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BUDDHISM AND ART

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BUDDHISM AND ART

BY

MARTIN WICKRAMASINGHE

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PREFACE

My approach to Buddhist art, and to Buddhist philosophy which inspired the artists, is not that of the archaeologist or of the Pandit who plods his way through the text, but of the critic and imaginative writer.

The Buddha denied the reality of the person, the individual, and the unchanging individual soul, but not the non-personal elements of transcendental reality which have been personified by many religionists including later Buddhists, except for one or two old Mahāyānist thinkers.

Nirvāṇa is the unchanging form of changing metaphysical reality which transcends the reality of impersonal elements - sankhāras, which are in continual flux. Professor Rhys Davids explaining the meaning of the word saṅkhāra said about half a century ago: "One of the most difficult terms in Buddhist metaphysics, in which the blending of the subjective-objective view of the world and of happening, peculiar to the East, is so complete that it is almost impossible for Occidental terminology to get at the root of its meaning in a translation."[1]

The development of science and philosophy during the last half a century has diminished, if not demolished, the artificial boundaries of thoughts and concepts which made it impossible for Western terminology to get at the root of the meaning of an Indian concept, specially that of Buddhism

1 T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede, *Pali-English Dictionary*, Vol. iv, p. 123

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which implied the blending of the subjective-objective view of the world and of happening. The word 'world-stuff' used by the English biologist Sir Julian Huxley, the word 'event' used by Bertrand Russell, and the words 'mind dust' and 'neutral reality' imply conceptions similar to the concept of *sañkhāra*.

"Thus 'mind' and 'mental' are merely approximate concepts giving a convenient shorthand for certain approximate causal laws," says Bertrand Russell. "In a completed science, the word 'mind' and the word 'matter' would both disappear and would be replaced by causal laws concerning events.

"We have to ask: Is matter emergent from events? Is mind emergent from events? If the former, is mind emergent from matter, or deducible from the properties of matter, if the latter is matter emergent from mind or deducible from the properties of mind or neither? Of course, if neither mind nor matter is emergent from events, these latter questions do not arise."[2]

"Huxley uses," says Professor T.A. Goudge, "language of Spinozistic cast and talks about matter and mind not as potentialities but as 'aspects of the ultimate substance in which they are united'. Again he declares that mind is developed from some 'universal' property of the world-stuff"[3]

By the acceptance of the concept of Brahman or the supreme impersonal spirit of the Upanishadic

---

2 Bertrand Russell, *An Introduction to Philosophy*, pp. 292, 294

3 T. A. Goudge, *The Ascent of Life*, *p. 160*

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mystics,[4] the Buddha would have been involved in absurdities and contradictions in explaining the relations of it to the origin and the reality of the empirical world. As the world is a manifestation of the supreme impersonal and unchanging spirit, moral evil and the cruel and destructive aspect of nature become inseparable from it.

The Buddha rejected the ontological aspect of the concept of Brahman[5] and said there is no beginning or end for the impersonal changing reality. Man can realise, or create for himself by his own effort, the Nirvāṇa or the unchanging bliss. A sceptic would say, that the Buddha reintroduced the concept of Brahman in a new garb from the back door of metaphysics.

In fact the Buddha developed a new metaphysical theory by rejecting the a priori method and following the a posteriori method. Upanishadic mystics accepted the Brahman and followed the deductive method of reasoning and contemplation. The Buddha, who was also a mystic, boldly rejected the concept of Brahman and the a priori method but realised noumenal truth by following the inductive method of reasoning and contemplation. The Buddha, I believe, invented the tradition of criticising tradition and myths-simultaneously with the Greeks if not before them.

The Buddha preached his eightfold path to those who renounced the householder's life. Many

4 The founders of the oldest speculative monistic philosophy which later developed into the Vedāntic system.

5 The Indian conception of the absolute or the essence from which all created beings are produced.

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Western scholars lack a discerning knowledge of the daily life of Buddhist laymen of the Buddha's time or that of laymen of Buddhist countries today. They treat the eightfold path as a way of life for all Buddhists—monks, laymen and laywomen. But the Buddhist laity are free to adapt and assimilate any culture. The only Buddhist aspect of their culture is the way of worship and the support of the Sangha who have entered the path and order. The five precepts repeated daily or weekly by the laymen and women of Ceylon are not exclusively Buddhist. They are a part of pre-Buddhistic Indian ascetic ethics. The majority of the Buddhist monks of Ceylon live a rigorous ascetic life. Consciously and unconsciously they desire to see laymen admiring with profound respect the ethics of the eightfold path, if these lay people do not go so far as attempt to practise them.

