tuberous root for preparing an aphrodisiac. They say that the root is always found as a yam of double halves.

A comparison of the above story with an elaborate myth of Tobriand Islanders given by Malinowski, and the love magic associated with it will make it clear that the Sinhalese tale can only be a second-hand version of another story which may have been the original.

Malinowski has related this story in three of his books. He refers to it briefly in his *Myth in Psycho-*

logy, and gives an abridged version of it in his *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*. A full translation of it with original text is given in *The Sexual Life of Savages*. As the latter is very lengthy, I am reproducing the abridged version from *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*:

There lived in the village of Kumilabwaga a woman of the Malasi clan, who had a son and a daughter. One day while the mother was cutting out her fibre petticoat, the son made a magic potion with herbs. This he did to gain the love of a certain woman. He put some of the pungent *kwayavaga* leaves (mint) into clear coconut oil and boiled the mixture, reciting the spell over it. Then he poured it into a receptacle made of toughened banana leaves and placed it in the thatch. He then went to the sea to bathe.

His sister in the meantime had made ready to go to the water. As she passed under the spot where the magic oil had been placed, she brushed against the receptacle with her hair, and some of the oil dropped down over her. She brushed it off with her fingers, and then sniffed it.

When she returned with the water, she asked her mother: "Where is the man, where is my brother?" This according to native moral ideas was a dreadful thing to do, for no girl should inquire about her brother, nor should she speak of him as a "man."

The sister ran after her brother. She found him on the beach where he was bathing. She loosened her fibre-skirt and tried to approach him. Horrified, the man ran away along the beach, till he was barred by a precipitous rock. He turned and ran back to another rock which stands up, steep and inaccessible, at the southern end.

Thus they ran three times along the beach under the shade of the big overhanging trees, till the man, exhausted and overcome, allowed his sister to catch hold of him, and the two fell down, embracing one another in the caressing waves of the shallow water.

Then, ashamed and remorseful, but with the fire of their love not quenched, they went to the grotto of Bokaraywata where they remained without food, without drink, and without sleep.

There they died, clasped in each other's arms, and through their linked bodies there grew the sweet-smelling plant of the native mint *sulumwoya*.

The Sinhalese folk tale, though vague and incomplete, has some relation to the Tobriand Islanders' story. The Sinhalese story emphasizes the power of a drug; the savage story the power of magic. There is no incest in the Sinhalese story. According to the savage myth, the creeper which grew out of the bodies of the two lovers acquired magical properties. The Ceylon story does not explain the origin of the creeper, but the yam with two halves connects it with the primitive myth.

Malinowski says that, in spite of taboos, brother-and-sister incest was not rare amongst the islanders, who have a social system in which the above myth could have originated. The Sinhalese folk tale, devoid of supernatural elements, reads like a recent intelligent adaptation of the original myth to emphasize the aphrodisiac properties of the local plant.

There are other elements in Sinhalese culture, which suggest a direct or indirect connection with the Pacific Islands. When uttering some charms, the Sinhalese exorcist addresses the devils with the relationship terms for father, uncle and brother-in-law. Why should the Sinhalese exorcist address devils in this manner? The devils of the Sinhalese are a species of supernatural beings far removed from human beings.

Professor J. G. Frazer, in his *Belief in Immortality*, gives the English translation of an invocation of the Melanesians to the spirits of their ancestors: "Uncle! father! plenty of boars for you, plenty of money, *kava* for your drinking, lucky food for your eating. I pray you with this, look down upon me, let me go on a safe sea."

The Melanesian medicine-man addresses the spirits of their dead ancestors. The Sinhalese exorcist never invokes or appeals to the spirits of their dead relatives. Addressing the devils with relationship terms seems to be a meaningless item that has crept, perhaps under foreign influence, into Sinhalese exorcizing ceremonies.

I have seen a magic ceremony performed by a Sinhalese exorcist to detect a theft. It is the same as that of the Polynesians described by Athol Joyce in the *Customs of the World* (vol. 1 pp. 129-30): "In matters of small importance, such as a minor theft, the parties concerned will take their seats in a circle, and a coconut is set spinning on a mat in the centre. The person towards whom the 'eyes' of the coconut point as it comes to rest is regarded as the culprit."

The only difference in the ceremony I have seen in Ceylon is the fixing of an ekel to the tuft of the coconut and getting a boy to perch on it.

Among the boys of the Southern Province there is an indoor game called "catching-the-thief." Several boys gather together and take as many coconut-fibre strands as there are boys who join in the game. One is knotted and mixed with the others.

A boy takes all of them within his fist, allowing only the tips of them to protrude. They take the strands one by one. The one who gets the knotted fibre is called the thief, and cuts are given on his palm with a twisted handkerchief.

"In Samoa exists another form of divination, usually practised in serious cases of theft," says Athol Joyce. "A ceremonial brew of *kava* is made with all due formality, and into the bowl is cast a small knotted fibre thread. The *kava* is then distributed in the usual manner, and the guilty party

is betrayed by the presence in his cup of the tell-tale thread." (vol. 1 p. 130).

"Theft in Tikopia," says Professor Raymond Firth (*Human Types* pp. 140-41), "is dealt with by tongue-lashing, and sometimes by physical violence, if the culprit is known. If he is not, then the wronged owner may compose a dance-song embodying his views of the thief with insulting innuendos, and get it chanted in full chorus at the public dances on the beach."

The chanting of verses with slighting allusions—such as "the father of this fellow is a thief; these fellows are the sons of the fighting she-cat; their parents are foreigners who swallow snails",—by boys in chorus at a particular game still survives in the villages of the Southern Province. It is known as *Jalli dameema*.

What were divination and punishment for theft amongst the Pacific Islanders have become the games of the boys of Ceylon, which fact suggests that these elements have been borrowed.

Fig. 3

The outrigger canoe used by the Sinhalese for deep-sea fishing has probably been borrowed directly or indirectly from the Pacific Islands. Sailing vessels represented in ancient sculpture are river boats or large sailing vessels without the outrigger. In the old classical Sinhalese literature, I have failed to find a reference to anything like an outrigger boat. The ancient Sinhalese were not in need of an outrigger canoe, because they did not fish in the deep sea. There are references to inshore fishing in old Sinhalese literature.

The Polynesians invented or borrowed the outrigger canoe because of economic needs. "The need for the canoe in Polynesia is principally an economic one," says Professor Raymond Firth. "They are essential for catching large fish beyond the confines of the shore reef, and they serve the needs of transport and travel partly around the coast and partly to other islands." (p. 59)

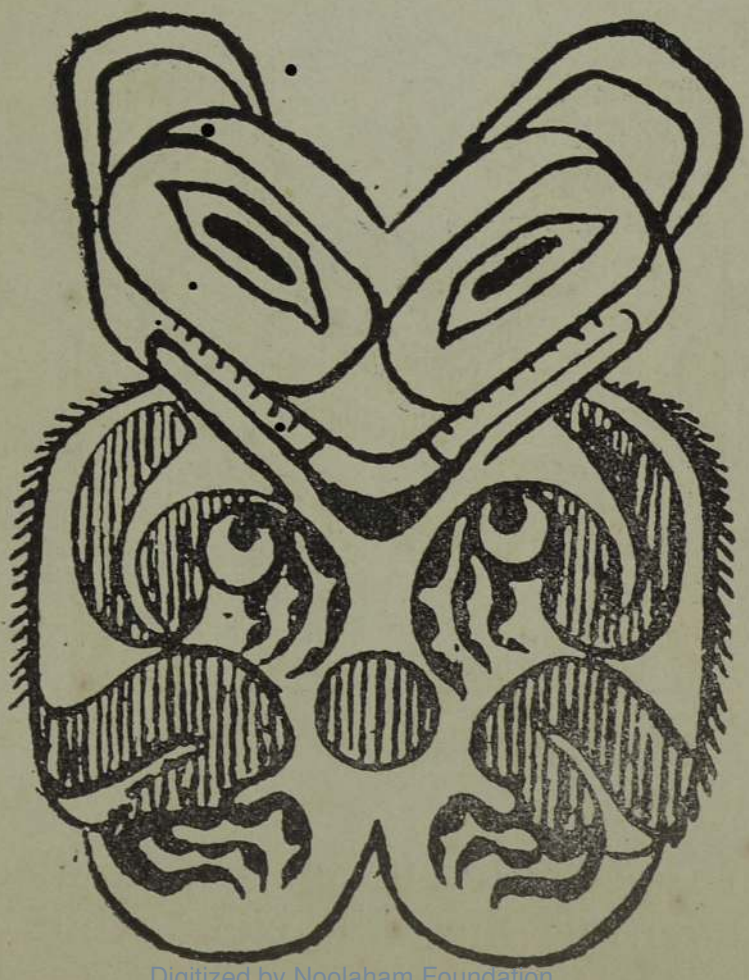

Fig. 4

Figures 3 and 4 represent paintings of Pacific coast Indians, and figure 5 is a line drawing from a copy of a painting in colour in Ridi Vihara, Kurunegala. The coloured copy was made by Mr. L. K. Karunaratna of the Archaeological Department. The two Pacific coast paintings from Goldenweiser's *Anthropology* represent stylized figures of a bear, and the Ceylon painting the figure of a lion sitting on its haunches.

Six legs, four of them outstretched, and the semi-circular lines on the two sides of the frontal figure represent two lions sitting on their haunches. This is a peculiar painting of a Ceylon folk artist. The sexual organ in the Pacific coast painting of the bear is denoted by a large circle, and in the lion of the Ceylon painting by a more realistic diagram. The lines of the eyes, nose and the mouth of the bear and the lion are of the same fundamental plan, though they differ in the stylized shapes.

Fig. 5

The bear represented in fig. 3 is divided into two parts representing the side views, and these two

parts are joined by the illusion of a broad mouth appearing in the centre of the design with a nose perched on the top, giving the frontal view of an animal resembling that of the figure 4. And the figure when divided into two gives the appearance of two side views of an animal sitting on its haunches. The lion figure of the Ridi Vihara painting, when divided by a straight line into two halves, gives the illusion of the side view of two lions sitting on their haunches, with their heads turned back.

Dr. O. Pertold, in his *Ceremonial Dances of the Sinhalese*, says "that Sinhalese masks have sometimes much resemblance to the masks of primitive peoples, especially those used in the agricultural ceremonies which are often very primitive like the masks from the Pacific Islands."

These similarities could be explained as coincidences arising from the similarities of technique, the choice of material and the aims of the artist, but if the Ridi Vihara painting is only an isolated specimen, the evidence is insufficient to support this hypothesis.

I do not insist that the similarities of all cultural elements pointed out in this chapter cannot be explained without recourse to the diffusionist theory. But some of them strongly suggest diffusion from a primitive source, which may be the Pacific Islands or some other area. One of the oldest Sinhalese prose works refers to Javanese slaves. The *Mahavansa* relates the story of a Javanese pirate who invaded Ceylon.

Professor Hocart, in an essay *India and the Pacific* in his recently published posthumous book *The Life-giving Myth*, adduces evidence to prove that the culture of the Pacific Ocean is closely connected with

the archaic culture of India. "In Polynesia," Hocart says, "we find sky gods, sun gods and earth goddesses, and the legends told of them are similar to the Indian myths—so similar for example in the egg, or the separation of heaven and earth, that it is impossible to doubt their common origin..... Near Lakemba was an island whose god used the reefs as his path, in Ceylon they say the West coast reef is Ravana's path."

5 FOLK POETRY OF THE SINHALESE

Many educated men of the present generation, elated by their admiration of Western literature, treat their own literary heritage with undisguised contempt. In the same way Sinhalese scholars, probably from the twelfth century down to the present, carried away by their admiration for pedantic Sanskrit poetry, treated Sinhalese folk poetry as unworthy of serious attention.

Though there is an inflated enthusiasm for a revival of everything national, the majority of our oriental scholars and school teachers still treat our folk poetry with the same contempt. I have heard a Sinhalese scholar once say that he would not touch Sinhalese folk poetry with a barge-pole. His contempt for folk poetry was the result of his preoccupation with classical language and grammar, for which he had developed a quixotic love.

"Let us humbly acknowledge it," says Anatole France (*Life and Letters*, Third Series), "the old country folk are the builders of the language, and our masters in poetry. They never seek rich rhyme, and are satisfied with simple assonance. The verses, not made for the eye, are full of ungrammatical elisions; but it must be borne in mind that if grammar is, as they say—and I doubt it—the art of speech, it is certainly not the art of song. Apart from that, the verse of the popular song strikes the ear as correct. It is clear and limpid, and possessed of a brevity which the most learned art seeks without acquiring; the imagery appears sharp and pure; in

short, it has the light flight and morning song of the lark it so loves to glorify."

The old writers who created our extant literature ignored and treated with contempt their own folk literature. I said "extant" literature, because we have not a single Sinhalese book of poetry or prose prior to the tenth century. The flowering period of Sinhalese culture as manifested in sculpture and painting ended before the tenth century. The twelfth century, from which our earliest literature dates, was only the beginning of a decadent and imitative tradition. Sinhalese scholars of the present-day are still under the influence of this superficial tradition.

There are only two courses open to them for breaking the monotony and the deadening influence imposed by this superficial tradition: to seek inspiration from an intensive study of Sinhalese folk poetry for developing new forms and instilling freshness and originality into modern Sinhalese poetry; or to study for inspiration, what is best in Western literature.

Our classical poetry which sought inspiration from Sanskrit is like an uprooted plant. It will never grow. All attempts to perpetuate the tradition which created such poetry will be as futile as the flogging of a dead horse. A French critic (quoted by Anatole France in his *Life and Letters*, Fourth Series) says: "The literature that divorces itself disdainfully from the people is like an uprooted plant.....It is in the heart of the people that art and poetry should steep themselves continually, in order to remain green and flourishing. It is their fountain of youth."

Borrowing will give vitality to poetry or art, but the strength, as Read says, must come from roots that grow deep into the native soil.

A systematic collection of Sinhalese folk poetry has not been made yet. A few European scholars and a few Sinhalese scholars like the late W. A. de Silva and Dr. G. P. Malalasekera, have taken an interest in the folk literature of the Sinhalese.

H. Parker, who was an irrigation engineer here, made an extensive collection of folk tales and translated them into English. This collection was published in a three-volume edition by Luzac & Co. This, I believe, is the only systematic collection of folk tales of Ceylon ever made. Parker's English translation is useful for students of ethnology rather than for those who seek literary inspiration. The emotional content of the stories is reduced and the many connotations of the Sinhalese words have not been adequately rendered, while the style and the rhythm of the originals too are lost in the English translation.

For ethnological purposes, it is not difficult to translate Sinhalese folk literature into English, but its quality as emotional literature is particularly difficult to recapture. It can be rendered into English only by a sensitive and experienced writer. Even a translation by such a person cannot adequately render the rhythm, music and the emotional content of the spoken word or the speech mode of the original.

It is only my sentimental enthusiasm that induces me to make this attempt at rendering three or four verses into English for the purpose of analysis:

Tired, carrying a pingo of pots and pans,
At an *ambalama* I rested,
The pots and pans a bull did smash
At which I laughed and laughed.

Incidentally, Sinhalese folk songs and poetry reveal the Buddhist view of life, the expectation of loss as something inevitable and a readiness to be reconciled to such loss as the only practical course.

Some colloquial words of the original of the above are full of suggestions to those who know the cultural background of the villager. "Pingo of pots and pans" is the English meaning of two Sinhalese words of two syllables each. But their meanings and associations are lost in the English translation. The two words *valan kada* will revive in the mind of the villager the memories of the Sinhalese New Year celebrations and the associated domestic emotions.

It was an old custom, now no more, among potters to carry a pingo of new earthen pots and pans as a New Year present for the few rich families of the village. The potters were treated to a sumptuous lunch and were given in return a load of rice, currystuffs, oil cakes and other sweetmeats.

The words *ambalama* and "bull" are suggestive in the context. *Ambalama* was the travellers' resting place before the advent of the train, the motor car and the 'bus. When it had outlived its usefulness it was abandoned. Dilapidated *ambalamas* with dirty walls green with moss and decaying wooden roofs can still be seen standing by many a road. Stray cattle resting and chewing the cud were a frequent sight at such places. They were the villagers' cows that roamed the roadways eating dry leaves, withered and scanty grass. At the slightest

drizzle they resorted to the deserted *ambalama* for shelter.

The emotive content of the Sinhalese words of the above verse would imply a fuller situation and meaning, something like the following.

On the day before the Sinhalese New Year a village potter was carrying a pingo of pots and pans, either as a present, or for sale. Being tired, he entered a dilapidated *ambalama* to rest. A bull resting in a corner of the *ambalama* rushed out in fright, smashing the pots and pans. On seeing the havoc caused he says, "I laughed and laughed."

It is also necessary to point out that the word "pottery" is a proverbial metaphor amongst Buddhist priests and villagers for impermanence. Like the bull, death will smash the worldly life of any man. The philosophical attitude of the folk poet was not the result of any learning. It was instinctive.

> Will you milk, "moonfaced", the cow
> And like the moon's disc congeal the milk?
> Oh! girl-cousin, don't say "no";
> Give me the curd.

Most of the Sinhalese words of this verse—the words for moon, moonfaced, girl-cousin, suggest romantic love to the village youth. This is probably a love poem. The rhythm of the last two lines of the original is lost in the translation. Such rhythm is a rendering of the yearning appeal of the youth into the language of music.

Love-making is taboo in the village. Direct and frank expression of love to a girl without the approval of her parents was regarded with horror by the villagers. Therefore more passionate and romantic young men naturally had to evolve a

gesture language, or compose covertly allusive verse to confess love to their cousins.

This verse of the folk poet, if I am not exaggerating the suggestive meaning, is either a confession of love or an invitation to his beautiful cousin to elope with him.

When a village youth wished to know the attitude of a girl towards him, it was the custom to ask her for some trivial thing. If she gave it to him, it was a sign that the girl was willing to reciprocate. If she refused, it was clear that she resented his clandestine advances.

There is a folk poem called *The Story of the Kaffir Prince*. A certain king had seven beautiful daughters. A Kaffir prince waylays them on their way to the pond, and asks for a chew of betel. The older girls refuse, but the youngest gives him that which he asks. The elder sisters, assuming it to be love-making, poke fun at the youngest on every possible occasion, though she herself denies it and weeps. The story ends with the happy marriage of the youngest girl to the Kaffir prince.

Teeny, weeny lovely maid
Took a pitcher to the well,
Around it was a *kabaragoya*
And, Oh my foot! a *diyahariya!*

Here the folk poet is in a humorous mood, and this is a specimen of his innocent humour. To the villager there are only two or three varieties of non-poisonous snakes. One of them is the water-snake. In this verse the folk poet visualizes a scene and an incident. The scene was familiar to him, and the incident, of course, was his imaginative invention. Village women and girls gather at the wells in the evenings to fill their pots. Away from

their parents and the inquisitive eyes of young men, they make fun, crack jokes and laugh.

A girl went to the well perhaps a little earlier than usual and saw, instead of her friends, a huge *kabaragoya* (spotted iguana). Frightened and startled, she turned to run away and was bitten by a water-snake.

The folk poet laughs at her discomfiture because he knows that the snake is not a poisonous one.

The following is a lullaby: The village woman's playful exaggeration of the importance and power of her baby can be seen in it.

Look! it's the elephant, little one,
Standing on the craggy land.
Now it hops from stone to stone,
And runs away for fear of you.

There are young poets who pay a sort of sentimental homage to Sinhalese folk poetry, but they have not shown any keenness to study it for inspiration or for evolving new forms and devices.

Another source for revitalizing Sinhalese literature is the psalms of the early Buddhists called *Thera-Theri Gathas* of Pali literature. Some of the *Theris* or Sisters and *Theras* or Brethren were not scholars but uneducated converts from the lower strata of society. Their spontaneous utterances, especially the shorter poems consisting of two or three verses resemble the old Sinhalese folk poetry in simplicity, sincerity, charm and technique.

The psalms of the early Buddhists and the verses of the *Upanishads* were a source of inspiration to Tagore, and he admits it in his preface to *Sadhana*. This influence must have enhanced the mystic and idealistic flavour of his poetry which attracted the attention of some European poets at a time when an

anti-theistic and anti-idealistic scientific spirit was permeating the literature of the West.

The poetry of the psalms of the Buddhists never exerted any influence on our classical poets, and they apparently did not seek inspiration from them. Scholars and poets of today see nothing sublime in them, perhaps because they failed to attract the attention of the Western critics and in consequence failed to become a fashionable cult.

The early psalms of the Buddhists have been translated into English by Mrs. Rhys Davids. The character of their affinity to Sinhalese poetry can be seen only in a Sinhalese translation; in any other language it is lost. In Mrs. Rhys Davids' scholarly translation those characteristics have been obscured to a very great extent.

I have made the following translations of a few verses from the poetry of Sisters and Brethren, based on the Pali original and the Sinhalese commentary.

The translation will show, I believe, their affinity to our folk poetry:

Freed from passions and well freed
From the pestle, brutal husband, wicker work,
And from stinking cooking pots
Escaped I completely and well.

Lust and malice
I will destroy with a resounding
chit-chiti chit-chiti
Sitting beneath the shade of spreading boughs
I will meditate, "Oh I am serene, I am serene"

The above is the translation of two verses attributed to a Sister called the mother of Sumangala. And the following is the translation of two verses of her son Thera Sumangala.

Freed and well freed;
And from three crooked things,
The sickle, the plough and the hoe
I escaped completely and well.

Sadhu! Here I will be
And here I will remain, freed from work
And freed from work
O Sumangala! meditate,
O Sumangala! meditate,
O Sumangala! meditate,
O Sumangala! be vigilant.

The original of the first translation consists of two verses uttered by a lady Elder. In the first line she expresses the ecstasy she felt in her free life, and in the other three lines she refers to her squalid domestic life and the drudgery from which she has escaped.

The words create a vivid picture of her domestic life. She was a weaver of baskets. Her husband was a bamboo cutter who hammered and split the reeds into strips and then removed the pulp. Out of these prepared strips she made baskets. The words 'pestle' and 'stinking pots' imply that in addition to her wicker work she had to husk the paddy, cook meals and wash the pots and pans—drudgery which a Sinhalese village woman of the poorer class is required to perform even today.

The pots and pans stink because they are usually washed in the morning after the night meal is cooked in them. The words 'chit-chiti chit-chiti' in the second verse refer to the noise made by her husband at hammering and splitting bamboos. They suggest the determination and the stern courage with which she was metaphorically hammering her mind to her lust and other worldly desires.

Her son, who has entered the Order and become an Elder, chants the second set of verses. He refers to the hoe, plough and the sickle as three crooked things because he had to bend and break his body constantly in using them.

In the last verse, by repetition, he expresses his intense feeling of release at escaping from worldly life, and in the last few lines he keeps admonishing his inner being to abide by the one certain activity—meditation.

It will be seen that there is an affinity and a resemblance in those verses of the Sisters and Brethren to the folk poetry of the Sinhalese, but our scholars and poets have treated them with contempt, thereby cutting off both sources of inspiration.

Some of our young Sinhalese poets are trying to derive inspiration from English translations of Tagore's more popular and sentimental poems; but the narrow religious training of our young Buddhist poets makes them insensitive to the best of Tagore's poetry because of its pervading theistic mysticism.

6 A LOST PHASE OF BUDDHIST ART

The remains of early Buddhist sculpture in India represent two sources from which the Buddhists derived their art. The sculpture of Sanchi and Bharut represents the Buddhist adaptation of the existing Indian art tradition; in the sculpture of Gandhara we see the Greek tradition. This early art, whether adapted from India or borrowed from the Greeks, is not Buddhist art, but an art about Buddhism. Ananda Coomaraswamy says: "In the omission of the figure of Buddha, the early Buddhist art is truly Buddhist : for the rest, it is an art about Buddhism, rather than Buddhist art." The real Buddhist sculpture was born later when the Buddhist artists developed their own idiom and expression inspired by Buddhist monks.

"Early Buddhist art," says Ananda Coomaraswamy, "is popular, sensuous and animistic Indian art, adapted to the purpose of the illustration of Buddhist anecdote and the decoration of the Buddhist monuments. Gandharan art is mixed, and misinterpreted equally both Eastern and Western formulae, which must be older than itself, while it is not Buddhist in expression ; the earliest Indian primitives of Buddhist art properly so-called are probably lost. In Northern India the absence of primitives is partly to be accounted for by the fact that Buddhist inspiration was there absorbed, not in direct creation, but in adopting Graeco-Roman motifs to its own spiritual ends

In Southern India and Ceylon the same energy working in greater isolation found a more direct expression ; and though the earliest masterpieces may be lost, there are still preserved at Anuradhapura and Amaravati magnificent works which we may fairly speak of as Buddhist primitives."

In Ceylon the early Buddhist art developed in greater isolation. In South India it developed in a mixed social and religious environment which was different from that of early Ceylon. The extent of this difference may be seen by retailing the distinctive characteristics of the architectural and sculptural remains of Mihintale. They represent an ascetic culture against a beautiful rural setting.

The stupas are on the summit of the hill, and the hillsides have been made into terraces on which monasteries have been built. The remains of one of the oldest and beautiful stupas, now being restored by the Archaeological Department, stand on the top of one of the hills. A sea of forest which begins at the foot of the hill stretches under a blue sky in one vast sweep disappearing in a hazy horizon.

The remains of the stone masonry of the monasteries of Mihintale are of finished workmanship of the simplest design with the least ornamentation. The balustrades on either side of the steps leading to the halls have their straight lines and curves, and are not adorned with the ornamental *Makara* figure. The guard-stones are plain and have no figures of dwarfs or gods (pl. 1). The highly polished stone slabs with inscriptions, of later date, have frames of simple design.

There is a huge stone trough of exquisite workmanship. The remains of a stupa, conserved recently by the Archaeological Department, have

four *Vahalkadas* with rows of ornamental sculpture. The *Vahalkada* and its ornamental work do not harmonize with the austere simplicity of the stupa, the architectural and sculptural work of the monastic buildings and the natural environment of Mihintale.