The Buddha said that there is no beginning or end to the changing process of the phenomenal world. He preached a path (a way of life) which led the person who entered it to attain prajñā (consciousness without content) by purging the mind of empirical knowledge, ego and all desires. In explaining the new way of life and the concept of Nirvāṇa or noumenal truth, he resorted to the common knowledge and linguistic usage prevalent in India during his time. The Pāli words *sammuti sacca* literally mean the truth accepted by common consent. The highest unchanging truth is Nirvāṇa which is indefinable. Nirvāṇa can be realised by the person who becomes a wayfarer after renouncing the householder's life.

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Centuries after the death of the Buddha, commentators interpreted his discourses according to the conventional truths and linguistic usages which were accepted by the intelligentsia of their times. The metaphysical aspect of Buddhism was developed by Theravāda commentators. They called it *abhidhamma* or metaphysical discourses and attributed them to the Buddha. The dogmas of *abhidhamma* became absolute truths equal to a revelation.

The Buddha rejected Vedic revelation and occult religious dogmas of his time. And his exhortation in two discourses[6] to laymen to examine and reject the authority of Vedic revelation, tradition and dogma is a charter of intellectual freedom.

The mystic intuition of the Buddha does not mean ominiscience which sees all truths of life and of the physical world. He gained *prajñā* or the knowledge of the highest truth by purging his mind of all knowledge of the physical world and life. The phrase 'consciousness without contents' used by Carl Yung suggests the bare idea of the mystic intuition denoted by the word prajñā.

The Buddha said in *Alagaddupama Sutta* that not only the knowledge of the world and life but the knowledge of his own doctrines should be discarded after crossing the 'ocean of becoming' (*bhava sāgara*) like the man who discards his raft on the bank after crossing the river and attaining his objective.[7]

---

6 *Anguttara Nikāya*, Tika Nipāta and Catukka Nipāta

7 *Majjhima Nikāya*, Alagaddupama Sutta.

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The great *Vedāntic* thinker Sankarāchārya, in defining the word prajñā according to Upanishadic philosophy, said that 'he who is mostly ignorant is the person with the highest cognition.'

Prajñā is attained by the Buddhist yogi who purges all sense knowledge and conceptual constructions by spiritual discipline which consisted of two parts: virtue (sīla) and contemplation (samādhi). *Prajñā* or non-dual knowledge itself is Nirvāṇa.

As long as the yogi is in the state of prajñā he realises Nirvāna and is completely ignorant of the empirical world. Only when he releases from the state of samādhi and prajñā, his empirical knowledge becomes active and his prajñā inactive. But he can get into the state of prajñā (mystic intuition) by reverting his attention to the experience of that supernormal state which he attained by discipline and practice.

Buddhist worship and the offering of flowers to religious symbols at the temple are more an aesthetic way of approaching religion. The worship of supernatural powers is more an occult way of approaching religion. It inspires fear and trembling rather than deep aesthetic feeling which dissolves the ego conciousness of the worshipper through empathy.

The image of the Buddha in samādhi mood which is called the consciousness detached from the world is referred to with insight by Dr. Stella Kramrisch as 'Face of Nirvāṇa.'[8] Professor Herman Keyserling calls it an absolutely perfect

8 Stella Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture pp. 62, 63, Art of India Through the Ages p. 34*

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embodiment of spirituality in the visible domain.[9] This abstract creation is one of the great achievements of old Buddhist sculptural art. Animistic religious beliefs inspired African sculptors to develop an amazing art, making visible the invisible which fired the philosophical imagination of twentieth century European artists. The old sculptors of Ceylon and India have been inspired, like modern European artists, by metaphysical conceptions which reduced the world and man into impersonal changing realities.

Serenity, repose, and spirituality are amongst the qualities attributed to African sculpture by Elsy Leuzinger and other art students. These qualities attain a perfection and an intensity in one of the stone Buddha images of Ceylon.

I have devoted one of the last two chapters to discuss an interesting aspect of the minor sculptures of folk artists of ancient Ceylon and India which has been completely overlooked by archaelogists and art students. These sculptures in bas-relief are called *vāmana* or dwarf figurines, not bigger than four or five inches, carved with infinite patience and care by ancient sculptors of Ceylon mostly on the stone pillar capitals. These stone pillar capitals lay strewn and partly hidden by the overgrowth of weeds on the grounds of the ruined monasteries of Anuradhapura. These figurines caricature the human comedy of old Ceylon with humour, sarcasm, and boisterous hilarity.

---

9 Hermann Keyserling, *The Travel Diary of a Philosopher, p. 280*

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I am very thankful to Mr. L. K. Karunaratne, senior draughtsman of the Archaeological Department of Ceylon, who aroused my interest in these sculptural midgets by presenting me, about thirty years ago, with line drawings of a few of them. Since then with unabated curiosity I have collected these midgets, and studied with absorbing interest and pleasure the unending procession of these midgets who collectively symbolize the human grimace of old Ceylon. My thanks are also due to Mr. David Maurice, formerly U. Ghine of Burma and now living in Queensland, Australia, for generously sending me a large collection of photographs of Buddhist sculpture, and Mr. M. N. Jha, who was Cultural Secretary at the Indian Embassy in Ceylon, for procuring for me a collection of photographs of Buddha images from the Patna Museum. Finally I thank Mr. E. P. Mendis for carefully reading the manuscript and helping me with suggestions and criticism in the revision.

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Rajagiriya,
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I offer my thanks to the following archaeological authorities, museums, and other official sources for supplying me photographs of the Buddha figures and other sculptural creations, and giving me permission to reproduce them in this book: The Director-General of Archaeology in India for figures 5, 8, 16, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 29, which are reproduced from photographs supplied by the Department of Archaeology, Government of India; figures 6, 16, 17, 18 are reproduced from photographs supplied by the Government Museum, Madras; figure 7 from a photograph supplied by the Prince of Wales' Museum of Western India, Bombay; figures 19, 20 are from photographs supplied by Service Francais d'Information; figure 26 from a photograph of Photo-Commissie, Rijks-Museum, Amsterdam.

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The line drawings of dwarf figurines from 52 to 78 are by Mr. L. K. Karunaratne of the Archaeological Department of Ceylon. Figures 83 to 87 are from sketches made at the temples of South.India by Mr. H. L. Karunaratna, and the drawings of dwarf figures 88 to 98 are from photographs taken by the author with the permission of the Archaeological Department of Ceylon.

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Buddhism and Art

Many Buddhist scholars of Ceylon believe that the Buddha ignored and condemned art. Dr Ananda Coomaraswamy, I believe, is partly responsible for originating this idea which misinterprets the attitude of the Buddha to art and literature. Many Buddhist monks of Ceylon, having studied Sanskrit poetry and poetics uncritically, accepted the notion that art and poetry are inimical to Buddhism. The later Sanskrit court poetry depicted the life of the king, the women of his harem, their drinking parties and picnics. So the monks thought art and poetry were inimical to Buddhism and the Buddhist way of life. If they had taken the trouble to analyse the excitement and pleasure they derived reading court poetry instead of concentrating on the study of its sophisticated and polished diction and metaphors, they would have realised that it is not genuine art but amusement art. Amusement art excites cheap emotions without having the power to cleanse and refine which is the function of genuine art.

Dr Ananda Coomaraswamy in his *Dance of Śiva* quotes three passages from Pāli texts to prove that the Buddha condemned art. One is from the *Cullavagga*, in which the monks were forbidden to allow the figures of men and women to be painted on monastery walls, and were only permitted wreaths and creepers. Another passage is from the *Dasadhamma Sutta* in which the Buddha says: "Beauty is nothing to me; neither the beauty of the body

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nor that that comes of dress." The third passage quoted by him is from the *Visuddhi Magga*. "Living beings on account of their love and devotion to the sensations excited by forms and other objects of sense give high honour to painters, musicians, perfumers, cooks and elixir-prescribing physicians and other like persons who furnish us with objects of sense."[1]

The meaning of the phrase 'elixir-prescribing physicians' can be understood by referring to the *Kāma-Sūtra* of Vātsyāyana. The phrase refers, I guess, to vendors of aphrodisiacs. There are prescriptions in the *Kāma-Sūtra* for preparing such aphrodisiacs. All these passages apply only to monks who, when entering the Order, have promised to observe strictly the vow of celibacy. But the laymen are not celibates. They are to abstain from committing adultery. The Buddha in one of his suttas gave a rational definition of adultery which has no relation to the Christian concept of it. The other four precepts require laymen to abstain from destroying life, lying, stealing and taking intoxicating liquor.

The admonition of the Buddha to bhikkhus to keep away from women and sensual pleasures and not to admire the beauty of women and their colourful costumes is no revelation of his attitude to art. Nor do the above passages quoted by Dr Coomaraswamy suggest that the Buddha was hostile to art. The *Visuddhi Magga* is a much later book written in Ceylon by the scholar monk Buddhagosha. The passages quoted from it can

1. Dr Ananda Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Siva*, Simpkin Marshall, London, p. 19.

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be treated as sarcastic references to all kinds of amusement art, including epicurean culinary arts and court poetry developed under the influence of the hedonism of the Cārvakas or materialists of India. The later Sanskrit court poets became panegyrists of the king and his life in the harem. Most of them resorted to the *Kāma-Sūtra* for inspiration in romanticising the sex life of the king and the aristocracy.