The bubble-shaped stupa (pl. II) is one of the most delightful symbols that represents the intellectual sensuousness of the abstract philosophy of Buddhism. In spite of its solidity and massiveness, the bubble shape of the ancient stupa symbolizes the transience of the world and life. The ornamental *Vahalkada* offends against the severe lines of the stupa. Dr. Paranavitane in his *Stupa in Ceylon* points out that the *Vahalkada* was not an integral part of the structure of the earliest stupa, but a later innovation.

The love of simplicity and of nature of the forest-dwelling monks, which reduced ornamentation to the minimum, was not the outcome of any artistic temperament but of their rigid discipline and suppressed emotions.

But it exerted an influence in the development of Buddhist sculpture among the city-dwelling monks and the laity during the growth of an urban civilization at Anuradhapura.

Among the recently discovered relics at the Ruvanveli dagoba, there was a flower with thin long silver petals, resembling a natural one. The human figures in the early sculpture of Anuradhapura are naturalistic. Their naturalness is hidden by the conventionalized representations of drapery, elaborate head dress and a plethora of jewellery.

In Theravada Buddhism there are no gods with many hands and heads. The greatest god—Sakra—is introduced in Buddhist literature as an *upasaka*—

a lay devotee. The Buddhist sculptural representations of gods and goddesses, therefore, is naturalistic to a greater degree than those of Hindu sculpture. Walter Pater, criticizing mystical art, says : "Such forms of art, then, are inadequate to the matter they clothe : they remain ever below its level. Something of this kind is true also of Oriental art. As in the middle ages, from an exaggerated inwardness, so in the East, from a vagueness, a want of definition, in thought, the matter presented to art is unmanageable and the forms of sense struggle vainly with it. The many-headed gods of the East, the Orientalized many-breasted Diana of Ephesus, like Angelico's fresco, are at best overcharged symbols, a means of hinting at an idea which art cannot fitly or completely express, which still remains in the world of shadows." This criticism, if we exclude figures of gods and goddesses borrowed later from Mahayanism, does not apply to early Buddhist art.

At an early date the representation of the body of gods and goddesses became conventionalized. This conventionalization consisted in reducing superfluous flesh, in suppressing muscles and sinews, and in etherealizing the bodies. In spite of this stylization, the early Buddha figure retains many naturalistic features. In the seated figure of the early period, the round and protruding heel and the curve of the foot are modelled anatomically in defiance of the unnatural features attributed to the Buddha in religious books. In later Buddha figures we find a flat sole without the heel and the arch, in accordance with the canonical features enumerated in the books on the Buddha.

The famous bas-relief at Isurumuniya (plate III) is a fine specimen which represents the naturalistic

tendency of early sculpture. The hilt of the sword and the outline of an ornamental shield behind the right shoulder, the sensuous lips and the bulky body, and the thick waist in it indicate a figure of a human being—a soldier.

The best naturalistic representation of a beautiful woman as idealized by ancient Sinhalese sculptors may be seen in a few figures of goddesses of this period (plates IV, V). In these, the modelling of the breasts, knees and legs, show more fidelity to the natural than to the conventional form. The absence of the muscles and sinews from the representation of the human figure is not entirely due to the effect of convention and tradition. Sports and physical culture that contributed to the development of muscles of the body were rare in India. Even the present-day Indian wrestler is not a man of much muscular development.

The best evidence of the naturalistic tendency of the early Buddhist sculpture is supplied by the famous moonstone of Anuradhapura (plates VI, VII). That this moonstone is carved out of one of the hardest stones can be easily inferred from the freshness of the sculptured figures of animals and the floral designs which it still retains in spite of the weathering and the tread of human feet for centuries. Professor Hocart says that a steel hard enough to cope satisfactorily with such a stone could not have been produced in Europe before the eighteenth century. He thinks that either the patience and the persistence of the workmen, or tools of harder steel brought from India, must have enabled them to overcome the hardness of the stone.

Bell, even though he took a critical and hostile attitude towards national arrogance, says of this moonstone: "The thoroughness of the sculptor is

exhibited in a clever touch—the curling tail and the trunk of the respective elephants which begin and end the procession, so as to present the animals complete. Both in actual size of the slab and in the spirit infused into the beasts, this *sanda-kada-pahana* excels all yet discovered. The *tout ensemble* of the work is masterly in breadth and freedom of execution, and cannot fail to leave its impress on the mind of all art worshippers."

Even the horse, which must have been rare in early Ceylon, is represented in the moonstone with a fidelity to nature. The figure of the lion, of course, assumes a grotesque conventional form.

7 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BUDDHA STATUE IN CEYLON

Most, if not all, of the sitting Buddha images of ancient Ceylon have an easily identifiable feature which is absent from Indian images of the same posture.

The sitting Buddha images of India are in the cross-legged posture called *padmasana* which is defined by Professor Phanindra Nath Bose in his *Principles of Indian Silpa Sastra* as a sitting posture in which the right foot is placed on the left thigh and the left one on the right thigh. The Indian image (pl. VIII) represents this posture correctly. But the stone images of the Anuradhapura and the Polonnaruva periods (fig. 6) represent a sitting posture different from this *padmasana*.

Having in mind the posture of cross-legged Indian images, many writers refer to Ceylon images as "cross-legged Buddhas." The stone images of Ceylon cannot be described as "cross-legged Buddhas" because they represent a posture quite different from that of *padmasana* and is described under a different name in Sanskrit texts. It is called *virasana* (hero-posture) and is described as follows in the *Yoga System of Patanjali* which has been translated into English by Professor James Haughten Woods (Harward Oriental Series): "A man settled down rests one foot on the ground and the other is placed over the partially contracted knee—hero-posture."

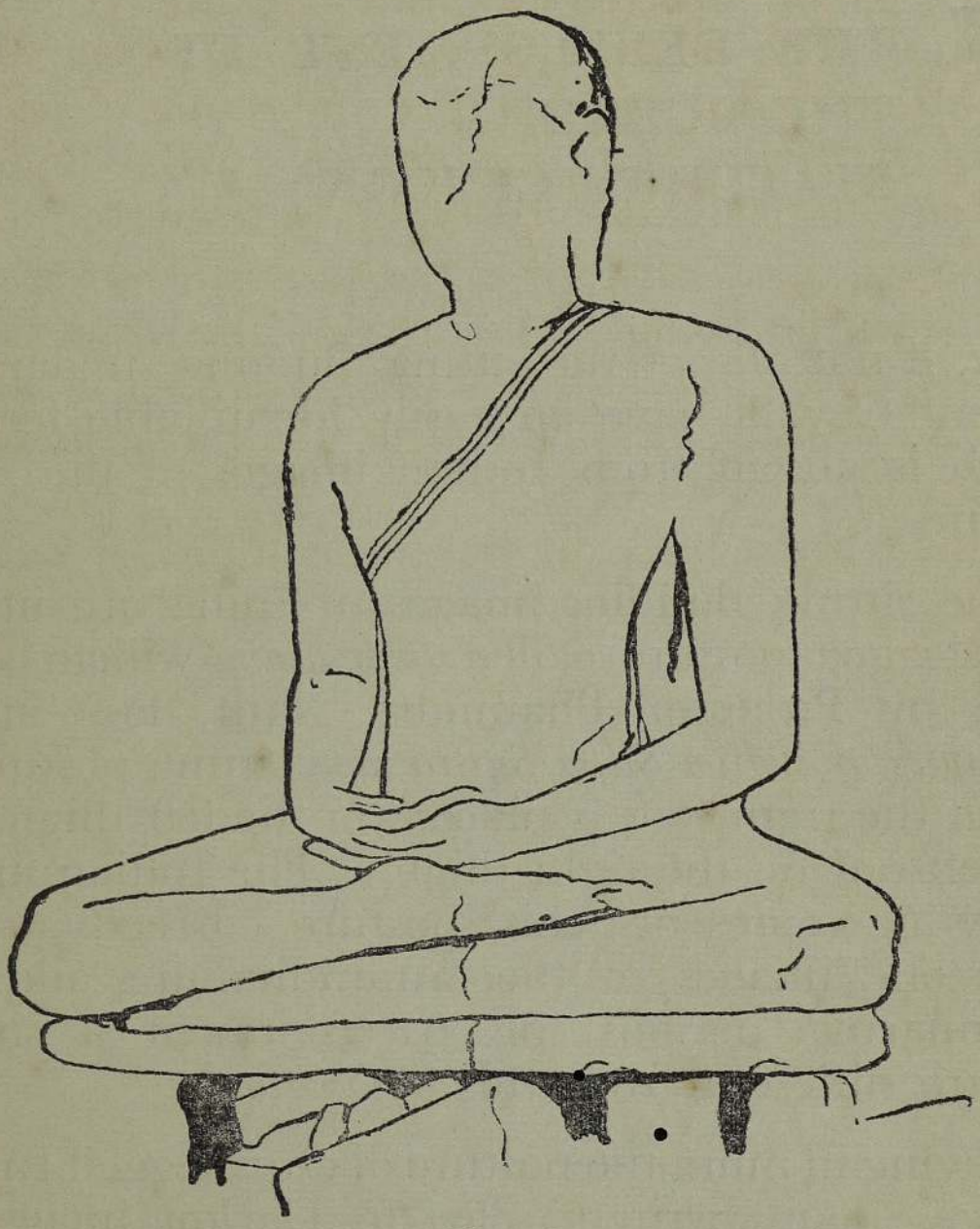

Fig. 6

This, I believe, is the sitting posture represented by the stone images of Ceylon, and it is a peculiarity that helps to distinguish them from the Indian ones. The trained eye of Havell seems to have noticed this feature of the Ceylon Buddha image. He gave an ingenious, speculative explanation for it. Referring to the Anuradhapura image, he says: "It represents the Buddha just emerging from the yoga trance, the left leg being released from the 'adamantine' pose of profound meditation, when both legs are firmly locked together."

If Havell had a better knowledge of Theravada Buddhism of Ceylon, I believe he would never have resorted to this speculative explanation. The *Samanna-phala Sutta* of *Digha Nikaya* and other Buddhist texts give the name of *pallanka* (Sanskrit *paryanka*) to the posture of the Buddhist ascetic who practises meditation in seclusion.

The *virasana* and the *paryanka* postures are identical, and the Indian scholars give the same definition to both. Professor Bose (*Principles of Indian Silpa Sastra*) says that *virasana* is not generally found in Indian images.

I have gone through the illustrations of Buddha images in most of the works of Havell, Coomara-

Fig. 7

swamy, Kramrisch, Smith, Foucher and some others, but have not found a Buddha image with the sitting posture similar to that of the Ceylon ones. Havell, in his *Indian Sculpture and Painting*, reproduces five Indian images in the sitting posture, but the positions of legs and feet of all of them are identical with those of the cross-legged *padmasana*.

In Dr. Bhattacharya's *Indian Buddhist Iconography* there are four or five Tantric images of Dhyani Buddhas representing the posture called *virasana* which is peculiar to Ceylon images. As all of them

Fig. 8

are centuries later than the Anuradhapura image, the age of which has been fixed as early as the fourth century by a consensus of opinion, the question of inspiration from Tantric images for the particular posture of the Ceylon ones does not arise. However, amongst the bas-reliefs of Amaravati and Nagarjunikonda there is the sitting Buddha figure in a posture somewhat crudely similar to that of the Ceylon image. Amongst the sculpture reproduced in Dr. Vogel's *Buddhist Art in India* there is a bas-relief from Amaravati in which the Buddha is represented in *paryanka* posture. Longhurst in his *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India* (No. 54) reproduces bas-reliefs of Nagarjunikonda. Amongst these there are several representing the Buddha in the same sitting posture (figs. 7 and 8).

When compared with the fine figures of men and women in various attitudes and emotional expressions in the Nagarjunikonda bas-relief, the Buddha figure seems to be crude and primitive. According to Longhurst, the Nagarjunikonda temples and stupas had been built by a Buddhist queen of a Hindu king, and she was supported by a colony of rich merchants who traded with Ceylon. It is possible that the bas-reliefs were carved by craftsmen who, though skilled, were just learning the iconography of Buddha images. The justification for this conjecture is in the crudeness of the sitting posture and other features of the Buddha figure (figs. 7 and 8).

As the Amaravati and Nagarjunikonda bas-reliefs were earlier than the Anuradhapura Buddha image, it is possible that the image of the Buddha in contemplation in this sitting posture was first carved in South India. But the perfection of it may have been achieved in Ceylon by sculptors who were

alive to the artistic tastes of the entire population of a Buddhist country.

Dr. G. C. Mendis in his *Early History of Ceylon*, after referring to Buddhist remains of Amaravati and Nagarjunikonda, says that South India exercised no cultural influence over Ceylon during this period. If Dr. Mendis' conclusion is correct, then it is more reasonable to surmise that the Anuradhapura Buddha image was an independent development, as its posture is quite different from that of the images of North India reproduced in such works on Indian sculpture as I have been able to examine.

8 A MASTERPIECE IN SCULPTURE

Of our ancient paintings only a few incomplete specimens survive; but of sculpture we have a wide range from the earliest times to the twelfth century. It is strange that there is hardly anybody excepting the archaeologist, who is interested in exploring the field of our ancient sculpture from an artistic point of view, though there are many artists, poets, journalists and even art historians who write and talk incessantly on the Sigiriya frescoes.

The interest of most of them in the Sigiriya frescoes is not purely aesthetic but springs from the appeals of sex, patriotism and sentiment. Indian sculpture has been studied not only by archaeologists but by European and Indian artists and art critics. Except Coomaraswamy, whose main interest was Indian sculpture and painting, there was hardly anybody of repute who made a special study of ancient Sinhalese sculpture from the artistic point of view. Stella Kramrisch in her comprehensive study *Indian Sculpture* ignored the interesting and subtle development of the Buddha figure in ancient Ceylon. Ananda Coomaraswamy thoroughly understood the achievement of the ancient sculptor of Ceylon who carved the famous Buddha statue of Anuradhapura. I believe Havell was the first art critic who saw the significance of this statue; but he dismissed it with the remark "that it was probably executed in the first half of the fourth century A.D.....by a sculptor from Northern India". His surmise that it was the work of

a North Indian sculptor, I believe, is merely an excuse to dismiss it without a detailed study, because he was not as interested in the sculpture of ancient Ceylon as was Ananda Coomaraswamy.

The archaeologist's interest in ancient sculpture is mainly historical, cultural, and religious. He does not ignore its artistic aspect, but it is of secondary importance to him. When the archaeologist finds a new piece of sculpture, his first concern is to ascertain its date. When there is no inscription or clue to indicate the age of a statue, he will compare it with Indian sculpture and decide the period by the method of classifying and assigning it to the particular school to which it belongs. It is an important method of study for the archaeologist, for he minutely studies the features and the peculiarities of the sculpture of different schools. But unfortunately some of our art students, perhaps without understanding the views and the method of the archaeologist, make the absurd inference that Ceylon sculptures are only copies or imitations of those of India.

All great artists have been influenced by others. And even borrowing is not copying, because the borrowed elements are changed and reintegrated by the artist according to his personality and imagination even if his art is religious and communal. The best work of an independent artist, even though he may have been influenced by a school or tradition, has an original flavour which is a blend of his imagination and personality.

Plate IX represents one of the famous Buddha statues of Anuradhapura. It is from a recent photograph of it after the restoration by Longhurst. His restoration of the nose seems to have disfigured the statue.

Compare the Buddha figures of Ceylon with those of India: Plates VIII and X represent two of the best Indian statues of the same centuries, if not of the same school. The Anuradhapura statue is different in style from the Indian statues, and also in the implications of the spiritual mood called *Samadhi*. The trunk, arms and hands of the Anuradhapura statue give the impression that they are attuned to the mood of spiritual calm, which is wonderfully suggested by its face, eyes, mouth and the sitting posture. The weight of the two arms and hands rests on the lap of the statue, but the arms do not suggest the relaxation of the arms of a person who enjoys laziness. They suggest the sensitiveness of the arms of a yogi with a well-controlled mind and a rigidly disciplined body.

The sitting posture of this Buddha figure is called *virasana*, which gives to the yogi perfect ease (*sthira sukha*). The Anuradhapura figure suggests the perfect ease of a natural sitting posture. Compare with it the posture and knees of the Indian statue (pl. X) which offends against the natural human physique and suggests the tortuously bent knees and legs of a stuffed effigy as stated by Havell. Even the knees and legs of the Indian masterpiece (pl. VIII) do not suggest the perfect ease of the yogic posture.

The spiritual calm attained by the yogi is described in Buddhist books. The mind of the yogi in contemplation becomes gradually free from sense impressions and empirical knowledge, and in its highest stage reflecting mystic rapture, it is compared to a bright and clean mirror that is hidden in a box. This mystic rapture is suggested by the face, mouth, lips, and eyes of the Anuradhapura figure (pl. IX). The same features of the

Indian masterpiece (pl. VIII) suggest not rapture but a tired feeling of pessimism and compassion.

The Ceylon sculptor seems to have perfected the Buddha statue with a mastery of technique and a grasp of the implications of the metaphysical psychology of Buddhism. The question whether he came over here from North India, or was the product of a local tradition is immaterial, because his achievement belongs to Ceylon where Buddhism in its purest form was at its height at the period when this statue was carved.

9 INDIAN SCULPTURE AND VICTORIAN PREJUDICES

Most of our highly educated young men of today reject Victorian ideas on art, politics and economy, and are very critical of Victorian literature. But in their attitude to the ancient art and literature of India and Ceylon they are still influenced by Victorian ideas and critical canons.

As they are lacking in a knowledge of Sinhalese, Pali or Sanskrit they have a justification for their indifference to our ancient literature, but not for their attitude to Sinhalese and Indian sculpture and painting.

The development of modern sculpture and painting has changed the attitude of European critics to Indian sculpture and painting. Most of them reject the criticism of Indian sculpture by Ruskin, Macaulay, Walter Pater and other Victorians and some German aestheticians who based their theories on Greek naturalism and idealism.

J. V. S. Wilkinson in his essay on Indian Painting which appears in a book entitled *Indian Art*, edited by Sir Richard Winstedt, says : "As for this country Ruskin and the other high priests of criticism misled people by condemning all Indian art comprehensively, without examining the evidence. Ruskin himself was doubtless misled by having met with nothing but second-rate Indian sculpture."

European artists and educated men became tired of naturalistic art which was limited to the visual aspect of the physical world. Modern art

originated as a revolt from this narrow ideal which dominated European art after the time of the Italian painters.

"The nature of the summit towards which Greeks were toiling upwards is," says Eric Newton in his *European Painting and Sculpture*, "so familiar to us that it is no longer a matter of wonderment that they got there. We have seen the same kind of ascent to a higher summit achieved by the Italian painters. We know how they too made it their business to give their work 'naturalness.' We know the stages through which art has to pass on this journey. But the Italians had a much bigger task to accomplish. They were concerned not only with physique, as we shall see, but with a set of spiritual values which lay outside the Greek view of life."

Clive Bell, one of the radical and individualistic critics, treats European and Oriental art as two streams which descend from the same range of mountains to the same sea. He says: "They start from different altitudes, but all descend at last to one level. Thus, I should say that the slope at the head of which stand the Buddhist masterpieces of the Wei, Liang, and T'ang dynasties begins a great deal higher than the slope at the head of which are the Greek primitives of the seventh century,..... .....but when we have to consider contemporary Japanese art, Graeco-Roman and Roman sculpture, we see that all have found the same sea-level of nasty naturalism."

One of the Buddhist masterpieces referred to by Clive Bell is a Buddha figure of the fifth century which appears as the frontispiece in his book, *Art*. But one of the great masterpieces of the Buddha figure representing the mood of spiritual calm was

the achievement of a sculptor of ancient Ceylon. Clive Bell seems to be unaware of it.

He confesses in his book *Civilization* that his knowledge of Eastern civilizations, except those of the Chinese and the Persians, is meagre.

Clive Bell, who dismisses some of the Greek sculptural pieces as "Hellenistic and Roman rubbish" says: "Since the Byzantine primitives no artist in Europe has created forms of greater significance unless it be Cézanne."

The inspiration for Byzantine art came from the East, and Cézanne rejected romanticism and realism, both of which are facets of Greek naturalism.

Eric Newton compares Greek art to the language of the physique. European artists had to turn to the East for inspiration to develop a different language to express the beauty of the soul.

After the renaissance, Greek naturalism was revived. With the development of science, the Christian faith declined, and in consequence naturalism became again the language of the physique. Moderns, who lost their faith in religion, have turned their attention to developing a language of art to express their inner feelings and the working of the unconscious mind.

"The taste of today," says Eric Newton, "whetted by our later knowledge of negro sculpture, our sophisticated love of naivete and our experiments in a more angular set of rhythms, has swung away from maturity."

This new approach in European art has, as I have mentioned earlier, changed the attitude of European critics to Indian art. But many of them are still repelled by the sculptural masterpieces of

India because of the multiplicity of heads and arms and the plethora of jewellery they bear. The Buddha figure and the gods and goddesses of Theravada Buddhism are free from some of these peculiarities which are repellent to the modern taste.

A student who can appreciate the works of modern sculptors like Henry Moore, Marcel Gili and McWilliam will find no difficulty in appreciating Indian sculpture. Compare the Nepalese bronze figure of Kuvera (pl. XI), who is sometimes sarcastically referred to as the god of capitalism by Dr. Paranavitane, with the sculpture of Marcel Gili (pl. XII) or McWilliam's *Father and Daughter* (pl. XIII).

Gili's figure of the mother is more abstract because its remoteness from naturalism is greater than that of the Indian sculpture.

Compare the figure of Zeus (pl. XIV) with the torso of Bodhisattva (pl. XV) which is a masterpiece of Indian sculpture.

In spite of its naturalism, ferocious energy and muscular and anatomical details, the figure of the Greek god suggests the crudeness of the athlete who consciously displays his muscles.

There is a refined and sensitive feeling behind the Indian torso which, I am sure, will appeal more to the modern mind.

The torso of a goddess (pl. IV) is a fine study of female figure by a Ceylon sculptor. Compare it with the Greek sculpture of Aphrodite of Melos (pl. XVI).

If our educated young men would seriously study the sculpture of India and Ceylon they should be able to make an evaluation without allowing themselves to be influenced by religious and national

prejudices. They will then give an impetus to the development of an independent art which will grow its roots deep into the soil.

"If art's vitality comes from the cross-breeding of styles, its strength comes from stability, from roots that grow deep into a native soil," says Herbert Read.

To evolve a contemporary art which will grow its roots deep into the soil is possible for men who try to understand the ancient religious art of India and Ceylon. This religious art, in spite of its sophistication and stylization, was felt by the common-man because its language was that of his religion which he instinctively understood.

One of our contemporary artists who has derived inspiration from this religious art is George Keyt. His paintings at Gotami vihare not only serve a religious purpose but impart an education to the common worshipper who is realizing that our temple paintings have been infused with a new vitality.

Here we can see the process by which an art, not only new but individualistic, grows its roots deep into the soil.

10 THE ISURUMUNIYA LOVERS: A POEM IN THE LANGUAGE OF GESTURE

Human beings and gods represented in the sculptural remains of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva are symbols suggesting spiritual and philosophical themes. Behind even a crudely carved stone image is the implication of a mood or a spiritual theme. The mood most common behind Buddha figures and those of Bodhisattvas and their consorts and gods and goddesses is serenity. The architectural remains including the decaying stupas of Anuradhapura, are themselves symbols suggestive of the impermanence of life and the vanity of man's achievements.

But these constitute only one, though of course the most prominent aspect of ancient Sinhalese sculptural and architectural remains. They represent only a part of the religious life of the ancient Sinhalese. Architectural and sculptural remains representing the secular aspect of their life are rare. Hitherto the archaeologists have been able to discover and excavate only two or three secular buildings at Anuradhapura. One of these is the Royal Pleasure Garden, and another the remains of the palace of King Vijayabahu. It is a very modest and humble building in comparison with the magnificent monasteries, remains of which still suggest a romantic background of luxurious living, including rock-cut ponds and underground lakes in the monasteries themselves.

The modern man who regards, "laughter and sweat as a necessary part of art as well as of life," feels something lacking in ancient sculptural art, rich though it is in religious symbolism.

The Royal Pleasure Garden, with its background of rock boulders and the beautiful Tisa-veva, holds the most attractive secular sculptural and architectural remains so far excavated and restored at Anuradhapura. An intelligent man who is acquainted with classical Sinhalese poetry would find no difficulty in imaginatively recreating the erotic festivals and picnics indulged in by ancient kings and queens, and sophisticated men and women of the city at this epicurean pleasure resort.

There are two or three exquisite pieces of sculpture in bas-relief at the cave temple called Isurumuniya, on the land adjoining the Royal Pleasure Garden. The sculptured men and women of these stone slabs look very lonely as if they have been removed from their own environment, which most probably, must have been the Royal Pleasure Garden. It is likely that the stone slabs with secular themes sculptured on them were removed by the men who ransacked the unexcavated ruins of the adjoining land for stones and bricks.

One of the finest of these pieces of sculpture is now known as "The Isurumuniya Lovers" (plate III). Even if it is conceded that the figures are those of a god and a goddess, the thematic interpretation would be that they represent two lovers and not as some believe, Siva and Parvati.

The ornamented shield and the hilt of the sword attached to it just above the right shoulder of the male figure can still be identified in spite of the weathering. The thick and sensuous lips and the heavy

waist and hips suggest that the figure represents a human being rather than a god, whose figure in sculpture always has a thin waist and sharp features. The dressing of the hair and the short trousers further suggest that the male figure represents a warrior. In a few pieces of Polonnaruwa sculpture, figures of men may be identified as soldiers by their only item of clothing which resembles a bathing trunk of today (fig. 9). Rajendra Lal Mitra in his *Indo-Aryans* says: "The ordinary rule regarding warriors and athletes, however, is not to have knots or chignons, but to cut their hair close, and to represent it in a thick, short, crisp, slightly curling state, the effeminate chignon and knot being reserved for common people, and specially for beaux and men of pleasure."