In common with all other founders of religions the Buddha did not expound aesthetic theories of art and literature. The Buddha and some of his gifted disciples created a literature which has some affinities to the literature created by English novelists and poets after the rise of English empiricism with Locke, Berkeley and Hume in the eighteenth century.

After the Buddha's death aesthetic symbols—the Buddha image, the stupa and the paintings of Jātaka stories—were introduced in temples. The Buddha image in samādhi mood was perfected in Ceylon after Buddhist iconography had developed for several centuries, unaffected by the influence of popular Hindu culture. To form an idea of Buddhist art and literature one needs to study and examine independently Pāli poetry, the Jātaka stories, the Buddha image, and temple paintings. Then only can we discriminate and appreciate the principles underlying Buddhist art and literature.

Militant Hindu art and literature rose at the end of the Gupta age as a violent reaction against Buddhism and Buddhist culture. Buddhist culture

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was a continuation and development of the culture of the Upanishadic period. Peace and serenity are characteristics of Upanishadic culture. But the rise and spread of humanitarianism was due to Buddhist culture and to the Jaina religion. The invasion of India by hostile races and fratricidal wars between the kings of different dynasties goaded the people to revolt against Buddhism and Buddhist culture, which did not instil the spirit of war and national pride in them. Militant Hinduism developed as a result of this revolt and reaction. Hindu art and literature at the end of the Gupta age developed a new idiom which was opposed to the dominant features of Buddhist sculpture: serenity, peace, restraint and humanitarianism.

"The revolt is in full swing" says Professor A. M. Hocart in *The Life-Giving Myth*, his study of post-Gupta Hindu art, "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."[2]

The difference between the genius of Buddhist art and that of later Hindu art could be best appreciated by comparing two sculptural masterpieces—the Buddha image in samādhi mood and the image of Śiva in his cosmic dance—which represent the configurational differences of the two cultures. According to the classification of the American anthropologist Ruth Benedict, Buddhist culture is Apollonian and the Hindu culture

2. A. M. Hocart, *The Life-Giving Myth*, Methuen. London, 1952, p. 241.

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Dionysian.[3] These differences imply principles of art which are independent. The principles of Buddhist art and literature have escaped the attention of even Buddhist scholars, who have uncritically accepted the principles of criticism which were developed on the basis of court poetry by Sanskrit alankārists. There is a passage in *The Principles of Art* by R. G. Collingwood which throws light on the motives that encouraged our scholars to admire and over-estimate Sanskrit court poetry and Sinhalese poetry produced in imitation of it in the twelfth century.

"The Victorian by temperament," says Collingwood, "is a snob. Literature dealing with high life at once excites and in fancy gratifies the social ambition of readers who feel themselves excluded from it, and a great part of the Victorian novelist's work was devoted to making the middle classes feel as if they were sharing in the life of the upper."[4]

Buddhist scholars who studied Pāli and Sanskrit have been looked down upon by the Westernised upper-class Sinhalese. Those scholars seem to have found a way of escape in reading Sanskrit court poetry which helped them imaginatively to share the life of the aristocracy of old India and Ceylon. Many English-educated middle-class Sinhalese became devotees of the English and American novelists Jane Austen and Henry James. Both of them depicted with consummate art the life of the upper-class. Many middle-class Ceylonese became

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3. RUTH BENEDICT, *Patterns of Culture*, Mentor Books, IV, p. 72.
4. R. G. COLLINGWOOD, *The Principles of Art*, Oxford, 1936, V, p. 72.

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devotees of the Victorian novel, not because they perceptively appreciated its form, but because they felt that they were sharing the life of upper-class English society. The psychology behind most of our Oriental scholars who became devotees of Sanskrit court poetry is much the same.

The independence of Buddhist art and literature and the latter's affinity to certain aspects of modern English literature are no accidents. During the last fifteen years several books on the origin and development of the modern English novel have been published. Some of these studies trace the influence of eighteenth century empirical philosophy on the development of the English novel. One of them is *The Rise of the Novel* by Ian Watt. Another is Basil Willy's *The Seventeenth-Century Background*, which describes the theistical, idealistic, and realistic philosophical thought in relation to the development of English literature, especially poetry.