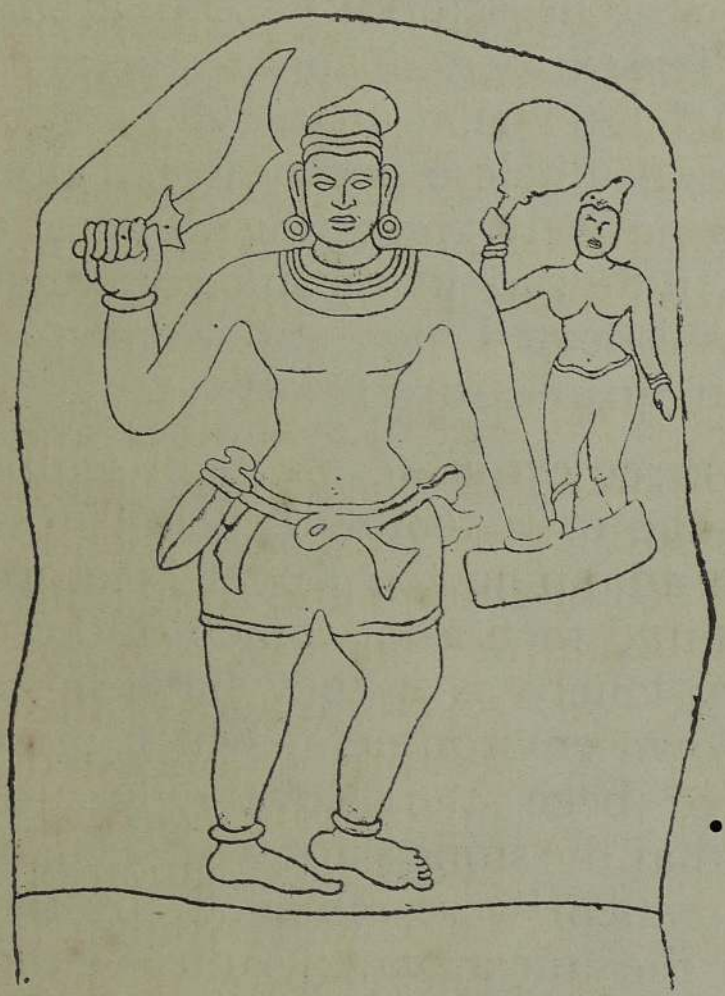

Fig. 9

Of course, the Indian archaeologist's reference is to the Indian warrior as depicted in stone. In Sinhalese sculpture too the soldier is represented with the same style of hair dress. The head of the male figure of the Isurumuniya sculpture has thick, curly hair, coils of which touch the shoulders.

A thirteenth century Sinhalese prose work referring to one of the warriors of Dutu-Gemunu says that he cut his hair and bathed before putting on the soldier's garb.

The original theme of the sculptor can be read and interpreted with the help of the gestures or *Mudras* of the hands, head and eyes of the two figures. Because of the weathering, the positions of some fingers of the hands cannot be traced. But, I believe, the two sketches of the hands made by L. K. Karunaratna of the Archaeological Department represent the gestures faithfully. This could only be done with a certain use of imaginative construction.

According to *Abhinaya Darpana* of Nandikesvara the gesture of the right hand of the female figure (plate III) could be identified as *Tripataka*. Bending of the third finger and the thumb and stretching of the others represent this gesture (fig. 10). Of the several usages of this gesture enumerated in *Abhinaya Darpana*, one is the "union of man and woman." The gesture of her head can be identified as *Ancita Mudra* which is described thus: the neck is slightly bent to one side; being in love is its usage. Half-closed, half-opened eyes indicate *Nimilita Mudra*. Two of the meanings given to it are subjection to another's will; greeting.

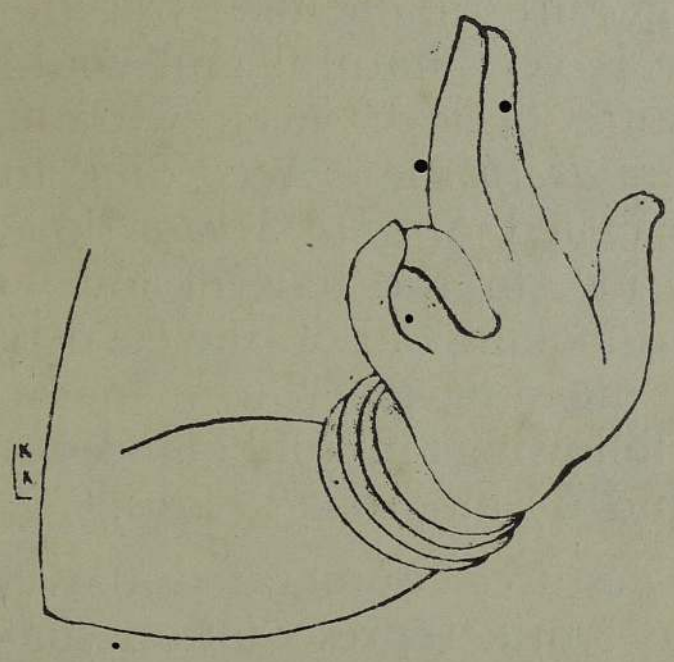

Fig. 10

In regard to the male figure, the gesture of its right hand (fig. 11) can be identified as *Mayura Mudra*, which is made by stretching three fingers and joining the tips of the third finger and the thumb. Of the eleven interpretations enumerated for this gesture, two are as follows: stroking the hair, wiping away the tears.

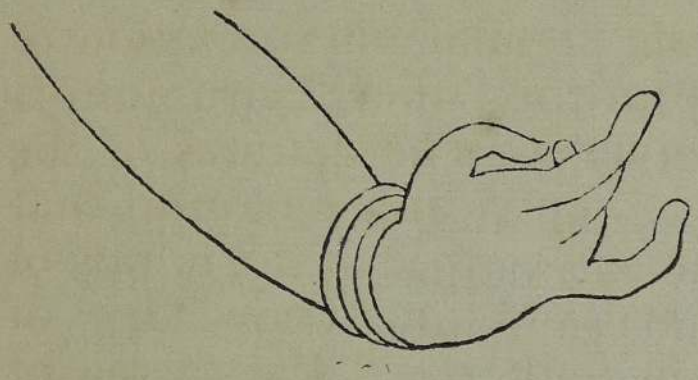

Fig. 11

The meeting of the separated wife and husband naturally suggests the "wiping away of tears." The gesture of the head of the male figure can be definitely identified as *Nihancita Mudra*, which is denoted by raising the shoulder, and touching it with the head. Usage for it is the "pleasure at seeing the beloved". The gesture indicated by the eyes of the same figure is very natural and could be identified as a gesture of love, even without reference to the *Abhinaya Darpana*. According to *Abhinaya Darpana*, it is called *Srngara Mudra* (love gesture) born of great joy, in the toils of love—raising the eyebrows and looking out of the corners of the eyes. The only meaning given to it in the *Abhinaya Darpana* is the following: mutual glances of those who are fast bound by amorous desires.

With the help of the gestures enumerated above, we can reconstruct the erotic representation suggested by the Isurumuniya sculpture. A warrior or a god in the garb of a warrior who was separated from his wife, returns home after a campaign in a foreign land. The sculptor, with the help of the language of gesture, tries to tell the story of their

reunion and depict their emotional reactions which could be better expressed in a poem.

It will be seen that the popular interpretation of this fine piece of sculpture as the "Isurumuniya Lovers" is not a wild guess. The gestures of the faces and eyes of the two figures are so natural that they seem to suggest the above title to the minds of intelligent men who, without any knowledge of *Abhinaya Darpana*, try to understand the theme of the sculptor.

11 THE HUMAN GRIMACE IN POLONNARUVA SCULPTURE

The traditional methods employed by certain sects of ancient Indian mystics to unite with godhead were not free from a tinge of magic and superstition. Ancient sculptors practised some of these methods of empathy to get into the proper mood to carve an image of a particular saint or god.

A Sanskrit text, as translated by Coomaraswamy, says: "Let the imager establish images in temples by meditation of the deities who are the objects of his devotion. For the successful achievement of this yoga the lineaments of the image are described in books to be dwelt upon in detail. In no other way, not even by direct and immediate vision of an actual object, is it possible to be so absorbed in contemplation as thus in making of images."

As the vision of the ancient sculptors has been influenced by religion and magic, their images have qualities which induce modern inquisitive minds to contemplate on or to brood over the mystery of life.

Those who refuse to allow themselves to be influenced by the vision of these sculptors who were devotees of mysticism and magic, remain ignorant of the implications of these creations.

But all ancient sculptures are not of this type, though most of the writers on them have emphasized their symbolic aspect. The depiction of boisterous laughter and human comedy in certain pieces of sculpture at Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva did

not require the spiritual discipline so laboriously acquired for other representations.

Fig. 12 Polonnaruva Dwarfs

The ancient artists had to serve their masters who built the religious monuments. But as human beings and artists they had their lighter moods.

Fig. 13 Polonnaruva Dwarfs

They rarely got an opportunity to express these lighter moods and visions, untrammelled by conventions and religious myths.

In spite of the restrictions imposed on them by their patrons, they sometimes availed themselves

of opportunities to exhibit their creative talents in an occasional piece of secular sculpture.

In carving religious monuments too, they found opportunities to express the joy of life in rollicking fun and play. The best of this class of sculpture is represented by dwarf figures decorating the pillar capitals of Anuradhapura, and the walls of one of the Polonnaruva temples.

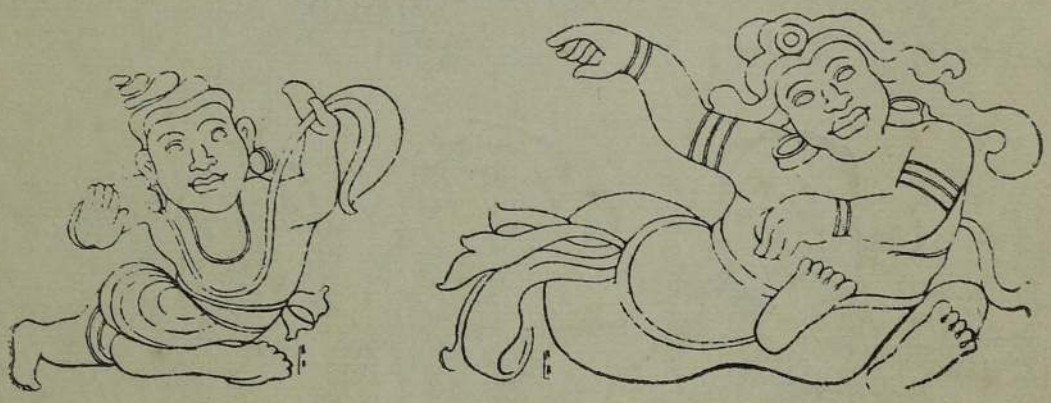

Fig. 14 Isurumuniya Dwarfs

Magical symbolism may have been the origin of the dwarf figure. The figure of the dwarf in guard-stones representing the god of wealth continued to be of magical significance. But when the figure of the dwarf developed into a decorative motif for pillar capitals and walls, it became, I believe, purely an artistic design.

The pottery figures of dwarfs in the half-round, decorating the outer walls of the Tivanka Image House at Polonnaruva (figs. 12,13) represent the highest development of this form of art. They are masterpieces of the human grimace modelled into clay by the potter.

Archaeologists have counted about two hundred and fifty of these figures each differing from the other in grimace and posture. Bell, who sometimes referred with biting sarcasm to the attempt of some scholars to make use of ancient monuments to

boost nationalism, writes thus of these pottery figures in one of his Annual Reports:

"Surmounting these, the vertical portion (1 ft. 4 in.) up to the cyma coping (in lieu of the lion dado below) was divided half-way by another bowtell—a fascia and fillets, all rectangular; above which is a lesser dado of dwarf *ganas*. So crowded are these merry little persons, in their *pradakshina* circumambulation of the building from left to right, that as many as 250 and upwards once 'joined the gay throng that goes laughing along' the foot of the temple's walls.

Fig. 15

"For a more jovial band, male and female, it would be hard to find anywhere, jostling one another, jesting and sporting the while, with all the exuberant good-natured conviviality which marks crowds on pleasure bent.

"The ever-varied attitudes of these *ganas* are worthy of attentive study: they forcibly illustrate the breadth, power, and wondrous skill of the

potter's hand which could fashion this engrossing procession of lifelike figurines—these jolly pigmies, bursting with the full joy of life."

Fig. 16

Most of these pottery figures have been destroyed by weathering. The surviving ones, except a few, have been defaced by weathering and growth of moss.

The stone pillar capitals now scattered on the ground of the Brazen Palace and a few stone slabs at Isurumuniya have a large number of finely carved dwarf figures in innumerable poses and attitudes of dancing and playing (figs. 14, 15, 16).

The Polonnaruva artists make use of the human grimace to express exuberant conviviality and boisterous laughter; but the Anuradhapura artists use the movements of dancing and playing to express the same mood.

Figure 14 represents two dwarfs from Isurumuniya. The dance of one of them is merely spontaneous play, which is an outlet for him to release his exuberant joy of living. Figure 15 represents dwarfs from the Brazen Palace pillar capitals. They try to imitate a well known classical dance pose.

The sculptor has deliberately

employed a dance pose, not to express rhythm of movement but to evoke laughter by calling attention to its incongruity. Behind many a figure on the Brazen Palace pillar capitals there is a streak of unobtrusive humour. The sculptor himself must have laughed heartily when he carved these grotesque figures which will ever remain diminutive and impish.

Fig. 17 Brazen Palace Dwarfs

One of the figures on the pillar capitals of the Brazen Palace is that of a pot-dancer (fig. 16). This dance still survives in villages under the name of *Kala-Pimbima*. Amongst the musical instruments in the hands of the dwarfs (fig. 16), the flute, the stringed instrument called the *veena* and the conch shell could be easily identified. The drums in the hands of the two dwarfs are still used by Kandyan dancers (fig. 17).

12 SINHALESE MASKS

The masks of the Sinhalese are a peculiar contribution of their culture, and they deserve more attention from ethnologists and artists. Even if the aesthetic quality of the best of them "can only please us but not stir," there are other aspects to compensate us for a thorough study of them.

Like the folk tale, they betray certain peculiar aspects of Sinhalese culture, developed under the influence of Buddhism. The Sinhalese masks, even the terrifying ones of devils, do not represent primitive art. They are the works of semi-cultured peasants who use European tools. They represent as much originality and ability as any average similar creations of primitive artists.

In the terrifying aspect, some masks of the Sinhalese, I believe, surpass those of many other countries, except those of Mexico and Peru. "One looks in vain for the erotic motive in Aztec art or anything corresponding to the maternity motive," says Herbert Read. Buddhism too is indifferent to life and treats erotic love with contempt.

The influence of this ascetic attitude to life and human emotions seems to have inspired the Sinhalese peasant artist to create terrifying masks of devils (pl. XVII) and sarcastic caricatures of the faces of foreigners. If there are any perceivable influences on the masks of the Sinhalese, their sources are the wood sculpture of certain primitive races of the East, specially those of the Pacific Islands, as Dr. Pertold suggests in his *Ceremonial Dances of the*

Sinhalese. The European influences on them, I believe, are confined to some features which are the results of the use of modern tools and the assimilation of a few cultural elements of Europe. Any direct influence by way of borrowing from European masks and sculpture is yet to be proved. Until definite evidence is produced, it is reasonable to uphold the view that human-shaped masks were not introduced by Europeans.

Fig. 18

One of the two masks from Goldenweiser's *Anthropology*, here reproduced, (fig. 18, *a*) represents the partially paralysed face of an old man. In symbolism and realism it resembles some of the Sinhalese masks. The other is the mask of a dying warrior. If the realism of these masks can be treated as that of primitive art there is hardly any reason to treat the realistic caricature of the Ceylon masks as a direct borrowing from European art, merely because the Sinhalese came in contact with Europeans.

The Sinhalese peasant believes in devils, but not in the existence of a particular kind of devil with,

for instance, tusks and half a dozen cobras on his head and neck. The mythology of devils is his inherited tradition. The same artist who made the masks of devils made the human-shaped ones. Is there any reason to reject only the latter as introduced by the Portuguese? All of them were the creations of semi-cultured Sinhalese peasant craftsmen.

Devil masks and human-shaped ones are used by the Sinhalese in ceremonial dances. These ceremonial dances are not always of magical significance. But some of the European ethnologists who have studied the ceremonial dances attempt to interpret every item of a dance as being of magic origin and significance. Some of the ceremonies were magical in origin, but they acquired, in course of development, items purely for entertainment. About thirty or forty years ago a regular source of entertainment for the villagers was these ceremonial dances. The climax of some of the dances was reached a few hours before dawn, when the exorcist began his masked performances. To see this climax, village lads kept awake till morning. In response to this demand for entertainment, the ceremonial dances acquired new items which were not of any magical significance. I remember seeing such new items in the masked dances when I was a lad. One of them was called *Ingirisi Sanniya*, which literally meant the "English fit." The dancer appeared in trousers with a mask or face painted in white. Only a foreigner or a sophisticated man of the town would have made the mistake of believing that the exorcist in his disguise represented a European devil who caused fits in the villager.

Most of the human-shaped masks of the peasant craftsmen represent ethnical types of foreigners with

a remarkable realism and sarcasm (pl. XVIII). The Sinhalese villager's genius for satire and humour can be seen in these masks. One of them is a deliberate caricature (pl. XVIII, 2) representing the face of a member of the foreign community known as money-lending Chettiars. He is known to the villagers as a hoarder and exploiter. The artist laughs at him with malicious pleasure. He has, I believe, achieved in this mask a triumph by overcoming the restrictions imposed on him by convention and his medium. It represents only the caricatured face of the particular ethnic type, but under the chin of the mask there is something like a precious stone. It suggests the amulet and gold chain which a wealthy Chettiar wears round his neck.

The Buddhist villagers regard the butcher with horror. The peasant artist who made the mask to represent the Moor (p. XIX, 1) seems to have been actuated by his desire to censure the butcher as a type. A free translation of a verse from the text of *Kolam*, the folk drama, betrays his attitude when he carved the mask.

Wiles of the Moor
Who knows?
Killer of cows,
The Moor steps on the stage—

That the sarcastic laughter of the rural artist at the Westernized Sinhalese is tinged with malice can be seen in the mask to which he has deliberately given an animal shape and a dandy appearance (pl. XIX, 2). The blank idiotic face of one of the masks represents lunacy (pl. XVII, 3). Without the caption of the mask it would suggest the lunatic to any intelligent man. The mask representing deafness would be treated by many as a freak (pl. XVII, 2). It is no

freak but a deliberate creation of magical and abstract symbolism. The mask has no ears. That is the peasant artist's symbolic representation of deafness in man. In place of the right ear on the mask there is a hooded cobra. I believe it is a symbolical and magical device suggested to the artist by classical Sinhalese poetry and legendary zoology. According to legendary zoology, the cobra's auditory organs are in its eyes. There is an allusion to this in a famous classical Sinhalese poem. The poet says that when the *naga* women sing the eulogies of a certain earthly king, the king of the *nagas* is prevented from hearing them by the joyous tears that gush to his eyes.

The rural artist's most heartless creation, in my opinion, is the grotesque mask of the warrior. I do not think that a peasant of any country other than Buddhist Ceylon or India could have created such a cynical and mordant caricature of a soldier (pl. XIX, 3). The following passage describing the dance of the warrior is from Dr. O. Pertold, who has written one of the most reliable studies of the ceremonial dances of the Sinhalese:

"The warrior's wife laments that she has been deserted by her husband whom she has not seen for several years. She describes her husband as a beautiful young man who stands sentry at the palace of Gampola and attracts the hearts and looks of all women. On the stage enters a shaggy, limping man with scars on his face, several teeth missing and his mouth contorted as a result of a sword-wound. Even his nose is disfigured. The warrior comes forward and tells the woman that he is her husband. She does not believe him and threatens to slap his face if he does not desist in his pursuit of her. He boasts about his deeds on the battlefield, how he fought with Tamils by whom he was taken prisoner. Then he describes the battle of Gampola where he fought and lost his nose.....It must have been a favourite scene with the Sinhalese.....The large number of

existing masks represent such disfigured faces that the spectator must have been disgusted looking at them."

The ribald humour and sarcasm of some of the masks would sometimes hurt the susceptibilities of hypersensitive townsmen. But like the folk tales, they are correctives to and criticisms of the ways of our living and thinking.

13 A PUZZLING GAP IN OUR LITERARY PAST

Some of our scholars take more interest in making extravagant claims for ancient Sinhalese literature than in undertaking research to solve some of the problems of Sinhalese culture and evaluating the contribution made to it by the ancient Sinhalese. There are many problems of Sinhalese culture and literature which can be solved by intensive comparative study. In this chapter, I wish to call attention to one of the problems of Sinhalese literature.

We can trace Sinhalese culture to its dim past when King Pandukabhaya built the first tank to give an impetus to collective agriculture. Later the introduction of Buddhism was a turning-point in the independent development of Sinhalese culture and language. Even if we discard the earlier portion of the *Mahavansa* as legendary history, we can trace the continuous development of irrigation, sculpture and architecture with the help of authentic evidence supplied by the archaeologists, and an unbroken continuity in the development of the language, with evidence supplied by epigraphists. But we cannot trace the development of Sinhalese literature beyond a comparatively recent time—the twelfth or thirteenth century. The extant oldest Sinhalese prose work, if we exclude a translation of *Vinaya* and the Sinhalese vocabulary for a Pali commentary, is a thirteenth-century composition.

The flowering age of Sinhalese culture was probably from the fourth to the eighth or ninth century. There is no Sinhalese work of prose or poetry, if we exclude the early verses scribbled on the wall of Sigiriya, representing the genius of this flowering period of culture. According to Professor A. M. Hocart, a former Archaeological Commissioner, the greatest achievements of the Sinhalese in irrigation, sculpture and painting belong to this period, and he considers it the classical age. Dr. Paranavitane, though cautious in arriving at any definite conclusion, seems to have, perhaps unconsciously, supported Hocart's view when he made the following observation in his lecture on the Sigiri graffiti:

"These verses have been written at a time when Sinhalese culture was at the height of its maturity and before the symptoms of decadence began to appear. The men who carved the famous moonstone at the so-called Queen's Palace and the equally well known guard-stone at the 'Elephant Stables' at Anuradhapura must have lived at a time not far removed from that in which the writers of these verses visited Sigiriya.

"The deterioration of taste which gradually set in after the fall of the Gupta dynasty is reflected in the literature as well as in the plastic art of India. It may therefore be legitimate to conclude that there was the same difference between a literary work of the later Anuradhapura period and one of the Kòtte period as there is between two pieces of sculpture, dating respectively from these two epochs."

Minneriya tank, which surpasses others in beauty and vastness, and some of the exquisite Buddha statues and the moonstones of this flowering period

provide sufficient evidence, I believe, to convince an unbiassed student of the independent character of Sinhalese culture. Ananda Coomaraswamy, Havell and a few other European art critics have paid a great tribute to one or two of the Buddha statues of this period. Only a critic with a knowledge of mysticism can acquire imaginative sympathy to appreciate the achievement of the Sinhalese sculptor in whose hands the hard stone became a statue with a subtle expression of spiritual calm and peace which pervade the face, body and every limb. It could not have been the achievement of a single individual. It must have been the achievement of the inherited tradition of generations of Buddhist sculptors.

The few cultural achievements of the ancient Sinhalese which will stand the test of critical examination, are confined to this classical period that produced those statues and tanks. The so-called classical Sinhalese literature will hardly stand the test of modern critical examination. It is the imitative product of a decadent period that began after the tenth century. The real and genuine classical tradition of Sinhalese culture was lost and forgotten. A tradition that began with the decadent period of literature alone survived until the advent of the Portuguese. Because of this decadent and imitative literary tradition, Sinhalese scholars failed to appreciate their genuine older culture which survived in architectural and sculptural remains and tanks of ancient cities buried under the jungle tide.

In art, architecture and irrigation we have a past of which we can talk with genuine feeling. In literature we have a past which does not extend over seven-hundred years, and there is very little in it that can arouse much enthusiasm.

There was a break in the development of Sinhalese culture after the ninth or tenth century, and of the language after the fifth century. According to Geiger and Sir Baron Jayatilaka, the Sinhalese language underwent a characteristic change of great importance after the fifth century. Dr. Paranavitane rejects this hypothesis. But the gap still remains unexplained.

The Buddha criticized and rejected Vedic tradition and ritualism and its ally, popular theism. But he upheld the highest ideals of Indian mysticism and culture. With the gradual decay of older Indian culture and of Buddhism which supported it, a more sophisticated but spiritually superficial and decadent culture began to sweep over India. Ceylon seems to have succumbed, after a fight, to the influence of a wave of this popular culture. The sectarian quarrels of the Sangha and the invasions from India seemed to have helped the later Indianization. After a few centuries of this influence, a great revivalist movement arose and attained its zenith during the time of Parakrama Bahu the Great. But the tradition that grew with this revival had no deep roots in the older culture. Most of the popular elements of the later culture of India fused with the popular elements that survived of the older Sinhalese culture to make the new tradition.

Professor Hocart, in an article contributed to the Ceylon Journal of Science, pointed out that the revivalist movement, begun by Vijaya Bahu I and continued by Parakrama Bahu the Great, was a Sinhalese reaction against Indianization, which probably began in the tenth century.

Dr. Paranavitane, in an article *Mahayanism in Ceylon*, says that the later Indian influence on

Ceylon religion has been mainly the introduction of Puranic forms of Hindu beliefs to the faith of the masses and is a process still going on. The process of this cultural diffusion went on until the Chola invaders were driven out of Ceylon by Vijaya Bahu I, who preceded the great revivalist Parakrama Bahu I. Vijaya Bahu found Buddhism "at such a low ebb that it was necessary to invite properly ordained bhikkhus from Burma to continue the spiritual succession." Hocart says that Parakrama Bahu was in fact a great revivalist, an archaizer—a sure sign of incipient decadence. He points out the decadence that is clearly indicated in Polonnaruva sculpture, contrasting them with those of the classical period.