English philosophical realism was given a definite shape by John Locke in the seventeenth century. David Hume developed it as an anti-traditional and anti-theistical realism in the eighteenth century. Many students of culture think that the greatest contribution of the English to European culture is their realistic and anti-traditional philosophy. It encouraged the growth of individualism and free exploration of nature. The philosophical realism developed in consequence of the Buddha's rejection of theistic idealism is one of the basic principles on which Buddhist culture and literature developed during his time, and in later times Buddhist scuplture. The Buddha rejected the Vedic tradition and in two of his

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suttas he advised his followers not to accept without examination tradition and authority. But with regard to religious experience he rejected reason and upheld the intuitive method of realising the noumenal truth. The Greek tradition and Western realism enthroned reason and ignored religious experience, which has been embedded in the anti-rational occult dogmas of the Bible especially in the Old Testament. The religious experience of Jesus Christ embedded in the New Testament, I believe, is closer to the religious experience of the Buddha who rejected occult dogmas, than to that of any other religious founder.

Hinduism developed as a syncretic religion which could assimilate elements from any culture and religion from the lowest to the highest. It has occult and sacrificial rituals which appeal to people whose religion is still in the animistic stage. There are in it the highest philosophical speculations and austere moral conceptions which appeal to the thinker and the cultured man. At the same time there is sex occultism combined with the highest theistical speculations. Hinduism tolerates and accommodates occultism and Tantric ritual.

The Buddha's attitude to the phenomenal world excludes from his religion every kind of occult mysticism. The Buddha said that there are three things unshrouded by mystery which shine throughout the world: the sun, the moon, and the Buddha's doctrine. This realistic and universal aspect of Buddhism founded on the idea of the holy and the concept of Nibbāna manifests itself through Buddhist sculpture as serenity, peace, humanitarianism and light. The Buddha image in samādhi mood and

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the white-domed colossal stupa which shoots its metal pinnacle towards the dome of heaven are abstract symbols which embody serenity, restraint, and light.

The Buddhist cave temples of India are not dark, dingy halls. There are specially constructed huge windows in these cave temples to admit sunlight profusely. The inner halls of these temples are flooded with sunlight like in an open space. The Buddhist cave temple symbolises the Apollonian aspect of the Buddhist religion in contrast to the dark Dionysian aspect of later Hinduism.

The Hindu temple is the abode and seat of God. Its structure implies the idea of inspiring fear, awe, and a feeling of mystery in the mind of the worshipper. Its internal space is small like a mountain cave or the cavity of the heart.[5] "Congregational worship has no place in Hinduism," says Stella Kramrisch.[6] The basis of popular Hinduism is the *bhakti* cult, fed by occult rituals and fear-instilling mystery which generates numinous feelings in the worshipper. Hindu worship and rituals require darkness and mystery. Even the Buddhism of the illiterate Sinhalese villager, with all its accretions of animistic beliefs, does not assimilate occult rites which require fear-inspiring darkness and mystery. He resorts to occult rites and animistic practices only to seek help from gods and devils to overcome his enemies, or to cure sickness of wife or child, and to attain

5. Dr Stella Kramrisch, *Art of India Through the Ages*, Phaidon Press, London, p. 20.
6. Dr Stella Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple*, Calcutta, Vol. 1 p. 142.

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success in his business ventures. He instinctively does not syncretize his religion with these occult rites and animistic beliefs. Not only foreigners but even many educated Buddhists fail to understand the psychology of the Buddhist villager who resorts to occult rites or offers tokens to gods for protection in his worldly life. They wrongly identify it as a form of worship. Illiterate villagers do not worship these gods. In invoking one of these gods he bends his arms parallel to his waist and keeps the right palm over the left.

The Buddhist temple is meant and built for congregational worship. The *stupa* and the *bōdhi* tree are two symbols which invite congregational worship in an atmosphere of serenity, light and open space. The worship of these symbols inspires the idea of the holy (*saddhā*) but not the numinous feeling evoked by the mysterious and terrifying symbols of Hinduism enveloped in darkness. The Buddha, following the tradition of Upanishadic seers, shattered the religious autocracy of the Brahmins supported by the ruling class. He said that the individual, not gods, priests or fate, is the master of his self. But Brahminical religion re-appeared later as popular Hinduism which assimilated rites and beliefs from the animistic religions and thoughts from the greatest philosophical religions, including Buddhism. Hinduism has strength and tolerance to unite all religions, but at the same time there is a sinister irrational anti-intellectual anti-democratic element in it which encourages a fusion of fascism and theocracy.

These differences between Buddhism and Hinduism imply diametrically opposed canons of art

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and literature. One of the easiest ways to understand these fundamental differences in the principles of art and literature of Buddhist and Hindu India is a comparison of the Buddha image in samādhi with the image of Śiva in his cosmic dance.

The greatness of that Hindu masterpiece, the image of Śiva, is in its violent rhythm, religious and philosophical symbolism. But it has another aspect which illustrates the *rasa* theory of poetry developed by later Hindu alankārists. The *rasa* theory has a psychological basis instead of a basis of philosophical aesthetics. The destructive weapons and the fireball in the hands of Śiva, the ring of fire surrounding it, and the garland of skulls, perhaps evoke many of the *rasas* or sentiments enumerated by the alankārists. The *ḍamaru* drum (*uḍekki*) in one hand of the image, in spite of the terrifying aspect of the whole figure, suggests humour or comedy to an intelligent man who does not believe in gods of creation and destruction.

Let us compare the image of Śiva with the figure of the Buddha. Serenity and restraint, and a rhythm more difficult to express through stone sculpture than that of violent movement, pervade the Buddha image in *samādhi* which symbolises a consciousness completely detached from the world. It generates serene joy, not a feeling of mystery and fear. The figure of the sitting Buddha with the knot of hair on the top of the head, directs the gaze of the person who looks at it to the white-domed heaven.

The sedent Buddha image in samādhi mood 'is an absolutely perfect embodiment of the spirituality in the visible domain.' The figure of the

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Buddha in this mood at Anurādhapura is one of the greatest masterpieces which represents transcendental intuition in visible form. One aspect of this mood is the detachment of consciousness from the world. The German philosopher Hermann Keyserling, who came to Ceylon to study Buddhism, seems to have intuitively grasped this aspect of the Buddha figure when he said: "I know nothing more grand in this world than the figure of Buddha. It is an absolutely perfect embodiment of spirituality in the visible domain. And this is not owing to the expression of calm, of soulfulness and inwardness which it bears, but it is due to the figure in itself, independent of all concurrence with corresponding phenomena in nature."[7]

Eric Newton, who refers to the 'countless cross-legged Buddhas of Ceylon,' seems to have been moved by the idea of serenity which every Buddha statue embodies. He says that behind every statue is the implication of the mood.[8] The samādhi statue embodies not only serenity but also other deeper inner aspects of the personality of the Buddha in contemplation. Keyserling intuitively seems to have felt some of them. But he forgets the fundamental difference between Buddhism and Hinduism. The Buddha does not reject the rational method of exploring the phenomenal world though he upholds the intuitive method of knowing the noumenal truth. He does not accept the concept of *Ātman* and the phenomenal world

7. Hermann Keyserling, *The Travel Diary of a Philosopher*, Jonathan Cape, London, Ch. 28, p. 280.
8. Eric Newton, *European Painting and Sculpture*, Pelican, p. 43.

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as a shadow of it. The Buddha's mystic conception of the Absolute is also psychological and aesthetic. The Buddhist sculptor's intuition makes use of reason in suppressing wild and exuberant myth-making imagination. This subordination of reason to intuition is implied in Buddhist art and in old Pāli literature.

Hindu artists had to create symbols for expressing the creative activities of gods, their superhuman powers, the romantic stories of their exploits. So they created weird figures, with numerous arms and heads and violent gestures. And sometimes they attempted to represent in sculpture the self-luminous unchanging *Ātman* imprisoned in a body which is only a shadow of reality. The hands and heads of a shadowy figure can be multiplied to suit the uncontrolled imagination of the artist inspired by mythology.

Buddhist artists had to create the figure of a human being who attained, by a process of contemplation and ethical discipline, *prajñā* or non-dual knowledge which is called Nibbāna. The basis of Buddhist art is psychological and aesthetic realism and symbolism. The Buddha figure does not represent the human body idealized by artists and poets as surmised by E. B. Havell and some other art critics. It is an image attuned to express the embodiment of perfect spirituality or complete detachment of consciousness from the world.

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The Buddha Image and Other Creations

The artistic and cultural aspects of the sculpture of ancient Ceylon have not yet been independently studied and examined. They have been studied for nearly a century from the point of view of archaeology and history. Those who study Ceylon sculpture are still influenced by this point of view and do not make an attempt to deviate from the method dictated by it. In most of these studies, a critical reader finds references to schools of art, the periods in which these schools arose in India, and the influences that these schools are supposed to have exerted on the sculpture, not only of India, but also on the sculpture of Ceylon. Discussions on the religious symbolism which is supposed to lurk behind the sculptured images and references to *śilpa-śāstra* texts are regular features of some of the more scholarly books. These erudite studies are of absorbing interest to the student of archaeology and history. But they tire a student who is interested in the artistic and cultural aspects of these creations of the ancient sculptors.