It can be inferred from the above, that the Sinhalese revival in the twelfth century began at a time when a popular but decadent culture had been already established in place of the earlier classical one. Extant Sinhalese literary works belong to this period. They were the product of a period when the creative genius of the Sinhalese had lost its originality. But still the traces of the simplicity of the earlier classical tradition can be seen even in the two oldest prose compositions: *Sikha Valanda Vinisa* and the *Amavatura*. Imitation, bombast, sentimental exaggeration and pedantry at the sacrifice of form and simplicity are some of the characteristic features of the Sinhalese literature that originated in the thirteenth century. Some of these symptoms of decadence can be seen in the sculpture of the same period.

The problem we have to solve is this: why do we not have a single Sinhalese literary work that belongs to the real classical period of culture? A new language must grow and develop before it can

become the vehicle of higher literature. But the oldest Sinhalese literary work was produced nearly 1,500 years after the beginning of Sinhalese culture. There are references in the old chronicles to poems written in the eighth century, but none has survived.

We see a similar gap between plastic art and literature in the two countries Andhra and Kanarese, of South India. These countries, like Ceylon, were under the sway of Buddhism or Jainism during the early period. The history of Andhra literature begins from the eleventh, and that of Kanarese from the ninth century. The literature of these two South Indian countries and of Ceylon seems to have undergone a parallel development under the influence of the Sanskrit tradition of the later period. Indeed the comparative literary history of Ceylon and South India offers a promising field for study and research.

14 RELIGION AND SINHALESE LITERATURE

Many people think that Sinhalese literature is very rich in religion. That this belief contains only a half-truth becomes apparent to the person who takes the trouble to analyse the religious aspect of Sinhalese literature.

It is true that all our classical prose writers handled stories, legends and anecdotes connected with the Buddha's life or the Buddhist religion. Genuine folk tales when recreated are good literature. But most of the stories narrated in classical Sinhalese prose works, if we exclude the book of *Birth Stories*, are not genuine folk tales. The average educated Buddhist is hardly able to read and understand them because of the obsolete language in which they have been written. And the well-educated Sinhalese who takes an interest in literature finds it difficult to read them with sustained interest, unless compelled to study them for an examination or to edit and paraphrase them for publication. They are monotonous because of the similarity of the stories, and the style in which they have been written.

Writing and copying of books on ola leaves was very expensive. Therefore, a very limited number of copies of classical works were produced. To overcome the expense and shortage, there arose the custom of reading of written tales by a priest or layman to a congregation. This custom exerted an influence on the development of a prose style which appealed to the listener's ear, and at the

same time it made repetition an inevitable virtue. The average educated man now buys printed books for silent reading. The classical Sinhalese prose, except the oldest, was not modelled on a style that appealed to the silent reader. They have some value as literature, but are no substitutes for the original inspiring sermons preached by the great spiritual teacher of the East. In Sinhalese poetical literature there are two or three poems that are capable of inspiring spiritual feeling in the mind of the reader.

A non-canonical Pali book which appeals to the intellect was translated into Sinhalese during the Kandy period, obviously for its propaganda value, to counteract the influence of theism. During the last three or four years a number of short Sinhalese manuals on Buddhism, intended for schools, have been published. But they cannot be regarded as religious books that would inspire adults.

The present-day layman with the best Sinhalese education learns his religion mostly from worthless sources. I say worthless sources, because the religious discourses of preachers, except a few, and the books and the pamphlets produced mostly by propagandists are incapable of evoking genuine religious feeling. Oral or written discourses by priests or laymen are more or less distorted versions of the spiritual truths uttered by the great religious teacher. Interpretations of his message by uninspired priests or laymen become saturated with their own feelings, jealousies, likes and dislikes.

The greatest utterences of spiritual value of the Buddha are at present ignored by the average layman because they are a closed book to him. *Abhidhamma*, the dogmatic philosophy developed in the monasteries, is given the first place with an

undue emphasis at the expense of the deepest and inspiring spiritual utterances of the Buddha. Until very recently the *Dhammapada*, which some people regard as the bible of the Buddhists, was published with elaborate commentaries solely for the benefit of the students of the Pali language and its grammar.

Some years ago attention was called in the Sinhalese Press, to the absence of an easy and simple Sinhalese translation of the *Dhammapada*.

Probably in response to this, two or three simple translations of it have been published recently at a price which is beyond the means of the majority of Buddhists. The beautiful and inspiring religious poetry of the *Suttanipata* has never been translated into Sinhalese verse or prose, though three or more translations are available in English, and one of them in verse is by Lord Chalmers. In one of the edicts of Emperor Asoka, three sermons, probably from the *Suttanipata*, have been recommended for study.

Our leaders, lamenting the decay of religion and morals of the Sinhalese Buddhists, attribute the cause of this decay invariably to the influence of foreign domination of Ceylon for centuries. There is a truth in this accusation, but it has become a way of escape with some of the Buddhists from the consciousness of their defects and superficiality. Ambition, avarice, the lust for power and position and the disregard of cultural and spiritual values are not the result of foreign domination. They are the result of the failure of a people to face with courage and determination a new and changing environment. The Tamils of the North faced most of the revolutionary changes caused by foreign domination better than the Sinhalese, and preserved at least some of their spiritual values. Perhaps

they have been able to preserve them because of the blind veneration demanded by a social code sanctioned by religion. The Sinhalese have a very liberal religion which, in the words of Sir Edwin Arnold, "has in it the proudest assertion made of human freedom". But they had a very poor literature in their own language and a spiritual culture at its lowest ebb when they came in contact with the European nations. The decadence of their spiritual culture, according to Dr. E. W. Adikaram (*The Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon*), began as early as the second century A.D. His statement will not be accepted by orthodox scholars, but there is inscriptional evidence to prove that this decadence was alarming by the twelfth century, and continued till the advent of the Portuguese in spite of several attempts to arrest it. The Sinhalese became a people without strong moorings before the advent of European nations.

The strength to survive and also the germ of decay lie in every religion in its dogmatism and conservatism. Buddhism has an element in its attitude to life, which in contact with highly sophisticated cultures brings about decay. The ascetic ideal, except in a few individuals, will not survive in practice when it is gradually engulfed by an urban civilization which creates wealth and innumerable forms of material devices for enjoyment. With the growth of the urban civilization in ancient Ceylon, the ascetic ideal of the Buddhists gradually decayed, and today it survives only in theory among laymen. Attempts to revive it in highly sophisticated modern Ceylon will tend to create more and more hypocrites—unconscious or conscious. But the attempts to revive the spiritual culture of Buddhism will help the Buddhists to discipline their lives to suit the environment of modern Ceylon. In Pali literature,

I believe, there are the elements to revive and build up a spiritual culture for Buddhists. The propaganda for the revival of ritual religion alone will contribute very little to the task. How can the Sinhalese-speaking population retain their spiritual values when they have not been provided even with a simple and authoritative Sinhalese version of their *Dhammapada* at a price that they can afford to pay? If the Buddhist leaders are earnest in their desire to see that the Sinhalese people acquire some of their lost spiritual values, they should think of supplying two or three simple and authoritative translations of selections of the inspiring spiritual utterances of the Buddha, and the best spiritual poetry of Buddhism.

15 A SINHALESE LITERARY RENAISSANCE

An Indian writer of the third or fourth century adapted Pali *Jataka* stories into Sanskrit. According to Professor Rhys Davids, Arabic and Latin translations were derived from this Sanskrit version called *Panchatantra*. A nineteenth-century Indian scholar then translated into Sanskrit the English version which was derived from the Greek version of their own folk tales. Professor Rhys Davids, in his introduction to the *Jataka Tales*, ironically observes : "It is perhaps worthy of mention, as a fitting close to the so-called *Aesop's Fables*, that those of his stories which Planudes borrowed indirectly from India have at length been restored to their original home, and bid fair to be popular even in this much-altered form. For not only has an Englishman translated a few of them into several of the many languages spoken in the great continent of India, but Narayan Balakrishna Godpole, B.A., one of the masters of the Government High School at Ahmednagar, has lately published a second edition of his translation into Sanskrit of the common English version of the successful spurious compilations of the old monk of Constantinople!"

The attempts of our nationalists to dispense with Western literature by deriving inspiration from Tagore's novels and poetry, or to originate a Sinhalese renaissance by translating them, create a similar ironical situation. Tagore's genius represented the synthesis of Eastern and Western culture that took place in Bengal. He derived

much of his inspiration from the *Upanishads*, the Psalms of the Early Buddhists and the philosophical poetry of Buddhism and from Western literature.

In Bengal a synthesis of culture originated with the predecessors of Tagore. Tagore was one of the best products of this tradition. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee is considered to be the father of the Bengali novel. Priyaranjan Sen (*The Journal of the Department of Letters*, University of Calcutta) says : "No other Bengali had drunk deeper draughts at the fountain of European thought and learning than Bankim Chandra; no one was more Anglicized in his habits of thought and modes of expression. His novels are English in taste, in construction of the plot, in the setting of character, sometimes to a fault. He was no imitator, but the moulds of his thought had come to be, by much reading and assimilation, English, and they imparted their stamp to all his productions."

According to Sen, the father of the Bengali novel was influenced by the novels of Walter Scott, Bulwer-Lytton and Victor Hugo. Tagore was influenced by Bankim's style which, according to the above critic, was influenced by English expression. But Tagore was influenced by others—by the novels of George Eliot, Ivan Turgenev and the plays of Henrik Ibsen.

As I have said earlier, Tagore's genius was nurtured from three sources : Western literature, the *Upanishads*, and Buddhist poetry. We in Ceylon could derive inspiration directly from these three original sources. We have a better tradition of English education. Buddhist poetry is a national heritage to us, though it has not been translated into Sinhalese yet. The *Upanishads* are available even in literal English translations. Is it not then

ironical to translate Tagore's poetry into Sinhalese from English translations, as has been done, or seek inspiration from them for a Sinhalese renaissance? Some of our educated nationalists of the past generation assimilated Western culture better than Tagore or Bankim Chandra. But, unlike Tagore, they rejected their own heritage and language. They have been entirely forgotten, but Tagore continues to live among us.

Even a versatile and well-informed scholar like Dr. Malalasekara, in an article contributed to a Sinhalese pamphlet published by the Sinhalese Cultural Society, argues that we should borrow cultural elements from India, but not from the West because we would not be able to digest the latter. Perhaps he has been alarmed by the attitude of some Buddhist monks who, misled by the novelty of the rather superficial aspect of Western culture and a cheap and false rationalism, began to attack what was of genuine value in their religion. But the argument of Dr. Malalasekara implies that not only Western elements but even Buddhist elements should be predigested by a Tagore or a great Indian; otherwise they would become indigestible to us.

I believe there is an unpleasant but unconscious truth in this argument. Some pieces of poetry of the Buddhist Sisters surpass some of Tagore's poems, and, if done into English by a genius, would be world poetry. Even the *Dhammapada* has not become the deep and charming Sinhalese poem it could be. Recently a very scholarly monk translated it into Sinhalese verse. But unfortunately he chose a very unsuitable metre which has been rendered worse by the hackneyed use made of it by pedantic poets. The philosophical poetry

of *Sutta-Nipata* has never been translated even into Sinhalese prose. Our poets—both the old and the present-day ones—never sought inspiration from these works and never considered translating even some of the exquisite pieces of poetry of the Buddhist Sisters.

These facts show that our nationalists are incapable of digesting their own poetry at its best. Therefore it is well that they should turn towards Bengal to get them pre-digested. But Sir Ivor Jennings' estimate of their attempts to digest the pre-digested elements of Tagore is as follows : "Tagore's genius inspired people of Ceylon to wish to do likewise and though the wish has produced no genius, it had produced some quite good copyists."

We have produced good copyists of Tagore only in dancing and music ; in literature we have produced bad ones. Some of the best and enduring examples of Tagore's genius, I believe, are his short stories. But our nationalists, ignoring them sought to derive inspiration from the English translations of his more popular and sentimental poetry. Two young Sinhalese writers translated his short stories from the original Bengali but they could not sell fifty copies of the book in spite of the hosts of Tagore worshippers. But many of our young writers who contribute to Sinhalese newspapers and magazines still vie with each other in translating passages from his *Gardener* or *Fruit Gathering*. I give two passages from Tagore's *Fruit Gathering* from which, I believe, some of our young writers sought inspiration.

"I woke and found his letter with the morning.

"I do not know what it says, for I cannot read.

"I shall leave the wise man alone with his books, I shall not trouble him, for who knows if he can read what the letter says.

"Let me hold it to my forehead and press it to my heart.

"When the night grows still and stars come out one by one, I will spread it on my lap and stay silent.

"The rustling leaves will read it aloud to me, the rustling stream will chant it, and the seven wise stars will sing it to me from the sky. (iv)"

* * * *

"The joy ran from all the world to build my body.

"The light of the skies kissed and kissed her till she woke.

"Flowers of hurrying summers sighed in her breath and voices of winds and water sang in her movements.

"The passion of the tide of colours in clouds and in forests flowed into her life, and the music of all things caressed her limbs into shape.

"She is my bride,—she has lighted her lamp in my house. (lxxii)"

Shakespeare, without a tinge of Tagore's egotism wrote of a life that :

> Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
> Sermons in stones, . . .

Tagore's greatest source of inspiration was the verses of the *Upanishads*. I give below the English translation of a verse from one of the shortest and most beautiful *Upanishads*. It will be seen that the Upanishadic mystic disparages the egotism of the scientist and of the poet who studies nature or seeks inspiration from nature.

> "Those who worship uncreated nature enter into gloomy darkness; into still greater darkness, those who are devoted to created nature."

I am criticizing not Tagore but the efforts of our nationalists who seek inspiration not from the best of Tagore but from the English translations of his mediocre writings.

The great poets and novelists of every country have been influenced by others. None of them

hesitated, because of a foolish and bigoted nationalism, to derive inspiration from every source that was available to them. Tagore did the same. Anatole France, in his *Life and Letters*, says: "A man who cares only for letters is not interested in such disputes. He knows that no man can reasonably flatter himself that he has thought what no other man has thought before him. He knows that ideas belong to all.....He knows in fact that an idea is of value only because of its form, and that to give a new form to an old idea is the whole of art, and the only creation possible to humanity." In exposing the folly of a French poet who accused a novelist of plagiarizing a situation from one of his poems, he said to the disputants : "Give me but forty-eight hours, and I will find the situation of the generous mother who falsely accused herself, in twenty writers, from the oldest Hindu story-tellers to Madame Cottin."

If we are earnestly concerned in a Sinhalese renaissance we should be prepared to encourage artists with genuine and sincere criticisms and help them with our patronage instead of attempting to mislead them with our own foibles, religious and political prejudices and personal idiosyncrasies. Gloating over another's achievement in literature and art, whether of the West or the East, would not raise the stature of an artist by an inch. A genuine artist, unspoiled by pride, avarice and desire for applause, would, I believe, become better by critically studying all heroes, at the same time criticizing himself and ridiculing hero-worshippers.

I think Buddhism has destroyed heroes by destroying the immortals. The present-day Sinhalese refer to Dutu-Gemunu as a national hero, but our greatest ancient chronicler, Mahanama, made him

a saint. The oldest Sinhalese book on the campaigns of Dutu-Gemunu, referring to his great generals, calls them *yodayas*, the only meaning of which is 'soldiers.' With the present-day sophisticated nationalists, the word has acquired the meaning of the English word 'giant'. But in the usage of the rustics it has acquired, I believe, rightly, a contemptuous meaning too. Instinctively they feel the original spirit of Buddhism which did not attribute heroic virtues to soldiers, whether they were great or small.

16 THE FUTURE OF THE SINHALESE LANGUAGE

To a progressive nation its past is a steep rock from which we can gain a better vision of the future. But to many of us our past is a cloud that blurs the view.

Many of our nationalists, who are not interested in politics, look down on the present and refuse to see the future. They see in the past a golden age, and they live in the dream of it, turning away from the present, which only reveals changes and the glamour of westernization. They ignore the future, which can only be bright for those who rise from their dreams. The present aggravates their inferiority complex, and so they find easy consolation in the exaggeration of the past and the vilification of everything new and foreign. Thus the past blurs their view of the present and the future too. On the other hand, the denationalized indulge their superiority complex by belittling and completely rejecting the past. Between these extremes no compromise seems possible, and it is difficult to devise a sincere policy for solving the language problem.

The sentimental attitude of the nationalists to the past has done more harm to the Sinhalese language than to any other institution. In coils of pseudo-classicism and pedantry, it has strangled a developing living language. The spoken language was not considered respectable enough as a literary language, and no revolutionary change, was therefore possible.

But there has been a gradual change or evolution of the Sinhalese language under modern influences for which journalists, a few writers and a handful of scholars and the common people were responsible.

The nationalists and the majority of scholars, because of their impotent jealousy of the present, rather than their love of the past, are fierce opponents of any movement to simplify the language. But it has undergone a continued change, in spite of an occasional revivalist movement which turns for guidance and inspiration to the oldest writers. The Sinhalese language, if it continues to change at the present pace, will become in a few years an instrument of greater precision and efficiency than any which can be wrought by revolutionary change.

All revivalist movements are signs of decadence and impotence. Fifty years ago there were more revivalist movements than at present. Then the Sinhalese newspapers, monthly journals and books became the organs of revivalist outbursts.

The past is dead and it cannot be revived. That which does not change becomes inert and dies. That which changes survives. The past survives in us, because we have been changing. We can perpetuate the past only by changing ourselves and our heritage.

Further, our past has not much great literature to offer. The literature of the twelfth century did not sink its roots deep enough to absorb sustenance from the flowering period of culture (Anuradhapura Period) or from folk literature.

The Sinhalese translation of the *Jataka* tales is the most valuable literary treasure we possess.

Early Buddhist writers of Ceylon handled and rewrote the original *Jataka* tales with conscious art. The irony and satire natural to such tales have been sharpened in their hands. The Sinhalese translation has been done in the simple, native diction, but the spirit of the preacher's verbose style pervades every story at the expense of its form. In some of the other Sinhalese prose works we find religious myths and *Jataka* tales distorted, merely to conform to conventions derived from Sanskrit models of the later period, and exaggerated for the sake of sentimental appeal. The average educated Sinhalese cannot read and understand them, because of the obsolete language in which they have been written, and the others, because of elaborate pedantry. Some of them have survived because they have been selected as prescribed books for schools.

The present stage of the development of Sinhalese literature has a parallel in Russian literature. My knowledge of Russian literature, particularly the novel and its history is from English translations.

Russia had no modern literature until the nineteenth century. French became the home language of the upper classes. They read and admired French literature. An early Russian intellectual, Herzen, described the westernized Russians thus : "Foreigners at home, foreigners abroad, idle spectators, spoilt for Russia by Western prejudices, spoilt for Europe by Russian habits, they were intelligent but useless, and wasted themselves in artificial life, in gratifying their senses, and in an intolerable parade of egotism.....My own father wrote French much more correctly than Russian, and never read a single Russian book."

But in less than a hundred years, Russia produced a literature which some European critics consider the youngest of the world's great literatures and at its best most spiritually mature.

The early writers who created modern Russian literature sought inspiration from European literature. "We," says Dostoveisky, "took into our soul the genius of foreign nations and thus showed our readiness and predilection for the universal human unification of all branches of the great Aryan race."

How was it possible for the Russian people to produce a great literature in such a short time? The vastness of the country and the suffering of the people alone could not have been the causes of the spiritual maturity of Russian literature. The educated Russian assimilated Western culture. Their old culture was considered to be half Asiatic. Edward Garnett, in an introduction written in 1899 to the fourteenth volume of the collected English edition of Turgenev's works, made the following observation in which some readers will perhaps see prophetic significance :

"The Russian is so inwardly discontented with his own actions that he is such a keen and incisive critic of everything *false* and exaggerated, that he despises all French rhetoric and German sentimentalism. And in this sense it is that the Russian's lack of will comes in to deepen his soul. He surrenders himself thereby to the universe, and, as do the Asiatics, does not let the tiny shadow of his fate, dark though it may be, shut out the universe so thoroughly from his consciousness, as does the aggressive struggling will-power of the Western man striving to let his individuality have full play. .....The mental attitude of the Russian

peasant indeed implies that in blood he is nearer akin to the Asiatics than Russian ethnologists have wished to allow. Certainly in the inner light of thought, intellectually, morally, and economically, he is a half-way house between the Western and Eastern races, just as geographically he spreads over two continents. By natural law his destiny calls him towards the East. Should he one day spread his rule further and further among the Asiatics and hold the keys of an immense Asiatic empire, well ! future English philosophers may feel thereat a curious fatalistic satisfaction."

The educated Sinhalese have assimilated Western culture. Eastern culture is a social inheritance to them. Therefore are they not in a unique position to create a great future for the Sinhalese language by taking into their soul the genius of foreign nations ? We have assimilated what was best of the Indian culture, and later the superficial and pedantic. If we purge away the superficial and pedantic elements and take into our soul the genius of other nations, we shall be able to create a better and greater tradition. Our concentrating on what others have to give will help us to mould ourselves afresh. It will not destroy our language or literature. A language is too intimate a belonging of man to be thus destroyed.

The language of a nation is not solely a utilitarian institution. In its growth from a remote past the language absorbed the sighs and sobs, sorrows and joys of successive generations. A nation's past lives through the language. Even in the life of an inveterate sceptic, there are moments which drive him to seek consolation from old institutions he has rejected. But for them, he would become so desperate in such moments that he would seek

relief in violence or self-destruction. Religion, nationalism or internationalism, or his own mother tongue will be a refuge for him.

Turgenev knew the French language as well as a Frenchman. He loved a French woman, and lived in France. What follows is an emotional outburst of Turgenev in praise of his language. He derived consolation from contemplating his own language at moments of despair in his life :

"In days of doubt, in days of painful thought about the fate of my country, you alone help and support me, O great, powerful, truthful and free Russian tongue. Were it not for you, how could I escape despair, seeing all that is happening in my country ? But I cannot fail to believe that such a language can only have been given to a great people."

17 THE LANGUAGE PROBLEM IN CEYLON

Those who emphasize the importance of English and disparage the national languages say that our nationalists are swayed by emotion. It is true that most of them are swayed by an inferiority complex and sentiment rather than by realities. But are the advocates of English free from sentiment and acquired prejudice? The attitude of the sentimentalists of both camps contributes very little to the solution of a difficult and urgent problem on which the cultural development and good government of this country depend.

English is our gateway to world culture and world literature. English is absolutely necessary for international communication and it is the medium by which we can acquire scientific knowledge. But all these undeniable facts do not constitute an argument to discard and disregard the national languages or to give them a subordinate place.

Of the English-educated people very few are interested in the vast treasury of knowledge, culture and spiritual inspiration that can be acquired through the medium of English. International communication will always be in the hands of a few select people. It would seem therefore that many have taken to English for earning a livelihood and acquiring social prestige. This prestige develops in them a feeling of vulgar superiority. They are not interested in using the English language to acquire

any accomplishment or for contributing to the cultural life of the country. Therefore the argument that world culture will filter into the country through English loses much of its force, for the majority of the English-educated seem indifferent to such interests. In other words, the sentimentalists among the advocates of English are not alive to the exact situation. I am a firm supporter of bilingualism, a thorough knowledge of a national language and English, but those who assert that the English-educated are necessarily cultured are overstating their case.

The segregation of the English and the Sinhalese-educated, and the contempt the former have for their own language prevent the diffusion of progressive ideas amongst the latter class. Some educationists emphasize the evils of segregating Sinhalese and Tamil children for teaching them their own languages but they ignore the growth of a worse form of communalism that places a barrier between the English-educated minority and the vast majority of people of the same community. In Ceylon the causes of class-consciousness are not entirely economic. Evils of segregation resulting from differences of language, dress and caste aggravate it.

When the British were masters of Ceylon, the people were forced by circumstances and their helpless condition to tolerate English as the official language. The masses supported the nationalist politicians in their fight for independence because they desired to get rid of innumerable oppressions that they had to submit to and endure under the foreign rule ; but not because they appreciated an abstraction called independence. The idea that the British were tolerant and just became proverbial

amongst them, and they attributed, rightly or wrongly, all oppressions and corruptions to other sources. One of them was the continuation of a foreign language as the only means of communication between the government and the governed.

I believe that those who advocate English as the only language as well as the nationalists, are ignoring a vital fact: we are now a bilingual people. Therefore the solution of the language problem depends on finding a way to impart a thorough knowledge of the national language and of English to boys and girls and to devise means to induce them to maintain a sustained interest in the national language. Unfortunately most of our educationists are not greatly concerned with devising ways and means for an efficient bilingual system of education. The nationalists who are clamouring to get an official status for Sinhalese and Tamil are not interested in continuing an efficient system of instruction in English. Apart from ignoring the need for an efficient bilingual system, they think there is only one way of creating a sustained interest in the national language among the educated minority who control the administration of the country—i.e. gaining recognition for it as an official language. What of making it the medium of instruction ?

There is, I believe, a confusion in emphasizing the difficulties in making the national languages the medium of instruction. Two difficulties are invariably mentioned: one refers to the dearth of good books in the mother tongue, and the other to the poverty of the language to express modern knowledge. The first is true to some extent, and the second is the result of a confusion.

Even the language of a barbarous nation has words, roots and suffixes which when combined

are capable of expressing the concepts of science, art and philosophy of any highly advanced modern nation. Sinhalese is a well-developed language with a history of nearly two thousand years. The modern ideas of science or philosophy can be clearly expressed in Sinhalese. The dearth of Sinhalese books on modern knowledge is not due to any poverty of the language, but to the dearth of writers who take the trouble to study and assimilate modern subjects.