Such a student feels that most of these scholarly books abound in references, in hackneyed phrases, to the chronology, art schools, and Sanskrit texts describing the anatomical measurements, gestures, and weird head-dresses of gods and goddesses. References to art schools, mostly, are convenient labels invented by historians to fix chronology. Most, if not all, of the texts are late compilations,

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not by master artists but by scholars who attempted to reduce the iconographical features and forms of the sculptural creations into abstract formulas and principles. And some of the later *śilpa-śāstra* texts, written in ungrammatical Sanskrit, are by minor craftsmen.

To appreciate the sculptural masterpieces of India and Ceylon a knowledge of religious iconography and the *śilpa-śāstra* texts is not essential. The Buddhist sculptures of Ceylon, except those of a very few Mahāyānist gods and goddesses, can be much better appreciated as artistic creations without a knowledge of iconography and the *śilpa-śāstra* texts.

"There is no contradiction in the fact," says John Irwin, in his essay on Indian Sculpture in a recent book, *Indian Art*, edited by Sir Richard Winstedt, "that this sculpture is at the same time an art conspicuous both for its conventional iconography and its astonishing life quality. To the mediaeval Indian sculptor, no less than to his contemporary in Europe, the rules of iconography were of the utmost importance. The main point, however, is that they were important not as conventional imperatives imposed from without, but as living symbols in a community culture.

"In such art, iconographical conventions are not to be confused with the *conception* of a work of art; they are no more than the *matter* of the conception. The Kailāsa sculptors owed nothing to the iconographical literature known as the *śāstras*,

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which belongs to a later period and was intended primarily as an aid to visualisation of the gods in worship, not in sculpture."[9]

Amongst the many studies on Indian sculpture I have read, there are significant ones which are not confined to historical and archaeological methods. Of these, three are by Dr. Stella Kramrisch, and the fourth is a very thoughtful essay by John Irwin in the book *Indian Art* I have just referred to. Stella Kramrisch in her three books *Indian Sculpture*, *The Art of India through the Ages* and *The Hindu Temple* attempts to look at Indian sculpture from a new angle which is a combination of aestheticism, technique, and the philosophy of Indian religions.

The early students and archaeologists had to combat and refute attacks on Indian sculpture by eminent professors and aestheticians of the West who studied the perfected naturalism of the classical Greek sculpture. Rajendra Lal Mitra, in his study of Indian art and culture in two volumes under the title *Indo-Aryans*, examines these criticisms. The third chapter of the first volume of this monumental study is devoted to Indian sculpture. He tries to refute the criticisms of Indian sculpture by Wilhelm Lubke, Ruskin, and Westmacott. This combative apologetical method was continued by Dr Ananda Coomaraswamy, Havell and others. In a recent book of essays on Indian art, J. V. S. Wilkinson refers thus to this prejudice: "The main reason for this is simply that Europe would not lift its heavy eyes and look beyond its borders.

9. John Irwin, Indian Sculpture, in *Indian Art*, edited by Sir Richard Winstedt, Faber, London, p. 96.

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As for this country, Ruskin and other high priests of criticism misled people by condemning all Indian art comprehensively, without examining the evidence."[10]

Discussions on the influence of art schools sometimes provoke national and racial prejudices which lead critics and historians to chauvinism. Cultural borrowing is not copying or imitation. All highly developed cultures are independent and have their own patterns or integrations. Language and religion are two factors that combine in endowing an individuality and a pattern of its own to a culture. This individuality is the result of the integration of various cultural elements in which language and religion exert considerable influence. Some of these elements in every culture are mostly borrowed. They have to be re-adapted and re-created to become homogenous parts of an independent culture.

"No culture is a simple copy of any other. No historian of present-day European culture would dare to assign it to any one original source. He knows perfectly that we have borrowed from everywhere, from ancient Greece as well as China and Japan, from India and from aboriginal America, and that out of the mixture we have evolved an entirely independent and homogenous culture," said Malinowski.[11]

New cultural objec[illegible] and customs spread among the whole populatio[illegible] If they undergo, at the

10. J. V. S. Wilkinson, In[illegible]dian Painting in *Indian Art*, edited by Sir Richard Winstedt, p. 106.

11. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Life of Culture, in Culture: A Symposium*, Psyche Miniatures, p. 36.