If a person assimilates any kind of modern knowledge and takes the trouble to do some independent thinking, he will find that his own language has all the words he requires to express his ideas clearly and without any ambiguity. This does not apply to the writing of textbooks on science, which requires precise terms. At present there are no such terms in Sinhalese, and the coining of them by scholars will be of little use. They will arrive spontaneously in the future when our bilingual scientists—as they should be—begin to teach and undertake research. The proposal to teach advanced science in the mother tongue is absurd. The precise scientific terms are confined to the vocabulary of scientists and science students. Therefore the technical terms should come out from our future bilingual scientists. But to convey scientific knowledge to the general reader or student, technical terms are not very essential.

As in English or any other highly developed language, the Sinhalese also have the same number of idea-units. By combining them, any modern concept of science or philosophy can be expressed, of course, by a man who has studied and assimilated the particular subject.

"More basic than words," say Professor Melville Jacobs and Bernhard J. Stern in their *Outline of Anthropology*, "are minimal units of distinguishable meaning, or idea-units, which number some thousands in every language. They have lately been termed *morphemes*. For example, the English word *railroads* has three such *morphemes*, *rail*, *road* and *s* for plural number. A scientific linguist's dictionary is therefore not so much an alphabetized inventory of words as it is an inventory of *morphemes* together with possible *morpheme* combinations, such as *railroading* and *railroads*. It is noteworthy that in every language, no matter how primitive the habitations, customs, or technology of the people who speak it, there may be found a vocabulary or *morphemes* and *morpheme* combinations large and varied enough to permit the expression of any idea known to any other people. In other words, the vocabulary of no people is either permanently handicapped or even severely limited at the moment of need to express a newly introduced concept.

"Every vocabulary constitutes a tool so complex and so specially adaptable that its *morpheme* resources can at once be employed to denote any new and complex technological, scientific, abstractly philosophical, and poetic interests which the people may have acquired. In this sense all languages display indefinite plasticity and rapid or immediate adaptability. It cannot be shown that in the matter of adaptability of vocabulary any one language is superior or inferior to any other."

The dearth of good books for primary education can be overcome in a short time without much difficulty if their production is encouraged. The

production of Sinhalese books will continue to be of poor quality as long as the teachers are indifferent and many of our educationists remain ignorant of the language. The Education Department's preference for and prescription of thirteenth-century Sinhalese books for S. S. C. students are creating an aversion in the minds of the students for that language. The thirteenth-century books, I believe are suitable for under-graduates who study philology and literature. Forcing these unreadable old books down the throats of schoolboys is the best way of creating a distaste in them for Sinhalese.

18 SOME CRITICAL TERMS IN SANSKRIT POETICS

Of the many technical terms used in Sanskrit poetics there are a few which have affinities in meanings with critical terms used by some modern English critics. In Sanskrit and Sinhalese criticism of art and literature a term meaning "beauty" does not occur.

Instead of a theory of beauty, the earliest Sanskrit literary critics developed the theory of *Rasa* which persisted, like the theory of beauty in Western aesthetics, in spite of all attempts to explain its philosophical and psychological implications by a succession of scholars who contradicted each other.

The theory of *Rasa* can be explained as the theory of the aesthetic quality of art. Most of the terms in Indian poetics have an intimate relation to this technical term *Rasa*. One of the earliest scholars who accurately rendered the term into English was, I believe, Ananda Coomaraswamy. He translated it as "flavour" which metaphorically conveys the original meaning, though the English word will never become *a critical term* like the Sanskrit one.

The word *Rasa* is an epicure's term probably borrowed from the culinary art. The originator of the term, sage Bharata, who wrote a book on the drama and poetry, says flavour is produced by mixing sauces and different other ingredients and vegetable. In the same way, by a conflux of different emotions flavour is produced. Men of good heart, who eat food comprising dishes prepared by mixing different ingredients, relish its flavour. Men

of good heart who see a play enjoy the flavour of the dramatic presentation of emotions.

Rasa is the term used in Sanskrit poetics to specify the main aesthetic quality of a work of art: a poem, drama or a story. According to the *Rasa* theory, ugliness is also an aesthetic quality, from which a man of taste derives pleasure. It will be seen that the *Rasa* theory avoids some of the difficulties and contradictions raised by the use of the word "beauty" by European aestheticians. The plot, characters, figures of speech and other aspects of a poem unite to produce *Rasa* which, the earlier *Alankarists* said, is the soul of poetry, the plot being the body, and the figures of speech the external ornaments.

There are nine *Rasas* or aesthetic qualities which evoke nine different pleasurable emotions connected with different instincts. Ugliness in art evokes in the mind of a man of taste a pleasurable sensation which is related to the instinct of disgust: erotic quality evokes a different pleasurable sensation which has its roots in the sexual instinct. The other *Rasas* or aesthetic qualities are also the sources of pleasurable emotions connected with different instincts.

Professor McDougall gives a list of fourteen instincts and their various emotional qualities. The nine *Rasas* enumerated in Sanskrit poetics have a resemblance to nine out of fourteen instincts and their various emotional qualities given in McDougall's list. The *Rasa* theory seems to have a basis in a psychological analysis of instincts and their related emotional qualities.

English critics who are dissatisfied with the term "beauty" sometimes prefer to use the word "flavour" to indicate the peculiar quality of a work

of art that appeals to the emotions. Eric Newton, in his *European Painting and Sculpture*, says: "Beauty, then, is an almost meaningless word if one attempts to attach to it any absolute value. It is merely a convenient and ingenious piece of shorthand.

"It is for that reason that the very word which has attached most firmly to the arts, which seems indeed to provide the ultimate test of their validity, must be viewed with the utmost suspicion. 'Beauty' is a word that does good service in everyday conversation. It ties together in a haphazard but useful way a host of human experiences, but in telling the story of art I shall try (doubtless not always successfully) to avoid it. It leads its users into too many pitfalls."

Eric Newton seeks the help of culinary art to explain the quality in a work of art that appeals to the connoisseur. He compares the stylistic quality of art to that peculiar flavour of the pudding made by a chef by mixing different ingredients. "Every work of art,—" says he, "every picture or statue—has its own flavour—its style."

An American writer, De Witt H. Parker, in an article on aesthetics contributed to the *Twentieth Century Philosophy*, says: "The problems have been two; whether aesthetic judgment or 'taste' is intuitive, a sort of 'sixth sense', or rational, an affair of rules; and what constitutes the beauty or value of works of art to be appraised. The two problems are, however, clearly interconnected; for if beauty be a sort of unique flavour, a *je ne sais quoi*, it would not be susceptible of formulation, but only of immediate apprehension; while if, on the contrary, it be no different in kind from other values, it would be as capable of rational estimation as they are. Considering the tenacity with which each of

these alternatives has been maintained by critics with large experience in the arts, it would be strange if there were not some truth in both."

The Indian theory deals with both problems. The word "flavour" (*Rasa*), which is a technical term in Indian poetics, is used by an English critic and also by an aesthetician.

Another Sanskrit term *bhavakatva* has an affinity, I believe, to the meaning and the ideas implied by the use of the word *sensibility* as a new critical term by one school of critics.

Dr. F. W. Bateson in an article in *Essays in Criticism* (a quarterly journal), after tracing the history of and analysing the term *sensibility*, says: "For *sensibility* divorced from *dissociation*, unless it is restricted to the faculty of sensation, there is little to be said. In the 1920's the word was the shibboleth of a vigorous critical party. At that time its imprecision was useful because *sensibility* appeared to unite the whole of Anglo-American *avant-garde*—those for whom the senses stood for the concrete objective fact (the imagists), and those for whom they meant the instincts (like Joyce and D. H. Lawrence). Its use today as a loose honorific synonym for 'taste' or 'personality' can only be deprecated."

If the Sanskrit term *bhavakatva* is to be rendered into English, then the word that would best convey the meaning would be *sensibility* in its new critical sense. The dictionary meaning of the word *bhavaka* is "having a taste for the sublime and beautiful." Therefore the meaning of the word *bhavakatva* is "the faculty to apprehend the sublime and the beautiful."

Another Sanskrit term is *chamatkara* which is explained as "the melting of the heart by the relish

of poetic flavour". According to Sanskrit poetics, the faculty to apprehend the sublime and beautiful is an instinct or a gift of the spirit, which is inherited and could be perfected by cultivation or in successive rebirths.

Herbert Read, who uses the term *sensibility* profusely in his *Philosophy of Modern Art*, and sometimes to denote the aesthetic quality of art, says that sensibility is a physical endowment inherited rather than acquired. Indian critics seem to have been more logical than Read who makes a crude biological speculation.

19 A RATIONAL THEORY OF TRADITION IN BUDDHISM

The scientific tradition inherited by Europe is exclusively attributed to Greece, and the writers on the history of science deny its existence in the ancient East.

According to certain modern writers on the history of culture, the Greek scientific tradition does not mean merely science, for nobody can deny the existence of science, at least in its rudimentary form, amongst primitive people.

Professor Benjamin Farrington, a classical scholar, says in *Science in Antiquity*, that the modern historian, out of a mistaken partisanship for Greece, strained every nerve to deny the existence of science in the ancient East because "Greek history has been written as if the mission of Greece had been to save Europe from some dread abstraction called orientalism".

Yet Professor Farrington in his *Head and Hands in Greece* explains that the Greek scientific tradition is unique because it constituted a mutation in human thinking.

Another classical scholar, Professor K. R. Popper in an article contributed to the *Rationalist Annual 1949*, tries to give a similar interpretation to the Greek tradition. He says: "What was this queer thing, the invention of rationalist philosophy, that happened in Greece? Some modern thinkers assert that Greek philosophers tried for the first time to understand what happens in nature. I shall show you that this is an unsatisfactory account."

He says that not only Greek philosophers but the primitive myth-makers also tried to understand what happened in nature. And then he goes on to explain his interpretation of the Greek tradition: "I think the main difference which early Greek philosophers introduced was roughly this: they began to discuss these matters. Instead of accepting the previous religious tradition uncritically, and repeating it dogmatically (as children do who protest if Aunty alters one word of their favourite fairy tale), instead of merely handing on a tradition, they challenged it, and they sometimes even invented a new myth instead of the old one. We have, I think, to admit these new stories which they put in place of the old were, fundamentally, myths—just as the old stories were; but there are two things about them to be noticed.

"First, they were not the repetitions of the old stories but contained new elements. But this is in itself not a very great virtue. The second and main thing is this: the Greek philosophers invented a new tradition—namely, the tradition of adopting a critical attitude towards myths; the tradition of discussing them.....This was a thing that had not happened before."

Professor Whitehead in his *Science and The Modern World* says that the progress of science in the ancient world, including Greece, was very little compared with the miraculous success of it in seventeenth-century Europe. He says, nevertheless, that Greece was the mother of Europe. The origin of modern ideas of Europe is traced to Greece. Ionian philosophers were interested in theories of nature. Their ideas have been transmitted to Europe, enriched by the genius of Plato and Aristotle. "But," says Professor Whitehead, "with the exception of Aris-

totle, and it is a large exception, this school of thought had not attained to the complete scientific mentality. In some ways, it was better. The Greek genius was philosophical, lucid and logical. The men of this group were primarily asking philosophical questions: What is the substratum of nature? Is it fire, or earth, or water, or some combination of any two, or of all three? Or, is it a mere flux, not reducible to some static material?"

The same philosophical questions have been raised by the ancient Indian mystics. *Prasna Upanishad* contains questions asked by students and replies given by the teacher. One pupil, Katyayana, asked:

> "Sir, whence, verily, are creatures here born?
> How does it come into this body?
> Through what does it depart?
> How does it relate itself to the external?"

Svetasvatara Upanishad is composed of replies given to philosophical questions amongst which these occur:

> "What is the cause? Brahma? Whence were we born
> Time or nature, or necessity, or chance, or the elements...are the cause?
> Not a combination of these, because of the existence of the soul."

The rational tradition, inherited by Europe and exclusively attributed to Greece, is a gift that the Sinhalese inherited from Buddhism. The only great difference is that it never stimulated the Sinhalese to investigate nature. It stimulated them to take an aggressively critical attitude towards myths, and later towards theistical philosophies.

In criticizing tradition, Buddhists resort frequently to the following passage from Kalama Sutta a discourse of the Buddha in *Anguttara Nikaya.*

Certain men of the warrior caste came to the Buddha and said: "The Ascetic and the Brahmin is praising each his own doctrine and condemning the others. As we cannot decide what to accept as truth and what to reject as falsehood, we are in doubt."

The Buddha told them that it was legitimate to doubt and to take a sceptical attitude, and he encouraged them to criticize the tradition by giving them the following advice:

"Accept nothing on the authority of Vedic tradition.

"Do not accept anything on the authority of tradition handed down by the older generation.

"Do not accept anything because you think that it ought to be so.

"Do not accept anything because of its agreement with the doctrines of your books.

"Do not accept anything because it is rational.

"Do not accept anything because it is logical.

"Do not accept anything by reasoning on its form which appeals to you.

"Do not accept anything because it agrees with your own pet view.

"Do not accept anything because it is said by an ascetic whom you are bound to honour."

The Buddha has repeated this advice in another discourse *Bhaddiya Lichchavi Sutta* in the same *Nikaya.*

If someone should take the trouble to analyse the above passage, he would realize that not only tradition attributed to the Greeks but also something ignored by the Greek tradition is embodied in it.

The Buddha definitely did advise the people to challenge tradition, but he went further in encouraging them not to reject the mystic tradition—that is—self realization. He advised the people to subject rationalism itself to criticism because he upheld the mystic tradition.

Some Western thinkers and scientists are now gradually realizing the inadequacy of the scientific tradition because it encouraged people to reject completely the religious tradition.

The Buddha's character and life symbolize the critical and mystical attitude he adopted. He challenged the Vedic tradition, destroyed the old myths and the animal sacrifice, and substituted new myths and harmless rituals. He criticized, like a rationalist the Brahminical theory of the individual soul, and gave a new and more daring interpretation based on his own mystical experience, to the conception of God of Upanishadic philosophers.

I am not arguing that the Buddha formed his critical theory of tradition in the same scientific manner in which the Greek philosophers tried to interpret and analyse natural phenomena. The Buddha arrived at his conclusion by directly and rationally analysing the tradition itself and ignoring the natural world. One aspect of the existing tradition of his time—that is, the theory of rebirth—he accepted without questioning and rationalized it. Therefore, he concentrated on discovering a way of becoming perfect or a way of escape from the endless succession of births and deaths.

As the Buddha and Greek philosophers had different aims and methods of taking the same attitude towards tradition, the question of borrowing does not arise.

Many people will inquire why it is that we do not have this tradition here now. In fact it is not completely absent, though it has never survived as a living tradition after the decay of Buddhism in India. The Buddhist critical tradition was not the result of the development of scientific method. It was a daring rational tradition invented to explore the moral and spiritual rather than the natural world. Therefore it did not develop in the manner of the Greek tradition. It decayed when the original Buddhism began to decay in India, and later completely disappeared.

The Buddhists of Ceylon still retain the spirit of this critical tradition. Even the uneducated Buddhists do not hesitate to challenge and criticize the message of the high priest or his decision and the sermon.

Educated priests boldly criticize many traditional doctrines of Buddhism, and both the educated and the uneducated laymen freely criticize the present-day temple rituals.

Many Hindus of Jaffna still regard the beef-eating Christians as outcasts. But the Buddhists have no taboos, and they embrace the Christians as their kith and kin, irrespective of their dietary habits. Most of these habits and attitudes of the Sinhalese are the result of the rational theory of tradition of the original form of Buddhism and the result of new cultural contacts.

Tradition is very essential for the preservation of stability and advancement of a nation, society, or even a family. No nation or society will survive as an integrated whole if its tradition is completely wiped out. But at the same time any tradition, when unchanging, becomes a canker which will

slowly destroy a nation, like putrefaction that arrests growth.

If we can revive the critical theory of tradition bequeathed to us by Buddhism, we can avoid such putrefaction, and at the same time avert the disconcerting consequences we see in Europe as a result of the entire rejection of religious tradition by the intellectuals.

20 REALISTIC TRADITION OF THE SINHALESE

Professor Gilbert Murray commenting on a lecture given by an Italian liberal in Oxford, deplores the intrusion of romanticism into politics and real life.

"This romanticism," says Gilbert Murray, "which had its place in art, and was mostly confined to small artistic circles, has burst out into real life and, in country after country, has taken possession of the common man. What was an interesting speculation among intellectuals has become to the unthinking a dogma and an inspiration. When acted upon, it produces fanatics. We must all have noticed how Communists, Fascists and believers in various 'isms' become like religious sectaries. They talk and, when opportunity offers, even act as if their own theory or watchword were the one world-healing truth, and all its opponents outcasts."

Here in Ceylon we see the invasion of this romanticism into politics as well as into national life itself. Exaggeration of our past and our national life has been intensified since we gained our independence. Romantic exaggeration of politics and political theories in Ceylon, of course, will be admitted as an influx from the West. But many people will refuse to admit that the romanticism behind present-day nationalism and even literature is a cult which came from the West.

There is no romanticism in the oldest Sinhalese literature. Even religious romanticism is a later

influence which crept into religion after the tenth century from the Sanskrit literature of a later decadent India. This religious romanticism itself was limited to the exaggeration of the traits of the Buddha's character and the lives and the miraculous deeds of his disciples. Some stories of the Buddha's life, because of this exaggeration, resemble the fairy tale rather than the romance.

Early Sinhalese writers referred to the King of Ceylon by his name without strings of epithets. Only a word meaning 'chief' or 'sri' preceded the name of the king, and the Buddha was frequently referred to by a single word even without the epithet Lord. The writers were either priests who scrupulously observed the rules of ascetic life or laymen trained by them. The style of language of the early writers was simple and sometimes approached ascetic austerity.

Romantic exaggeration and bombast crept into Sinhalese literature probably after the eighth century. This exaggeration can be seen reflected in the colossal sculptures of a later period. Even this has been confined to religious themes until the advent of the Portuguese.

Buddhism inculcated in the minds of the Sinhalese people a realistic, and sometimes a pessimistic, attitude towards life. This anti-romantic spirit of Buddhism purged the artists and writers of their desire for the exaggeration of life and passions except for the purpose of showing their devastating aspects.

One of the greatest prose works of classical Sinhalese literature which appeals to the emotions is the *Jataka* stories. This compilation contains about 547 stories, including animal fables, and only a very few of them equal a modern novel in length. Most of these stories including the fables are realistic. Some

of them have been turned into ruthless satires by Buddhist writers. One story says in a few lines how a king disrobed 500 ascetics and forced them to join the army. A few of the stories sneer at men who believe in female chastity, and others expose religious humbug. Strange superstitions and animistic beliefs join with other elements to make the background of many of the stories. In spite of this background some stories have been turned into satires to laugh at men and women who cling to astrology and prognostication. Stories subjecting caste arrogance, credulity, the pretensions of Brahmins and the vanity and cruelty of kings to merciless satire are not rare. Some satirical fables equal *Gulliver's Travels* and *Candide* in their hatred of human baseness and greed.

The present-day uneducated villager, more than the educated, is influenced in his attitude to life by these stories. It is an immemorial custom to impart religious education to men and women by reading *Jataka* stories. Until very recently it was the habit of every village priest to relate a *Jataka* story in his sermon. A few of the stories assumed the garb of the real folk-tale by undergoing changes at the hands of village story-tellers who narrated them to entertain boys and girls. The villager is ignorant of the satirical and other deeper literary aspects of these stories, but his realistic and practical view of life is largely the result of their influence.

The romantic exaggeration of love that invaded Sinhalese literature is a later influence from the popular literature of the West. Romantic love is entirely a borrowed theme in modern Sinhalese literature.

The classical Sinhalese writers condemned the two great epic poems, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*.

One writer referred to them as "books of prattle", and another as "balderdash". It is evident that they ignored the great poetry of these works because of their own religious views and the romantic exaggeration of the lives and exploits of Hindu Gods and kings. *The Arabian Nights* was translated into Sinhalese and published with superb illustrations about fifty-four years ago, but it was a failure. The Sinhalese name of the book became a synonym even amongst villagers for any exaggerated and absurd story or lie.

The Sinhalese villagers, like the peasants of many other countries, are yet uninfluenced by romantic literature. Therefore they still retain the traditionally realistic and unconsciously practical attitude to life. This is an asset that can be handled and turned to foster the spirit of democracy and tolerance. But the tendency, whether conscious or unconscious, of the present-day propaganda of all political parties and of even the education imparted to village boys and girls is, I believe, to inculcate an attitude of romantic exaggeration in passions as well as in every thing national. This propaganda and the narrow outlook of many school teachers will slowly eradicate the healthy Buddhist attitude to life which still lingers in the minds of the unsophisticated masses in spite of their superstitious beliefs.

The Sinhalese teachers and some educationists still prefer heroic and romantic tales as the best literature that should be read by our boys and girls in Sinhalese schools. "All these romanticisms and fanaticisms under the mask of unselfishness and devotion to noble causes are really expressions of over-grown and semi-insane egoism," says Gilbert Murray.

Educated men who are not acquainted with the cultural background of the Sinhalese villagers attribute their traditional attitude to ignorance and lethargy. It is true that the majority of them are illiterate, superstitious and lethargic. But their lack of enthusiasm for becoming converts and fanatics in response to the nationalistic and socialistic propaganda of political parties is due to the spirit of their religion. If we destroy this instinctively rational attitude by indiscriminate propaganda, we are destroying their traditional moorings. The Buddhist masses are not disciplined by a church. There is no such institution as a church in Buddhism. And even their devotion to the Buddha or his Dhamma is quite of a different kind from that of the devoted theist. Therefore the cutting away of their traditional moorings, without substituting a form of modern discipline, which can only be acquired by a long process of intellectual and spiritual culture, will lead to their demoralization.

21 NATIONAL REVIVALIST MOVEMENTS

The nationalists are lamenting the decay, and are clamouring for the revival of ancient institutions, customs and habits. But few of them have a clear and rational conception of the implications of their revivalist movements.

The decay of an institution or a custom means that it has ceased to change with the changing environment. Decay is the visible effect of failure of an institution to function effectively by adapting itself to changes.

I believe there are two methods by which we can revive and perpetuate such an institution: either changing the institution to enable it to adapt itself to the changing environment, or changing the environment to suit the institution which has ceased to change. The second method is difficult, and sometimes impossible.

I propose here to analyse without sentimental bias the implications and the possible ultimate results of the attempt of politicians and nationalists to revive the indigenous system of medicine.

In opening an institution to modernize Ayurveda, the politicians, consciously or unconsciously, seem to have accepted the impossibility of applying the second method: that is—the changing of the environment to suit Ayurveda, which ceased to change about five or six centuries ago, except in the dress, behaviour and attitude of the practitioner.

Ayurveda has a real and great survival value as an art—that is, as the art of healing. As science there is very little survival value in it now. I do not deny that there is a philosophical value in the so-called theoretical and scientific aspect of Ayurveda. But that speculative knowledge is not only useless, but sometimes dangerous in the hands of a physician who treats not the ailments of the soul but the ailments of the body.

The major part of the physiology and biology taught in Ayurveda has been borrowed from the mystic philosophy of the *Upanishads*. A French scholar, Rene Guenon, writing on Vedanta philosophy, says that the theories of physiology and biology derived from a mystic philosophy, are true for that particular philosophy with which and for which they were developed.

There is a biological theory in Ayurveda borrowed from the mystic philosophy called the "theory of *koshas*". *Koshas* literally mean envelopes. Those who are acquainted with modern biology will regard this theory as occult superstition. But as a philosophical speculation it has a strange resemblance to the speculations of certain modern biologists.

Dr. Joseph Needham, the Cambridge biologist, in his *Time: The Refreshing River*, writing of the levels of organization in nature says: "From the scientist's standpoint the organic conception of the world involved succession in time, envelopes in space. Taking the first, it is obvious that the different levels of organization, for such we must call them, occur one within the other.....The remarkable thing about our world is, however, that these envelopes seem to be analogous to past phases of the history of its development."

The theory of *koshas* or envelopes of Indian mysticism includes an envelope of chemical matter, an envelope of life, an envelope of mind, an envelope of consciousness, and an envelope of bliss or soul. Professor Paul Deussen in his *Philosophy of Upanishads*, says that these envelopes "are manifested alike in mankind and nature as a whole.....Stripping off these sheaths one by one, and gradually penetrating deeper and deeper, we finally reach the inmost essential being of a man and of nature."

The theory of *koshas*, I believe, means levels of organization. The difference between it and the speculations of the Cambridge biologist is that the Indian mystic begins with matter, and ends with the Absolute or the Universal Soul, while the modern biologist begins with matter and ends with the mind as the highest organizational level.

As I have digressed, I must return to the original point I wished to discuss. The College of Indigenous Medicine has been started to revive Ayurveda by synthetizing it with some elements of modern science. But as there was opposition the lecturers of the College set about it in a half-hearted way. Still there are no Sinhalese textbooks on anatomy, physiology and biology, though some nationalists say that they can produce even advanced textbooks on science for the University, if Sinhalese is made the medium of instruction. The lecturers' knowledge of Sinhalese is very weak, and they find it difficult to impart to the students a good knowledge of those subjects.

The graduates of the College use stethoscopes and thermometers and prescribe quinine and patent medicines. Their status is higher than that of the traditionally-trained physicians. They charge

fees, and are gradually approaching the affluent condition of Western-qualified medical practitioners.

It is not very difficult to guess the probable result of this revivalist movement. In place of the traditional Ayurveda, there will be a new synthetic system, in which only the art of healing of the old system will survive. And in another thirty or forty years there will be a very large number of doctors who will migrate to small towns, and competition will arise between them and the new Ayurvedic physicians. By local research and by assimilating the result of research in India, the science of Western medicine will gradually absorb the drugs of Ayurveda, and become more adapted to our environment. So competition will become very acute. The result, perhaps, will be the gradual ousting of the new Ayurvedic physician and his system, if one system does not absorb the other peacefully by a large and more comprehensive synthesis.

A few years ago the Sinhalese notaries were flourishing. Now they are being rapidly ousted by the proctors, and in few years more they will be completely displaced. I am not suggesting that the attempt to revive Ayurveda will suffer the same fate easily or in a short time. But the nationalists who clamour for the revival of ancient institutions should know the process by which the revival becomes possible.

I believe the greatest and real value of all revivalist movements is in the influence they exert to avoid cultural indigestion by borrowing and accepting more new elements than we can digest from other cultures, and in the mechanism they will provide to avoid disintegration and disappearance of some old institutions of intrinsic value.

Professor A. Irwing Hallowell, writing on the *Sociopsychological Aspects of Acculturation* (*The Science of Man in the World Crisis* Columbia University Press), says: "The old manner of life can never be revived. On the other hand, as Linton observes, rational revivalistic or perpetuative movements may provide a mechanism of adjustment that may compensate in a more positive way for the feelings of inferiority that have been aroused."

22 THE SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONALIST*

The title of this essay "The Spiritual development of a Nationalist" does not imply that Ananda Coomaraswamy's earlier writings were devoid of a reverential attitude to religion, or that there was a conversion in his later life. In his early writings too there was a deep religious vein. But his attitude underwent a change, which was manifest in his later writings. In his earlier writings he contrasted the spiritual aspect of Indian art and culture with the materialistic and secular aspects of European art and culture. But in his later writings he concentrated on comparing the spiritual aspect of Indian culture with that of medieval European metaphysics and art, to prove the fundamental unity of both. In his early essays he attempted to emphasize the similarity, in spite of divergences, of Eastern and Western aesthetic theories and to explain the peculiarities of Indian art by its religious symbolism. But later he rejected modern art and aesthetics, and tried to defend the religious art of the East and the West, even of peasants and primitive people.

There is a parallel in this spiritual development of Coomaraswamy with that of Leo Tolstoy. Tolstoy was a very great creative artist. Matthew Arnold in one of his essays said that the Russians "have great novelists, and of one of their great novelists I wish now to speak.....Count Leo Tolstoy." In his fiftieth year Tolstoy wrote his

*A paper read at a meeting commemorating Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy

confessions after a struggle to free himself from the bonds of materialistic and industrial culture of the West. Tolstoy condemned his own creative works and wrote a book, *What is Art?* in which he severely criticized Western aesthetics and modern art.

Ananda Coomaraswamy was not a creative artist, but a critic, scholar and metaphysician. His final attitude to art and religion was the result of gradual development and maturity. Later I will try to show the similarity of the attitudes of Tolstoy and Coomaraswamy to art, religion and life.

Coomaraswamy's early career is in strange contrast to that of modern young men who go to England and return home, after obtaining brilliant academical qualifications and an acquired indifference or contempt for everything Eastern. Outside their own professions, most of our young men with high academical qualifications failed to grow an inch in their spiritual stature. But Coomaraswamy's spiritual growth was tremendous. Though he lived in America, he never severed his traditional moorings, which were in Hindu India and Buddhist Ceylon.

Coomaraswamy was born in Ceylon, but was brought up in England by his European mother. He studied science and came to Ceylon only after a quarter of a century. At twenty-five he became the Director of Minerological Survey of Ceylon, and it is strange for a young man, who was brought up in England by a European mother, to have written five years later a book on national idealism, which is still the best defence of Indian culture and one of the most courageous and severe criticisms of our educational system.

The fact emerging from the above contrast is in itself an indictment of the education that prevailed

in Ceylon. Was it not the genuine English education prevailing in England that helped Coomaraswamy to develop his inherent intellectual and spiritual abilities? The English education that was transplanted here without its agelong tradition and environment was further distorted by teachers who treated with contempt their own tradition, which should have been the foundation for any spiritual development of a child, whatever may have been his religion. Christianity should have been Ceylonized first, instead of Westernizing the Ceylonese and then converting them to Christianity, as has been done. This wrong method of proselytizing must have eviscerated the Ceylonese boy of all his early spiritual contents.

Coomaraswamy, in his *Essays in National Idealism*, says: "So much is the mother tongue neglected and despised that instances of educated Sinhalese unable to speak to, or read a letter from, their own relations are by no means unknown. Those who have been educated in an ordinary English school are usually very ignorant of the geography, history and literature of Ceylon. Most stupid of all is the affectation of admiring everything English and despising everything Sinhalese or Tamil; recalling that time in England when, 'Falsehood in a Ciceronian dialect had no opposers, Truth in patois no listeners.' "

I believe, that we are now in a better and chastened mood to read and appreciate Coomaraswamy's *Essays in National Idealism*. His criticisms of our educational system were not inspired by a narrow nationalism, but by a deep feeling for a spiritual conception of life which pervaded Indian culture. In his later writings he endeavoured to show the similarity of the spiritual aspect of Indian culture with that of Western culture. "For if we

leave out of account," says Coomaraswamy in his *Bugbear of Literacy*, "the 'modernistic' and individual philosophies of today, and consider only the great tradition of the magnanimous philosophers, whose philosophy was also a religion that had to be lived if it was to be understood, it will soon be found that the distinctions of culture in East and West, or for that matter North and South, are comparable to those of dialects; all are speaking what is essentially one and the same spiritual language, employing different words, but expressing the same ideas, and very often by means of identical idioms."

In the essay *Educational Ideals*, he quotes the following passage from a letter from Professor Patrick Geddes: "The trouble is not only with the vested interests of the official class (which are sure to be protected in any change), but in the wooden heads, the arrested minds, the incompetent hands, etc., etc., of those who have gone through this machine, whether here or with you in India. It lies in thousands of barristers and clerks and crammers, who know all the programme of the University of London in its darkest days..... but who know nothing of the vital movements in literature, science, art etc., by which we in some measure here escape or at least mitigate our official oppression, or even begin to modify it."

Coomaraswamy's nationalism and his spiritual attitude which had not been completely developed at that time, can be seen in one of his early books on Indian art, *Dance of Siva*. In one of the essays he tries to explain and defend Manu and some of his injunctions regarding women. Many Indian scholars condemned the same injunctions of Manu and argued that they indirectly contributed to the later degradation of Indian women.

Romain Rolland, who contributed a foreword to the above book, says thus in defence of one of the last two essays in it: "Spiritual purity may not shrink from allying itself with sensual joy, and to most licensed sexualism may be joined the highest wisdom. (The amazing Sahaja is an extreme example, as a paradoxical challenge to forces opposed and mated.)"

In the essay in question Coomaraswamy seems to have made an attempt to attribute great spiritual virtues to an aberration of the later Indian mind which resorted to sex mysticism. But in his later writings he adversely criticized all aberrations and also European aesthetics and modern art.

"To equate love of art," says Coomaraswamy in his *Figures of Speech and Figures of Thought*, "with love of fine sensation is to make works of art a kind of aphrodisiac. The words 'disinterested aesthetic contemplation' are a contradiction in terms and pure nonsense.

"Plato's 'heartsease' is the same as that 'intellectual beatitude' which Indian rhetoric sees in the 'tasting of the flavour' of a work of art, an immediate experience, and congeneric with the tasting of God."

Robert Allerton Parker, in his introduction to Coomaraswamy's *Bugbear of Literacy*, says: "The purpose of art has always been, and still should be, effective communication. But what, ask the critics, can works of art communicate? 'Let us tell the painful truth,' Coomaraswamy retorts, 'that most of these works are about God, whom nowadays we never mention in polite society!' "

Coomaraswamy, like Tolstoy, defends the religious view of art with a deep knowledge of meta-

physics and aesthetics. By religious view, both of them mean the religious perception of mankind, but not any particular religious cult.

Tolstoy, in his *What is Art*, criticized Western aesthetic theories and modern art and literature. The following passages selected from *What is Art* will show that Coomaraswamy's views on art and aesthetics are fundamentally similar to those of Tolstoy:

"If the meaning of life is seen in freeing oneself from the yoke of animalism, as is the case amongst the Buddhists, then art successfully transmitting feelings that elevate the soul and humble the flesh will be good art, and all that transmits feelings strengthening the bodily passions will be bad art.

"The artists of the middle ages, vitalized by the same source of feeling—religion—as the mass of the people, and transmitting, in architecture, sculpture, painting, music, poetry or drama, the feelings and states of mind they experienced, were true artists; and their activity, founded on the highest conceptions accessible to their age and common to the entire people, though, for our times a mean art, was, nevertheless a true one, shared by the whole community.

"Universal art has a definite and indubitable internal criterion—religious perception; upper class art lacks this, and therefore the appreciators of that art are obliged to cling to some external criterion."

What is meant by "religious perception" is explained by Tolstoy as follows: "People who do not acknowledge Christianity in its true meaning, because it undermines their social privileges, and who therefore invent all kinds of philosophic and aesthetic theories to hide from themselves the

meaninglessness and wrongfulness of their lives, cannot think otherwise. These people intentionally, or sometimes unintentionally, confuse the notion of a religious cult with the notion of religious perception, and think that by denying the cult they get rid of the perception. But even the very attacks on religion and the attempts to establish an idea of life contrary to the religious perception of our times most clearly demonstrate the existence of a religious perception condemning the lives that are not in harmony with it.

"The religious perception of our time in its widest and most practical application is the consciousness that our well-being, both material and spiritual, individual and collective, temporal and eternal, lies in the growth of brotherhood among men—in their loving harmony with one another."

Robert Allerton Parker commenting on the attitude of Coomaraswamy to modern art says: "One is reminded of the fact that our modern treatises on ukiyoye rarely mention the hetaerae upon whose lives the great part of this art centres."

"Art of our time," says Tolstoy, "and of our circle has become a prostitute. And this comparison holds good even in minute details. Like her it is not limited to certain times, like her it is always adorned, like her it is always saleable, and like her it is enticing and ruinous."

I am not defending or criticizing these views. I wish only to point out the similarities of views of Coomaraswamy and Tolstoy on art.

This phase of the extreme sophistication of art can be seen in Indian court poetry, though Coomaraswamy ignores it. Later, in the so-called decadent period, this sophistication induced Indian

sculptors to revolt from religious and intellectual restraints. They derived inspiration from sex mysticism, which became a cult, to break away from classical art. "Gupta art, like all art," says Professor Hocart in an essay, *Decadence of India*, in his posthumous book, *The Life-giving Myth*, "passes its zenith and declines into a florid and elegant but nerveless accomplishment. Then comes the revolt against form without content, against the excessive restraint imposed by classical standards of perfection. It is the romantic period of Indian art. The emotions rise up against the tyranny of intellect, and in the pursuit of intensity destroy form. The revolt is in full swing in the seventh century. Even those who do not like its violence and defiance, its exaggeration and the cult of the monstrous, must allow a certain greatness to that art."

There is similarity in the religious views of Coomaraswamy and Tolstoy. Views on religion came to Coomaraswamy through a study of comparative religion and also as a traditional inheritance. But Tolstoy seems to have arrived at the same views through his artistic and religious intuition.

Tolstoy, in his essay *What is Religion*, says: "Religions differ in their external forms, but they are all alike in their fundamental principles. And it is these principles that are fundamental to all religions, that form the true religion which alone at the present time is suitable for us all, and the adoption of which alone can save men from their ills.....All these principles are common to Brahminism and Judaism and Confucianism and Taoism and Buddhism and Christianity and Mohammedanism. (If Buddhism gives no definition of God, it nevertheless acknowledges *That* with which man unites and

into *Which* he is absorbed when he attains to Nirvana. So *That* with which man is united of into *Which* he is absorbed in Nirvana, is the same Origin that is called God in Hebraism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism.")

This is the Hindu view of religion and also that of comparative religion. Coomaraswamy says in *Bugbear of Literacy*, "The greatest of modern Indian saints actually practised Christian and Islamic disciplines, that is, worshipped Christ and Allah, and found that all led to the same goal; he could speak from experience of the equal validity of all these 'ways' and feel the same respect for each while still preferring for himself the one to which his whole being was naturally attuned by nativity, temperament, and training."

Like the Upanishadic mystics of India, Tolstoy became a hermit and later abandoned home for forest life. To a Rationalist his later life was a tragedy. But to the Buddhist and the Hindu his life was the fulfilment of the highest ideal, life of contemplation or living in God, the fourth *Asrama*.

Ananda Coomaraswamy in his early writings, as far as I know, treated Buddhist conceptions, Anatta and Nirvana, and the Self and Brahman of Vedanta philosophy as separate conceptions. But in his maturity he tries to equate both conceptions as one and the same. In *Gotama the Buddha*, written jointly with I. B. Horner, Coomaraswamy says: "In the whole of Buddhist canonical literature it is nowhere stated that 'there is no Self,' no reality distinguishable from the empirical self that is repeatedly subjected to destructive analysis. On the contrary, the Self is both explicitly and implicitly asserted; notably in the recurrent phrase according to which this, that or the other is not my Self.

"*Sabbe dhamma anatta* have formed the basis of the mistaken view that Buddhism denies (not merely the self) but also the Self. But a moment's consideration of the logic of the words will show that they assume the reality of a Self that is not any one or all of the things that are denied of it. As St. Thomas Aquinas says, 'primary and simple things are defined by negations; as, for instance, a point is defined as that which has no parts;' and Dante remarks that there are 'certain things which our intellect cannot behold.....we cannot understand what they are except by denying things of them.' "

Coomaraswamy and Horner later say, "It need hardly be said that for a European reader or scholar who proposes to study any Oriental religion seriously, a considerable knowledge of Christian doctrine and thinking, and of its Greek background, is almost indispensable."

The majority of Ceylon Buddhists and Christians, I believe, would treat this as an ironical observation because their view of religion is parochial and quite different from that of Coomaraswamy.

Coomaraswamy equates not only Self but Nirvana too with Brahman of the *Upanishads*. Theravadi Buddhists will repudiate this. The Buddha rejected Vedic revelation. His rejection of Vedic revelation, I believe, is explicitly stated in *Kalama Sutta*. The Buddha examined and analysed the fact of life—suffering. He applied this empirical method to explain his doctrine to others. Nirvana was the term he applied to explain the ultimate state: cessation of suffering (*dukkha*). The late A. D. Jayasundara, a Buddhist scholar and a formidable controversialist, who defended the Anatta doctrine against those who tried to equate it with immortal Self, says in *Buddhist Essays and Reviews*:

"The supreme value and profound significance of the Anatta teaching becomes clearly manifest when we consider the intimate relationship which Anatta bears to the doctrine of Nibbana.....It follows therefore as a logical necessity that both *Sassata* and *Uccheda* are wrong, and it is the golden mean of the Anatta doctrine, as explained by the Buddha, which at last makes Nibbana even a bare possibility."

Professor O. H. de A. Wijesekera has discussed Upanishadic Atman and Buddhist Anatta in an article contributed to *Siddha Bharati* (an Indian publication). After an examination of Pali and Sanskrit passages and their meanings, he says thus: "The above discussion shows that the early Buddhist Nikayas are quite outspoken on the question of an Atman conceived, either theistical or pantheistical, that is to say, as creator or Immanent Soul. There is no question of silence on these issues. Nor is Buddha reported to have maintained any silence on the question of a transcendental (as opposed to pantheistic, immanent) Absolute. The *Udana* makes it very clear that the Buddha was positive on the reality of a transcendental state which is described as unborn, unbecome, unmade and uncompounded. Thus a transcendental Brahman (neuter) seems to have no antagonism to the Buddhist view of ultimate Reality."

The Upanishadic mystics accepted the Vedic revelation. They proceeded to explain the facts of life on the basis of universal Self or Brahman. To the Buddhists, who rejected the Vedic revelation, it was a dogma. Therefore the difference between the two conceptions Brahman and Nirvana related to two mystical approaches to the same problem.

23 EDUCATION THAT IGNORES ENVIRONMENT

The education that has prevailed in Ceylon for a long time has contributed towards the development of two mental attitudes which does not encourage independent thinking. English education until recently encouraged the growth of an uncritical attitude to everything of the West. This attitude was developed in many a receptive mentality with the result that originality was killed and imitation was encouraged. However, the vast majority who received education in Oriental languages, modelled on an obsolete system and from books written to suit it, acquired a mentality that encouraged the worship of the past. Both these aspects of our educational system produced more dogmatists who immolated their own individualities at their particular fetishes.

Today we have an environment and a tradition different from those of the West and of our past, and we are continually living in them. Our attempt to ignore them in our eagerness to merge ourselves in the English tradition or in the tradition of the past is a form of immolation of our inmost selves before the new and the old fetishes.

The English-educated as well as the Sinhalese-educated, I believe, respond imperfectly to the present local environment. The former always turn towards the West, and the latter to the past. They waste their energies in a futile conflict with the environment of modern Ceylon. If the English-educated have a good knowledge of their own lan-

guage and tradition, they can save the Sinhalese-educated from their futile attempt to revive the past. And if the latter try to assimilate the best, instead of the superficial elements of Western culture they could help the former to understand what is best in their own tradition. But the system of education which had the effect of segregating the people into two camps aggravated the conflict.

Two opposing methods of education have desiccated or stunted our inner selves for centuries. A unified system of education will facilitate a fusion of two streams of culture and tradition. Attempts to isolate and cling to either of them will not help to develop in us the adaptability and the selective faculty which are necessary for survival in a changing local environment, which again has to adapt itself to a world environment, which in turn is changing at an enormous speed. Even Japan had to adopt bilingualism and make efforts at fusion of two cultures, without destroying their own tradition. Bilingualism and the assimilation of the two cultures would equip us with gifts of the mind and heart to equal the West, at least, in artistic and intellectual attainments.

Tagore's achievement was due to his bilingualism and assimilation of two cultures. The attainment of Sir J. C. Bose as a biologist was made possible by a fusion of his knowledge of Vedantic philosophy with his knowledge of biology. I think Bose himself said (I am writing from memory) that in his biological speculations and the invention of the Resonant Recorder, a delicate instrument to measure the nerve impulses of plants, he was indirectly influenced by his knowledge of Vedantic philosophy. India had no tradition in physics, but Sir C. V. Raman achieved distinction in research in physics.

There is no doubt that he derived inspiration from the highly speculative and systematic philosophy of India.

Leonard Woolf produced a novel on Ceylon life, which attracted the attention of English critics. His achievement was due to his genius, which came to him as a result of his English training, his knowledge of Sinhalese and his sympathetic observation and study of the villager and his life and environment. It is because of his bilingualism that J. Vijayatunga was able to write a very fine and charming study of the people of his village. Some critics regard it as the best book written in English on Sinhalese village life.

I have dim recollections of a satirical short story I read long ago in a volume called *Bazaar*, by Martin Armstrong. The story laughs, perhaps maliciously, at those who cling to the past and its legends by ignoring the present :

In a certain country a young prince who loved his people became the king after his father's death. As he wished to encourage the production of food and the exploitation of the natural resources of the country, he summoned the professors of the old National University. He asked one of them about the germination and the growth of barley and wheat. The professor supplied all the details he had learned from old books on varieties of barley and wheat grown in heaven. The prince wished to know something about the barley that was grown in his own country. The professor professed ignorance and said that nothing was stated in their old books about barley grown in their own country. Therefore he said that he treated barley as a non-existent thing. Next the prince consulted another professor to obtain information about the animals of his country. He also made a learned discourse: "The horse is born from an egg laid at the bottom of the river by a swallow," said the professor.

The disappointed prince summoned all the professors on a certain wintry morning to the bank of the river. He got the second professor to repeat his learned discourse on the horse.

After patiently listening to it, the prince told the old professor to prove his statements with verifiable facts, and forced him to jump into the river, dive and produce the horse-egg which he said would be at the bed of the river. The professor emerged from the river shivering with cold. The prince asked him whether he had found the horse-egg.

"No," replied he.

"There is no such thing as a horse-egg."

"No."

"What is stated in ancient books is not true."

"Yes; not true."

At last the prince succeeded in convincing the teachers of the National University of ancient lore of the importance of studying the barley they ate and the horses and other animals of their own country.

Our rulers, I believe, are still in a position not very much better than the prince. Some of our Oriental scholars are still arguing and quarrelling about the anatomy of devils given in ancient Sanskrit or Pali books. Others are arguing about the colour and the scent of a particular heavenly flower. About five or six years ago a book, *Rural Science*, was published in Sinhalese. It was approved by the Textbook Committee of the Education Department, and was extensively used in schools. A section of that book supplying zoological information says that there are no males but females amongst storks. Conception in them is caused by thunder and they laid their eggs on the tree tops!

This information is not an invention of the teacher who wrote the book. He repeated the information he picked up from an old Sanskrit or Pali book.

After gaining independence, when our rulers turned towards our own scientists, they found that many of them were able to supply more accurate information about plants and animals of Europe

than of Ceylon. Mentally, most of us are living in the past and most of the English-educated in the West. Therefore our knowledge of present-day Ceylon is still very incomplete. Without knowing ourselves and our environment thoroughly, independent thinking is difficult. To know ourselves, I believe, we must have a knowledge of our own language. We are made up of acquired as well as inherited habits which are the outcome of our environment and tradition. Our own language is a part of that environment and tradition. Tagore's saying that we suck in our own language with our mother's milk metaphorically suggests the intimate connection that exists between an individual and his natural and social environment. Before Tagore a great European writer, Cervantes, said :

"The great Homer wrote not in Latin, for he was a Greek ; and Virgil wrote not in Greek, because he was a Latin. In brief, all the ancient poets wrote in the tongue which they sucked in with their mother's milk, nor did they go forth to seek for strange ones to express the greatness of their conceptions ; and, this being so, it should be a reason for the fashion to extend to all nations."

24 CULTURAL CONFLICT IN CEYLON

The development of applied anthropology is mostly due to the interest of European governments in the smooth exploitation as well as the well-being of colonial people. Their social institutions, customs, beliefs and languages were ignored by early European administrators. As Professor Felix M. Keesing says in *The Science of Man in the World Crisis*, the early "administrator, missionary, or other man of action is too often like a bull in a China shop, crashing hither and yon through the delicate materials of native life and thought."

When the European administrators became alarmed at the demoralization of the native people and at their growing hostility, they began to study anthropology and seek the help of anthropologists, to avoid the blunders which were destroying the traditional ways of life of these people.

We have got rid of colonial government by regaining independence. But it does not follow that we do not require the aid of applied anthropology for the successful administration and the economic advancement of the people of this country as an independent national unit.

Our administrators and leaders have to face the same problems and difficulties that confronted the foreigners, because the same conflict between the indigenous culture and Western culture still goes on and will go on. Most of them are free from the prejudices of Europeans, but their limited and sometimes superficial knowledge of the institutions,

life and language of the people will not help them to a great extent in solving the problems of administration and regeneration. A knowledge, therefore, of applied anthropology will be of great value to them in this task.

The leaders of Western nations have only great political and economic problems to solve. We have, in addition to these, acute cultural problems which agitate the minds of the people, creating bitter feelings. The language problem is becoming a major one in which the problems of education, administration and politics are involved. Many other cultural and national problems have their economic and social aspects. Literature, painting, drama and peasant arts and crafts have their economic aspects which are creating bitter feelings and antagonisms between the Westernized and the nationalist elements.

A cultural conflict, which prevents the formation of a closely knit unit of the people, is a danger which has not been realized by most of our politicians. Government officers and many politicians still retain the prejudices they acquired from the Europeans. "The view-point of the science," says Professor Keesing, "has run to earth a number of myths regarding native character and capacity which unfortunately are still widely current in colonial areas. Included are stereotypes of the 'lazy' native, the 'improvident' native, the 'dishonest' native, and the 'communal' native. Study of indigenous work methods, consumption habits, property customs and other aspects of economic and social organization shows such ideas to be the product of inadequate or myopic observation. Native people work hard, but according to their

own rhythms and only when moved by incentives they count worth while."

Most of our politicians are more or less influenced by such myopic views about the Sinhalese villagers. The gambling habit, petty thefts and idleness are spreading in the villages. Some politicians and officials attribute this decadence to defects or habits inherited by the masses from the past; others to poverty and unemployment. They ignore the direct causes that paved the way for the demoralization of the villagers, especially of those who live close to urban areas.

With the decadence of religious and magical ceremonies, traditional customs and games, the villagers lost their recreational opportunities. Innumerable forms of magical ceremonies to cure or prevent sickness, and the ceremonies at temples and processions with traditional forms of entertainment were the sources of recreation for the villagers. Their disappearance is not due solely to economic factors nor to the gradual sophistication of the villager. Religious and political propaganda of nationalists was to a greater extent responsible for the disappearance of the old forms of recreation. Under the influence of Western culture educated nationalists treated magical ceremonies as degrading and superstitious, and the items of entertainment connected with temple ceremonies and processions as vulgar buffooneries which were alien to Buddhism. They were interested in reviving an imaginary ascetic form of Buddhism which never existed among the masses of Ceylon at any period of its history. Their propaganda combined to hasten the break-down of these sources of entertainment to the villagers. They never thought of supplying any substitutes. Yet, it is strange that many edu-

cated urban people, who treat with contempt the artistic aspect of magical ceremonies, i.e., the dance, still resort to the incantations of the exorcist.

Buddhist villagers still do not show any enthusiasm for keeping cows. Professor Raymond Firth in his *Human Types*, following Dr. Nicholls, says that the poorer people of Ceylon, do not milk their cows, but keep them for breeding cart-bulls, for the manure they produce for the fields, and eventually for the price they fetch from the butcher.

Villagers living close to urban areas do not breed cows for the price they fetch from the butcher. However, it is true that they do not treat milk as an important article of diet. About thirty years ago, villagers of certain areas of the Southern Province kept cows for breeding cart-bulls, but they did not treat the milk that was available as an important item of their diet. Some of them would milk the cows and pour the milk over the roots of a coconut tree. Others took milk as a medicinal decoction. After taking milk they washed their mouths and had a chew of betel. On the day they took milk, they invariably gave up their morning food and ate nothing until the mid-day meal. Milk was not a tabooed article of food among them, but their extreme caution may have been due to a conviction that it caused dysentery and diarrhoea. The old villagers had never heard of the disease-carrying germs or the sources of infection which made the drinking of milk dangerous. They always took milk fresh from the cow and without boiling it. Perhaps this habit of taking raw milk caused diarrhoea, and it may have been responsible for creating in them a superstitious fear of milk. The nationalists and the Government propagandists, instead of

trying to find out the cause and remove it, ridiculed the villagers for their superstition and ignorance.

The facts enumerated above show the importance of theoretical and applied anthropology in the work of administration and regeneration of the people of Ceylon. Professor Keesing says:

> "What anthropologists have really emphasized is the principle or view point that the existing culture of a people must be made the constant point of reference, if administration and welfare work is to be intelligently planned and effective. Obvious as this seems to be, it is too often forgotten, and the colonial planner thinks rather in terms of his own cultural standards or some distant goal of future improvement, or some overall policy which applies to every group in an area regardless of local differences."

The most useful method of study for us, I believe, is that of the functional theory elaborated by Professor Malinowski. It emphasizes the study of culture-contacts and changes and the treating of the changes as functional realities, instead of wasting time in tracing the sources of diffusion.

Our present-day institutions are not functioning in the same way as of old. In form and function they have changed as a result of their contact with alien cultures. Changes obey a specific determination of their own. For instance: the indigenous medical system has changed, yet it is functioning as an independent institution in spite of the elements borrowed from the Western system, and the adjustments it had to make in adapting itself to the new social environment.

"There are few customs in which Man is more conservative than in his treatment of the dead,"

says Professor W. H. R. Rivers in his *Psychology and Ethnology*. In every culture funeral rites and customs persist century after century. Hindus and Muslims still reject the coffin. Parsis are a very progressive people, but still their culture retains the old way of disposing of the bodies of the dead. But the Buddhists, even in remote rural areas of Ceylon, have adopted coffin-burial from European culture. Their funeral rites had to undergo changes because of the coffin. This, I believe, is the best evidence to show that the cultural conditioning of the Sinhalese has given them a measure of freedom of choice and adaptability, not discernible in many other Eastern peoples. This freedom of choice and adaptability will render Sinhalese culture better fitted to fuse together the old and the new elements into an integrated system of life. The Sinhalese people require no compulsion but guidance and education. The best possible way to accomplish this is to seek the aid of applied anthropology.

25 CULTURAL SYNTHESIS

We speak of Eastern and Western culture. But if we analyse this concept against a background of anthropology we shall not be able to find many elements of culture that can be definitely pointed out as peculiar to Western culture and foreign to us.

The motor car, the electric bulb, gunpowder and the printing press are now material elements of Sinhalese culture. They have been familiar amenities of life and are becoming integral to the life of the people. Some of the implements which we now consider peculiar to the West had their origin in the East. Gunpowder and printing were invented by the Chinese and belong to the East. The motor car and the electric lamp are material inventions of Europe and America. Being material inventions they have become, and will become, the elements of any culture or civilization that can afford to have them.

Modern science was developed by the scientists of the West and is gradually becoming an integral part of Eastern culture. Science is neither Western nor Eastern, though it developed in the West. Christianity is an Eastern religion which became the matrix of Western culture.

Anthropologists speak of cultural traits, complexes and patterns of geographical groups, but not of Eastern or Western culture. They see peculiar traits, complexes and different patterns in the cultures of different ethnic groups. But they are not antagonistic or inimical to each other.

Any alien trait can be absorbed and integrated by another culture if it is elastic enough to adjust the new element to its basic pattern. Kipling's famous verse is only a sentimental expression of a patriotic and imaginative English writer who valued his own culture with arrogance.

Every culture is made up of borrowed and a very few invented elements, and is dynamic. Sinhalese culture is no exception. It has changed and is changing. It has borrowed from India, China and the Pacific Islands, and is borrowing from the West. During the British period, when there was developing in us the habit of merely imitating Western behaviour patterns and the indiscriminate borrowing of other cultural traits, our culture began to change at a dangerous pace. Had that pace continued, Sinhalese culture as a tightly knit unit would have disintegrated under the stress.

Professor Melville J. Herskovits in *The Science of Man in the World Crisis*, says : "For every society—that is, a going concern has a culture tightly enough knit so that only under conditions of the greatest stress does it yield sufficiently to blur its identity; and when this occurs, demoralization ensues and continues until such time as reintegration is achieved, or the group, as such, disappears."

This danger to our culture has been removed and the crisis averted. Now the fusion will go on here, and Ceylon will achieve a cultural synthesis quicker and better if she is determined to discard her present superficial standards and get rid of her inferiority complex, and the desire merely to imitate. For effecting a cultural synthesis Ceylon is better suited than some other countries of the East. It is an island; it has a liberal tradition

and an elastic culture extending back nearly two thousand years.

Sinhalese culture as represented in its literature was, it is true, shallow in intellectual, spiritual and emotional depths, and limited in complexity, compared with that of India. But it was great in its ascetic simplicity and free from many crudities and aberrations and from the hybrid superstitions that were inherent in the vast synthetic cultural conglomeration of the Indian continent.

The Sinhalese had no religious sanctions for their secular customs . The customs of the Hindus had the sanction of Manu's *Law Books* which were regarded as a part of Vedic revelation. Buddhism, being a liberal religion, encouraged the ancient Sinhalese to build a culture with an elasticity sufficient to assimilate and adjust any element from radically different cultures.

This elasticity of Sinhalese culture became a serious danger when it came in contact with European civilization. Because of this elasticity, the Low-country Sinhalese succumbed easily to the external elements of European culture.

The people of Jaffna, backed by the supernatural sanction they had for their social and domestic customs, have been able, with an irrational conservatism, to withstand the impact of Western culture, and preserve their own cultural tradition to some extent. As we are now free to develop our individuality, the elasticity of Sinhalese culture will be an advantage for us to make a greater contribution towards a synthesis.

As examples of the capacity of the liberal tradition of the Sinhalese and their elastic culture to absorb alien traits and make them integral elements, many instances can be cited. Here are a few :

The Sinhalese have borrowed the coffin from an alien culture and have adjusted their funeral customs to give the borrowing the character of an ancient integral complex of their culture. The coffin never was a part of ancient Sinhalese funeral customs. Priests, kings and rich people had been cremated. Their bodies were carried in palanquins. The bodies of the common people were carried and dumped on the *amusohona* to be devoured by wild beasts or consigned to putrefaction.

The majority of the present-day Sinhalese refuse to believe that the coffin is a borrowed element from the West. It has become such an integral and familiar item in the adjusted rites and customs to make people resent the suggestion that it is borrowed.

The use of confetti at weddings is a custom that has spread even to the villages. The origin of this custom shows the possibilities of diffusion and cultural change.

The old custom of throwing rice or paddy on a mat or cloth on which the bridal couple stand during the cremony, still survives in our villages. Many people think it preposterous to suggest that paper confetti is a substitute for rice. But it is the transformation that this Eastern custom of throwing rice underwent in its impact with Western culture.

The Rev. S. Baring Gould in his *Book of Folklore* (Nation's Library) describes and traces the evolution of this custom in Europe. "In Devonshire," he says, "as the bride leaves the church an old woman presents her with a little bag containing hazel nuts. And now we have confetti as substitute for rice, itself a substitute for nuts."

The substitution of rice for hazel nuts is probably a borrowing from the East. How can we argue

that confetti is a borrowed element quite alien and novel to our culture ?

Take the blouse and the saree as worn by our women. The modern blouse is an element borrowed from the West and modified to become a part of the saree. But now the saree and the blouse are regarded as an age-old dress of the Sinhalese.

Nationalists as well as denationalized educated men laugh at and ridicule the dress of the present-day Sinhalese villager—coat and cloth or coat and sarong. But is not this dress of theirs an innovation, however crude, and a proof of the elasticity of their culture and the plasticity of their mind ? Educated people should make conscious attempts to evolve a national dress basing it on the villager's unconscious innovations.

There is nothing completely original in any culture, and these men are unconsciously doing what intellectually advanced Europeans are deliberately accomplishing. That is, they are allowing their minds to be impressed by other cultures.

In Europe today leading painters are seeking inspiration even from primitive cultures. L. Adam in his *Primitive Art* (Pelican) traces the influence of the sculptural art of the Africans, Bushmen and others on the modern European artists. "As far as we know," says he, "neither Modigliani nor the Russian Archipenko had lived among primitive men. But Modigliani, as Professor Talbot Rice puts it, models his forms on those of Negro art, and again adopts as his own something of the Negro's aesthetic approach.

"Archipenko's figures are sometimes of the same abstract character as the neolithic idols of the Cyclades.....One German sculptor, the

late Ernst Barlach, was also greatly influenced by West African Negro sculpture."

But we in Ceylon laugh at what is really an unconscious effort at cultural synthesis effected by our ordinary villagers. A cultural synthesis can be brought about, not by wholesale borrowing and imitation, but by preserving our individuality in readapting the borrowed elements. One way to preserve our individuality at the same time as we effect a cultural synthesis is to keep and develop our language. Language is not an expression of race and it has no causal relation to culture. But language has its value in the preservation of ethnic types. "Nothing counts more in the struggle for existence between types than the advantage of common speech. Language is a poor test of race, but an excellent measure of culture in its bearing on survival," says Professor R. R. Marret.

The majority of the educated people who try to substitute English for the mother tongue and try to perpetuate the English language as a substitute show little concern for any ideal. They are only indulging in cultural snobbery.

It is hard to believe that English will ever become an efficient tool for creative work among us, except in the hands of an exceptional individual who has been able to assimilate both cultures by mastering his own language as well as English. A living tradition and an environment entirely different from ours helped to fashion and temper the English language as a very efficient and marvellous tool. Some of us may master the English language, but we can never create the living tradition and the environment necessary for it.

The Westernization of our intelligentsia or of the whole nation will not create the tradition and

the environment suited for the English language to make it an efficient tool in the hand of a Sinhalese writer for expressing his emotions in creative writings.

Our borrowing or even wholesale adaptation of European cultural elements will not produce that particular culture here. Borrowing and adaptation produce only a new culture. It is neither the old culture nor the borrowed culture. It is a new culture or a complex or an institution born as a result of new contacts. When alien cultural elements come in contact they produce changes in each other. By fusion of these changed elements new customs or institutions are produced, and they become functional and integral parts of the original culture which came in contact with the new.

"Whenever one culture borrows from another," said the late Professor Malinowski, "it always transforms and readapts the objects or customs borrowed. The idea, institution, or contrivance has to be placed within a new cultural milieu, fitted into it, and assimilated to the receiving civilization. In this process of readaptation the form and function often the very nature, of the object or idea is deeply modified—it has to be, in short reinvented. Diffusion is but a modified invention, exactly as every invention is a partial borrowing. What is really important to the anthropologist is the nature of the cultural process, which is mixed borrowing and invention."

Professor Malinowski, in his posthumous work *The Dynamics of Culture Change*, argues that the culture of the European who crosses the Suez is not the same as that of his compatriot who lives in his homeland.

Our fathers and grandfathers did not live in a cultural vacuum to reproduce an exact replica of the European culture. Their mind was not a complete blank which could be filled with European civilization without any clash, change and transformation.

The culture of our Westernized society today is not the genuine culture of the English. Neither is it traditional culture. It is a new culture produced by a natural process of change which is being studied by anthropologists.

G. K. Chesterton, perhaps unconsciously, uttered a profound anthropological truth when he said that "the conversion of a savage to Christianity is conversion of Christianity into savagery."

The argument that we have no tradition and environment suited for the English language is valid today as it was in the time of Dutu-Gemunu. The culture of our intelligentsia is an entirely new one produced by the synthesis of the elements of our traditional culture with those of European culture. It does not constitute an environment or a tradition entirely suited to the English language.

For nearly two thousand years we thought with the aid of Sinhalese and Pali, so that it has become a habit. Such habits are not hereditary but potential, and the tradition and environment will always evoke and develop such habit-responses, in spite of attempts to forget them. When evoked by the environment, will not these habit-responses bring about effects similar to atavism, however slight ?

If we keep our own language, without discarding English, we shall be able to contribute something original, however small, to world culture.

The Sinhalese intelligentsia should assimilate the English language and culture and sharpen their critical faculties. Eastern culture being a social inheritance to them, they will have the advantage of making use of both cultures and languages as two wings to soar high in thought and imagination. Merely learning a language will not help to develop a critical and creative imagination. But assimilation of any culture through its language will stimulate creative imagination.

Imaginative Western writers are turning their minds to the East for inspiration, but their failure to assimilate Eastern culture and their ignorance of Eastern languages prevent them from breaking fresh ground.

Aldous Huxley turned to the East for inspiration apparently with no success. Somerset Maugham's *Razor's Edge* is a crude interpretation of Upanishadic mysticism. Arthur Koestler in his *Yogi and the Commissar* says : "Contemplation survives only in the East and to learn it we have to turn to the East ; but we need qualified interpreters and above all a reinterpretation in the terms and symbols of Western thought. Mere translations are useless except to those who are able to devote their whole lives to the task, and to snobs. The Vedanta bores me to death and Tao does not mean a thing to me."

The interpretation of the East in the terms and symbols of Western thought is a service which our intelligentsia who know both cultures, can perform.

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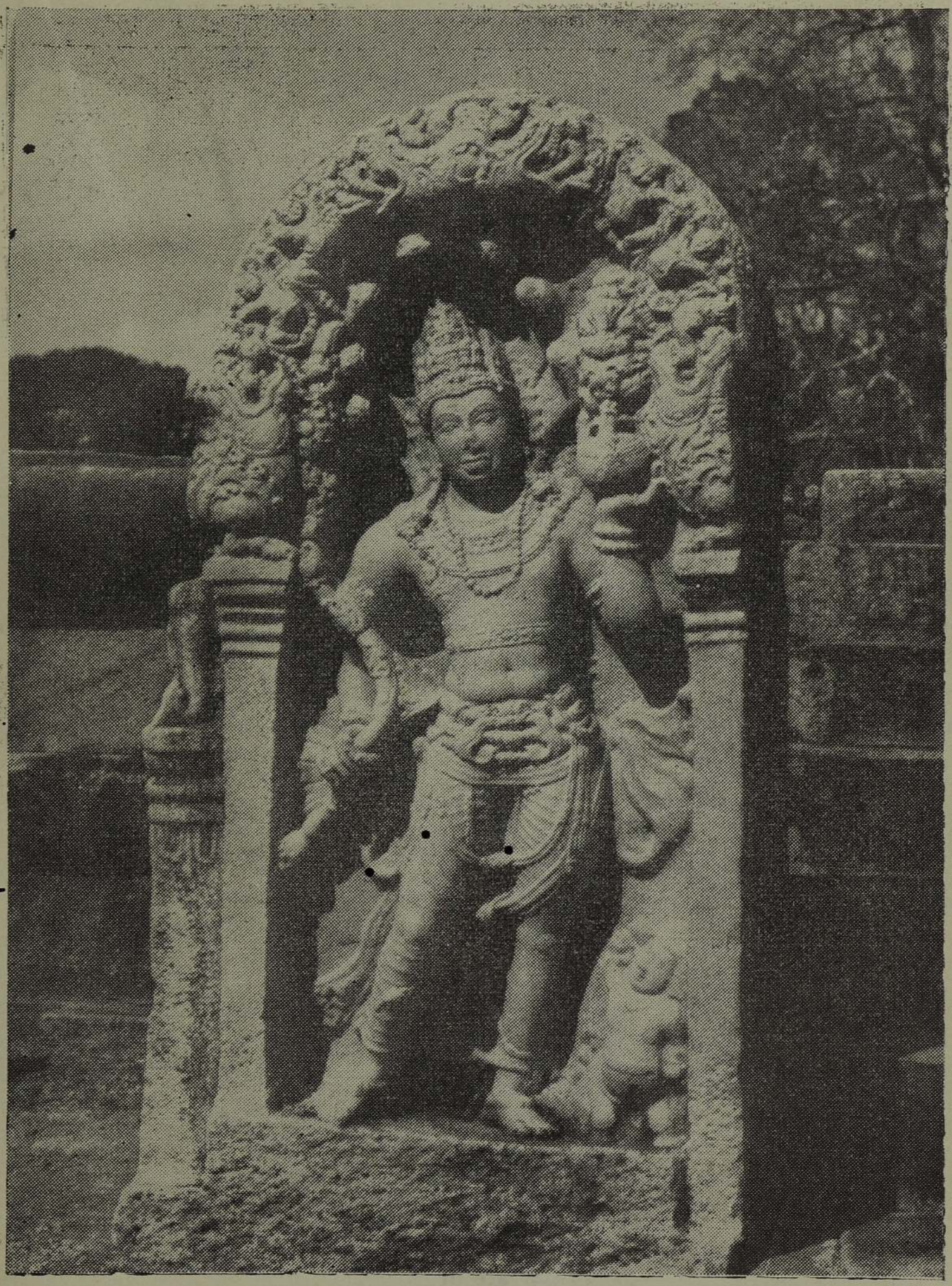

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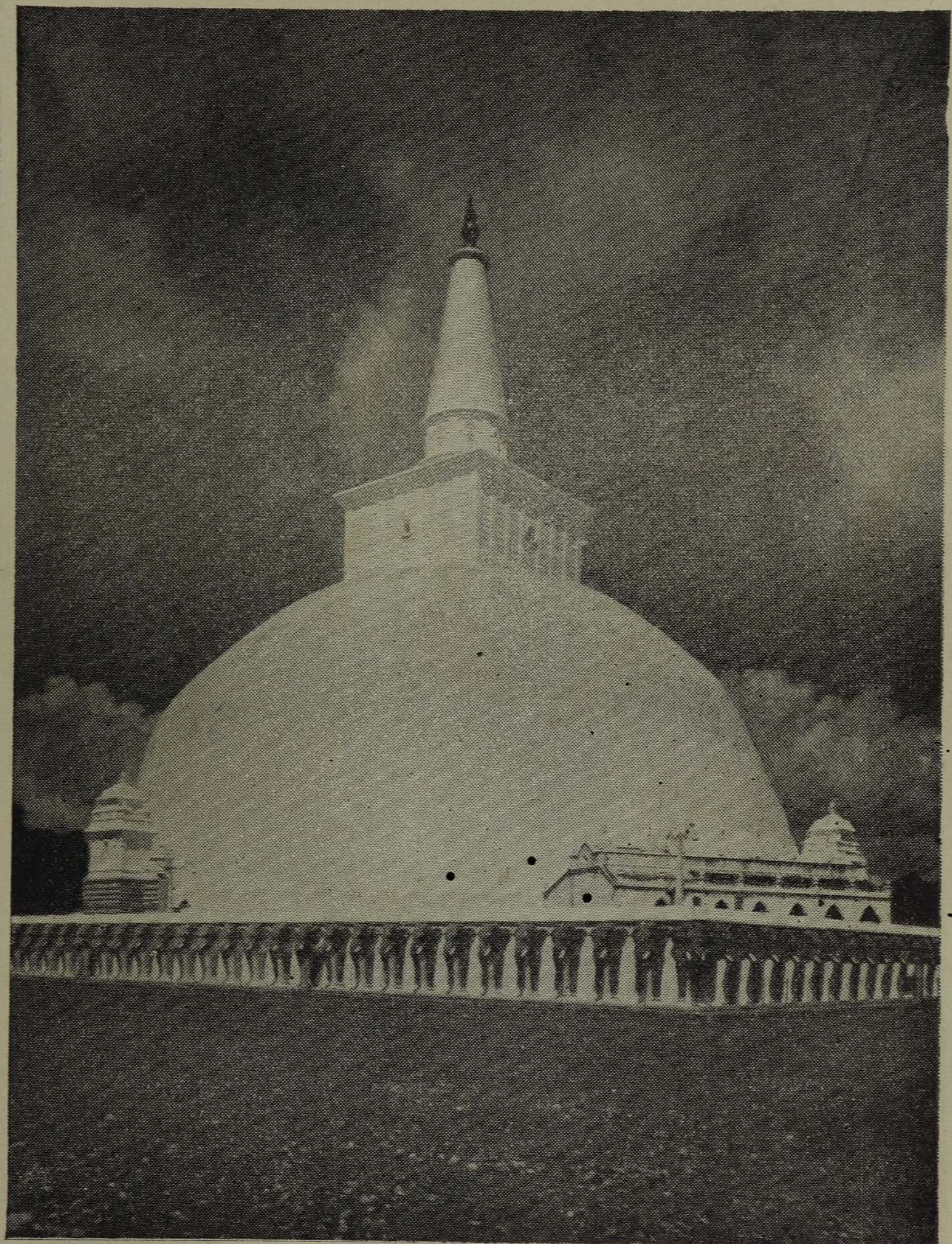

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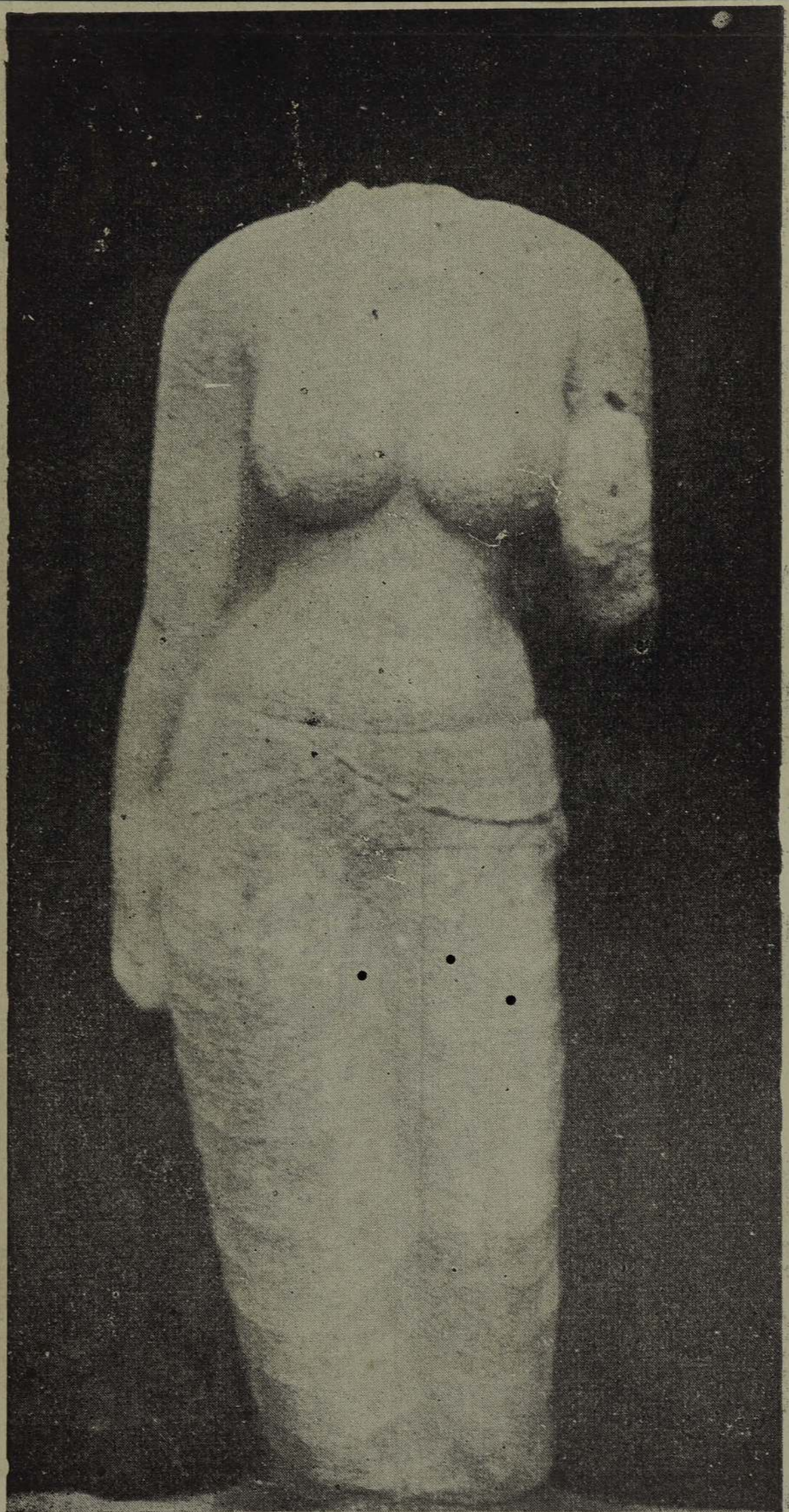
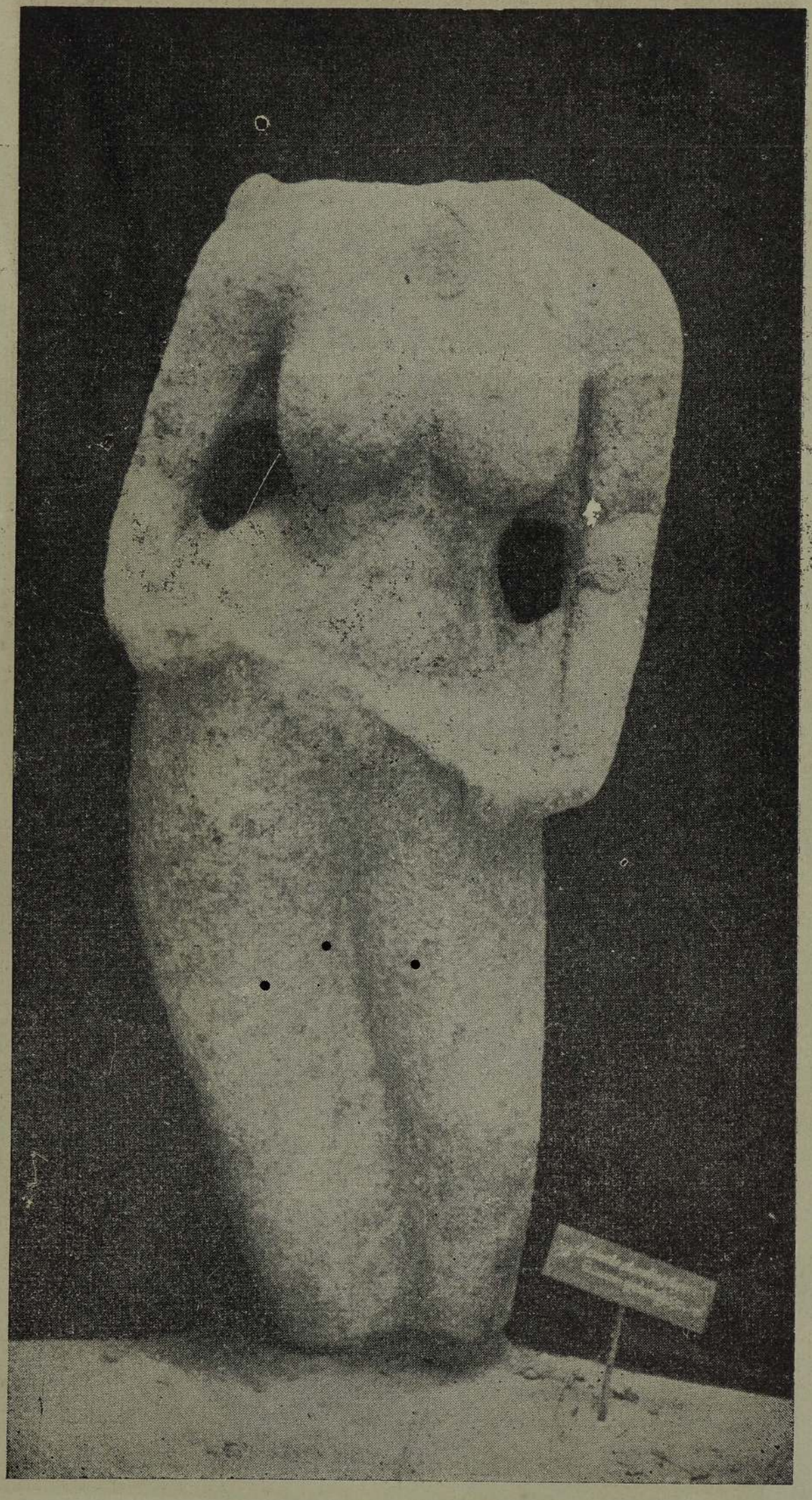


Plate IV



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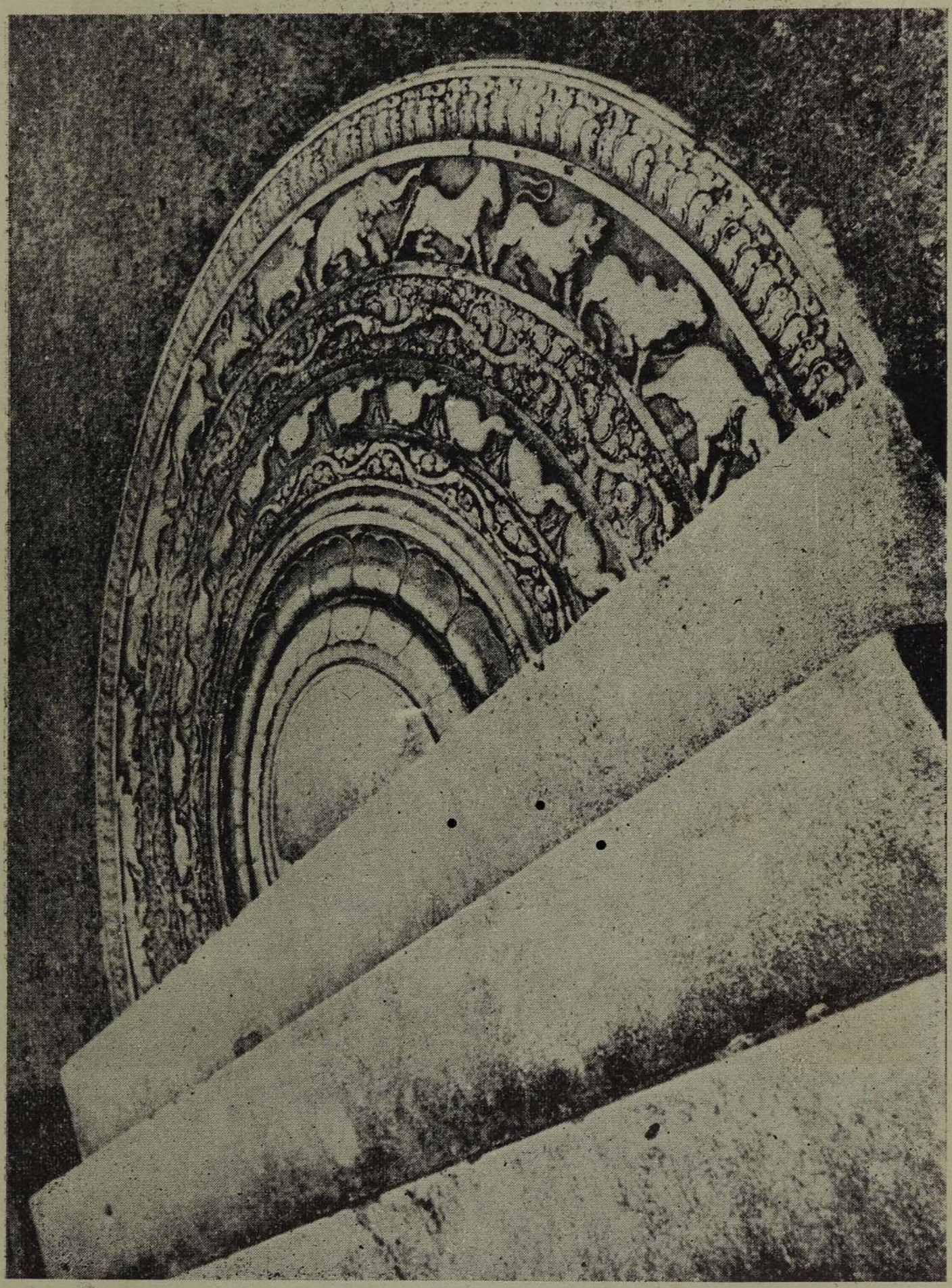

Plate VI

Plate VII

Plate VIII

Plate IX

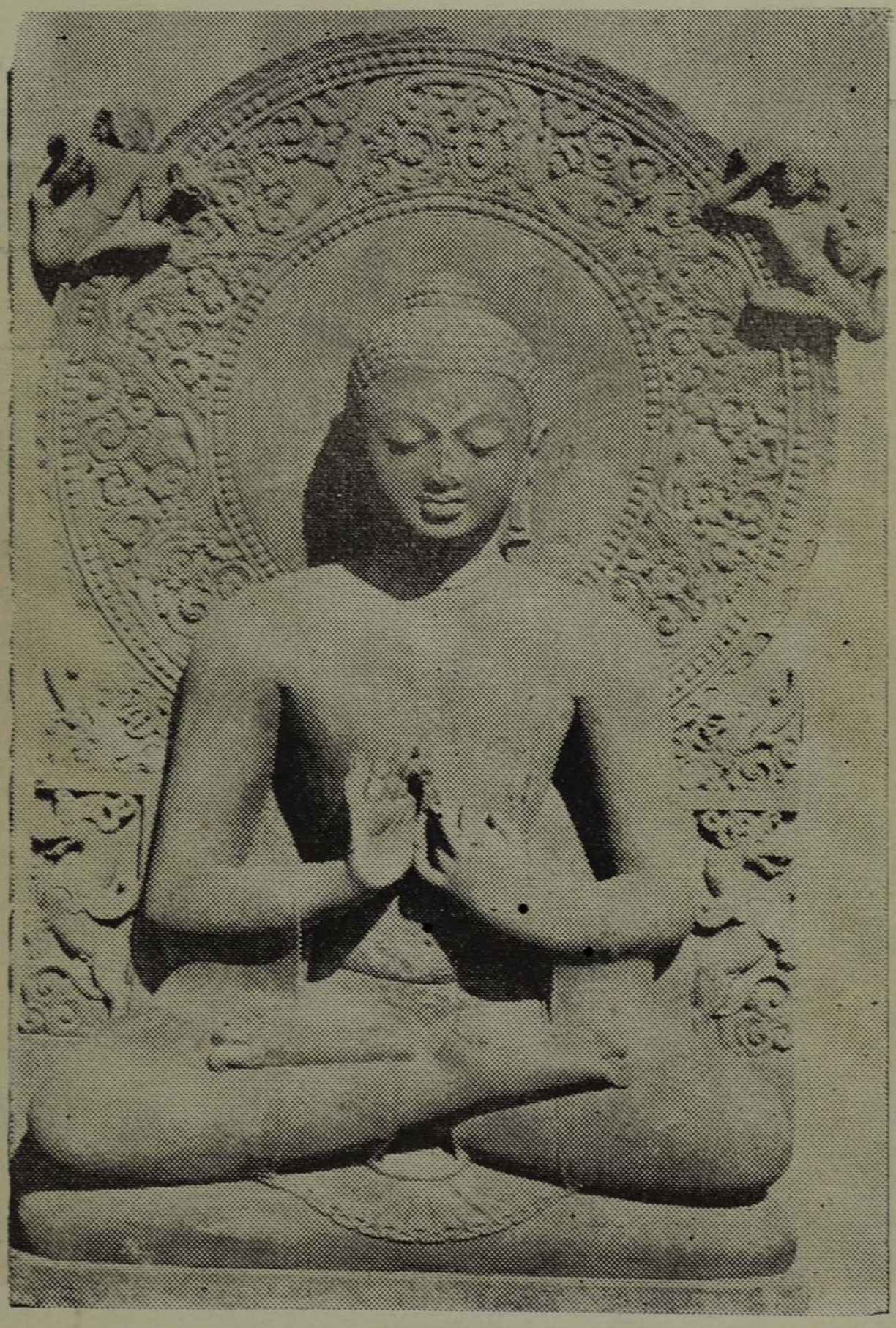

Plate X

Plate XI

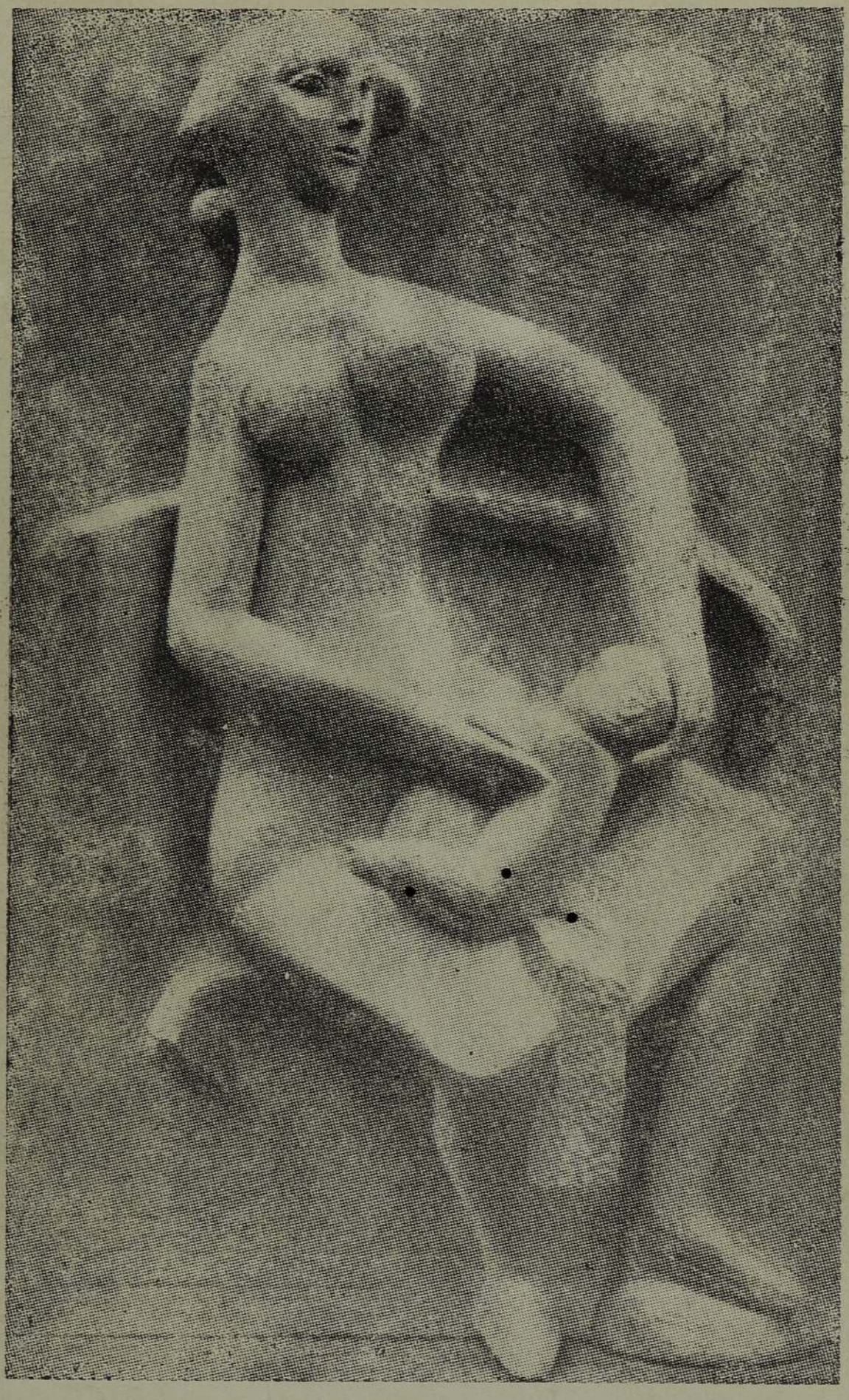

Plate XII

Plate XIII

Plate XV

Piate XIV

Plate XVI

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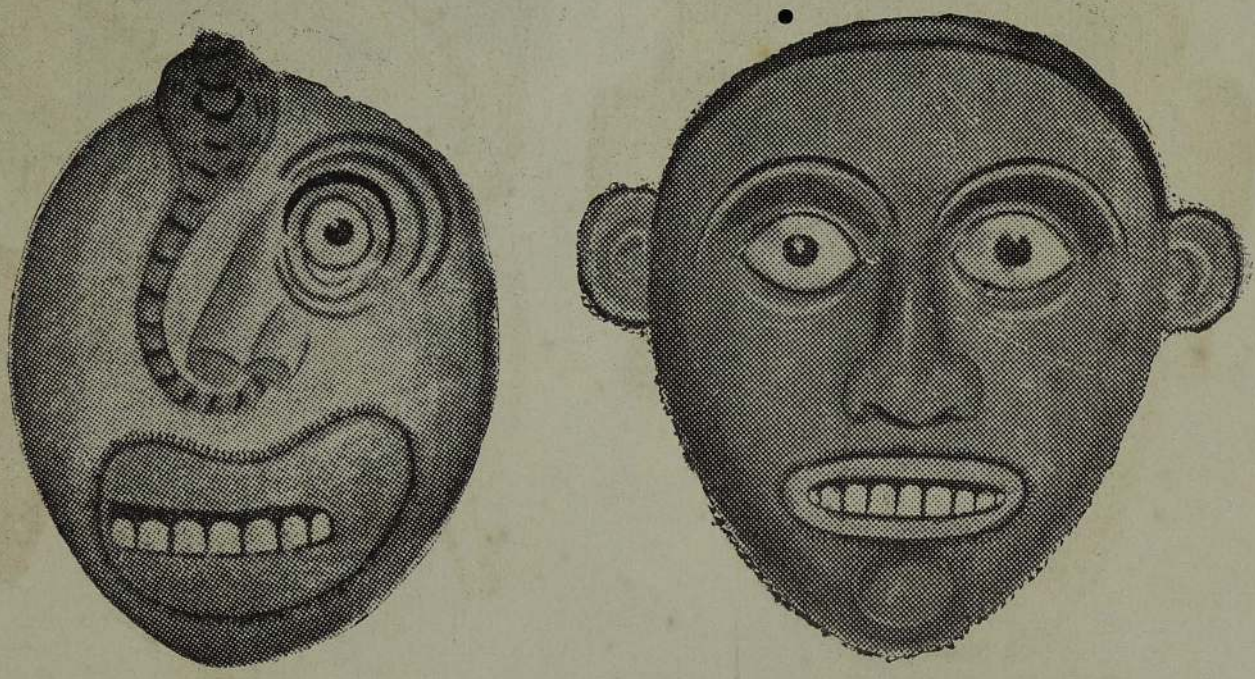

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Plate XVII

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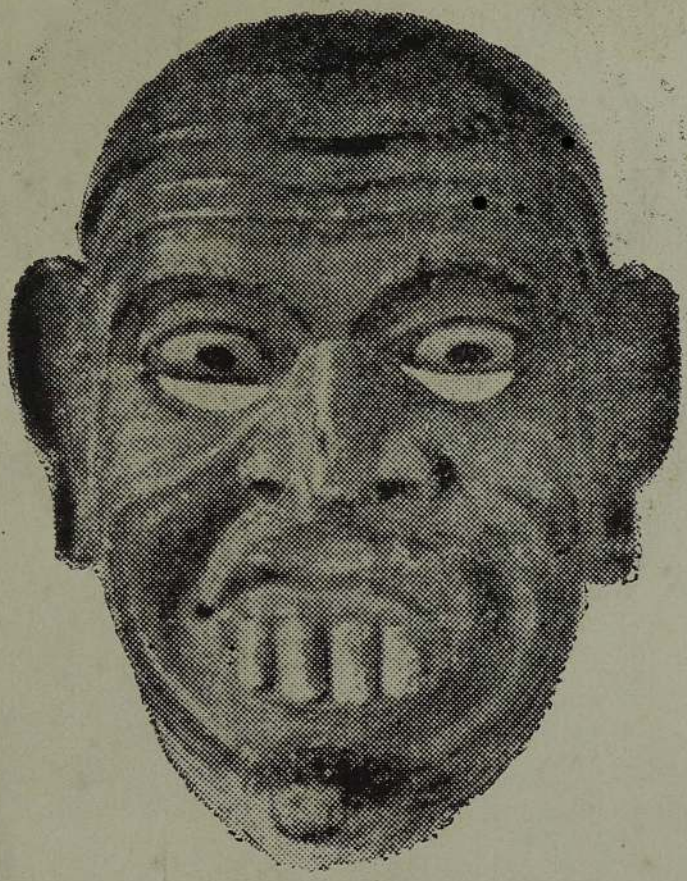

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Plate XVIII

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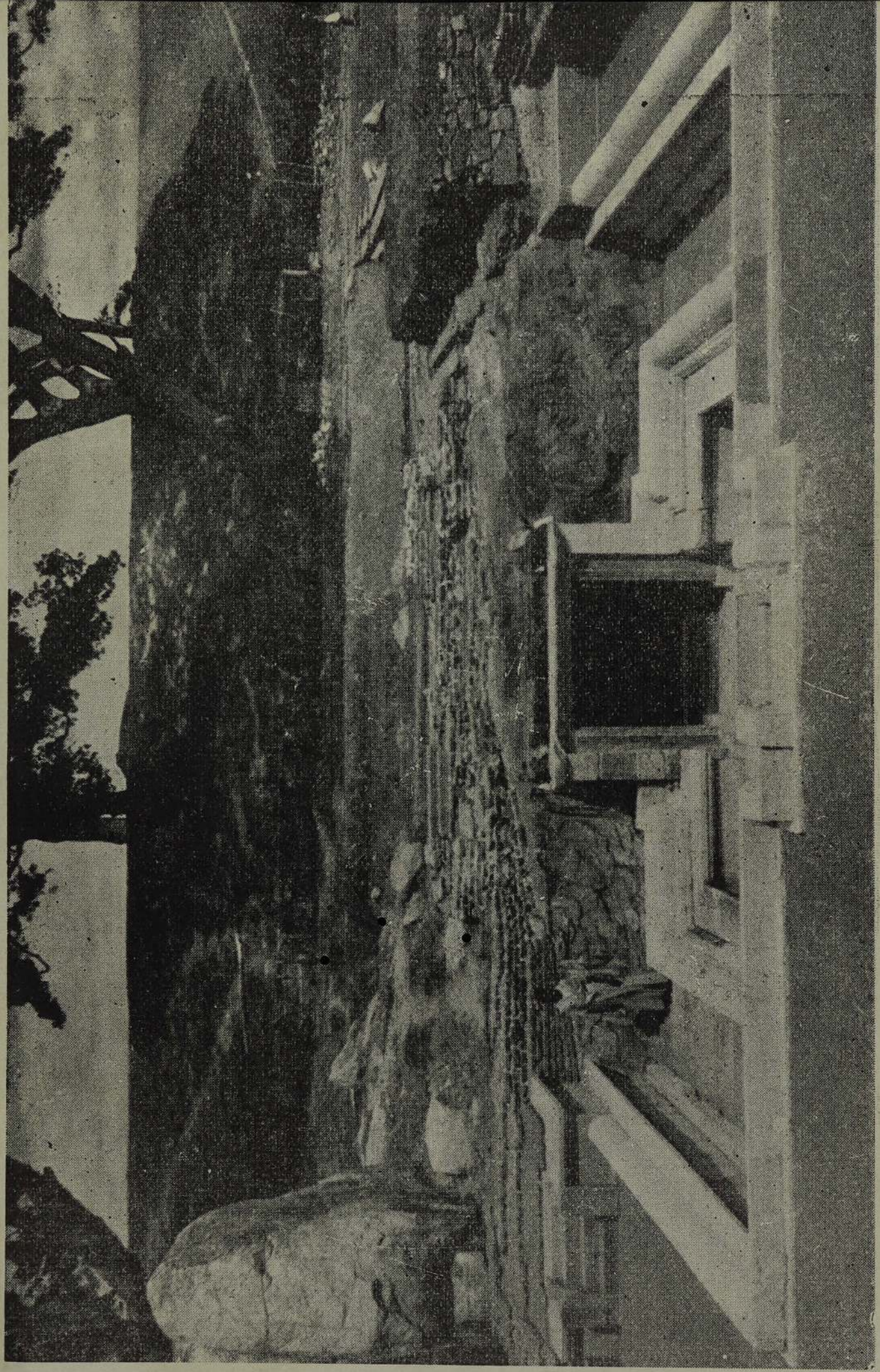
Plate XIX



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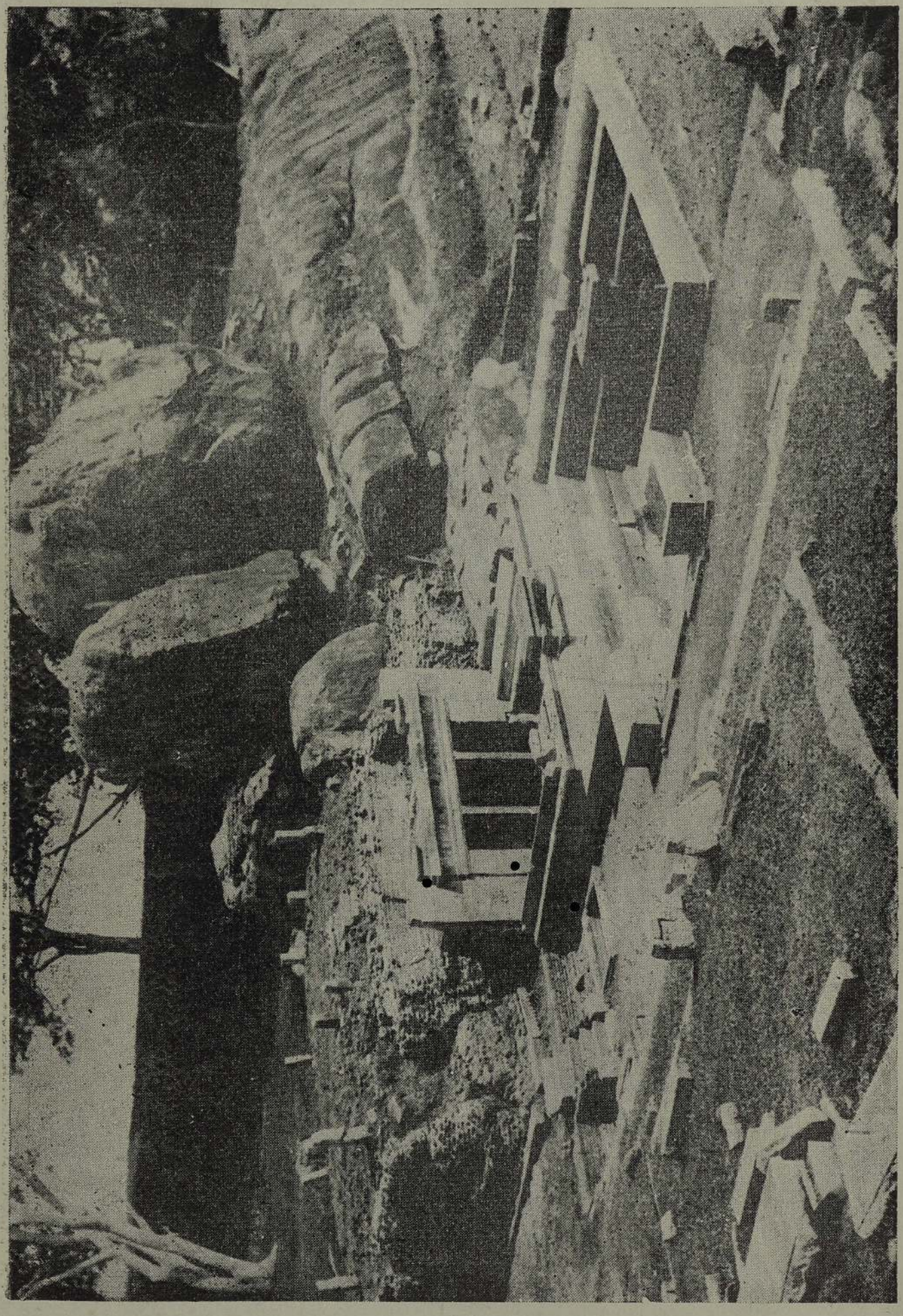

Plate XXI

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