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hands of ordinary people, changes in re-adaptation and become a part of the independent culture of that people, then is it not wrong to attempt detecting affinities, borrowings and influences on the sculptural creations of artists who have had a vision and an independent culture of their own? But many scholars still resort to this detective method when they wish to decide the chronology of old sculptures of India and Ceylon and other countries of the East. Mirella Levi D'Ancona, in an article (1952) appearing in the Art Bulletin published by the College Art Association of America, makes an attempt to decide the chronology of some of the major sculptures of ancient Ceylon. The writer, who shows a deep knowledge of the styles and draperies of Indian sculptures, treats some of the major Ceylon sculptures as mere copies. She dismisses the samādhi Buddha statue of Ceylon with these remarks: "The Ceylon and Amarāvati Buddhas considered above differ in their attitudes, the *Abhaya mudrā* (blessing attitude) being depicted in the one at Amarāvati, while the seated Buddha in the Colombo Museum is in the *Dhyāni-mudrā* (meditating attitude); a slight difference in style is revealed in the more fleshy appearance of the legs and foot in the Sinhalese example, but, aside from these minor differences of details the example from Ceylon seems to follow closely the Amarāvati style.

Buddhism was introduced to Ceylon in the third century B.C. For over two thousand years Buddhism held sway over the people of Ceylon. Sinhalese was derived from an Indian Prakrit

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and developed as an independent language receiving sustenance from Pāli, Sanskrit, and also slightly from Tamil. Buddhism and Buddhist culture came from India. But like their language, the culture of the Sinhalese also developed in isolation from the Indian continent and independently until at least the eighth century.

India is a vast country where Buddhism existed with Jainism, Hinduism, and different offshoots of the latter. In India, Buddhist culture and art had to live and develop cheek by jowl with Hindu culture and art. This intimacy and communion of the two cultures and arts had their effects on the two religions. It was by this process that the peace and serenity of classical Buddhist art was developed into a powerful new Hindu art idiom of violence and movement. It ignored the restraint imposed by Buddhism and Upanishadic philosophy. The classical art of the Gupta period developed under the influence of Buddhist culture.

Buddhist art in India developed under the patronage of rich merchants. The Buddhist temples and monuments in South India, especially places like Nāgarjunikonda, had been built under the patronage of Buddhist queens of Hindu kings, and of rich merchants who traded with foreign countries as well as with far-away cities of India. Mathurā, a junction of trade routes, was a great centre of sculpture during the first three centuries of the Christian era. The dominant community in Mathurā was the *seṭṭhis* or merchants.

It is said that there were more than thirty studios or factories in Sarnath alone, during the

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Gupta period, which manufactured Buddhist, Jaina, and Hindu icons on a commercial scale. And in Mathurā studios were more commercialized and served as factories.[12] It is legitimate to surmise here that in these factories the icons of a particular religion were not designed and executed by artists who were adherents of that religion.

Fig. 1

It was archaeologist Longhurst who said that the Nagārjunikonda Buddhist sculptures were the work of Hindu sculptors hired by Buddhist queens of Hindu kings. Some of the sculptures supply evidence to support this theory. The sitting Buddha

12. JOHN IRWIN, Indian Sculpture, in *Indian Art*, edited by Sir Richard Winstedt, p. 79.
"The Mathurā workshops were commercialized and served as factories for the supply of images over a very wide area in northern India."

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images in relief, not only of Nāgarjunikonda but even of Amarāvati, show that they were designed and carved by artists who were ignorant of Buddhism, its culture, and even the life story of the Buddha. The sitting postures of the Amarāvati and Nāgarjunikonda Buddha reliefs contradict Buddhist iconography. The sitting posture and the gestures of the hands of these reliefs (Figs. 1, 2) betray the artist's lack of reverential feeling and of a knowledge of Buddhism and its iconography.

"Sophisticated ecstasies of modelling effloresced in fugitive linear rhythms" is an apt phrase used by Stella Kramrisch to distinguish the narrative style of Buddhist art. In the bas-reliefs of Buddha figures in Amarāvati and Nāgarjunikonda a continuation of this narrative style can be easily seen.

Fig. 2

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The sitting posture of all the early Indian Buddha statues is that of the Hindu yogi but not of the Buddha. The Hindu yogi resorted to rigid postures to control the limbs and the flesh. The Buddha rejected these posture devices, treating them as a method of self-mortification. *Padmāsana* (Fig. 3) or the cross-legged posture slightly tortures the legs until the yogi, by practice, gains control over the muscles of his legs and the body. Apart from the Buddha's rejection of cramping postures, the cross-legged posture was not easy for Buddha or his disciples because of the long robe with which they covered their body. The robe of the Buddhist monk reached his ankles from the neck. Under this robe he wore another loin-cloth which reached his ankles. Most of the Hindu yogis wore a loin-cloth and a shawl-like cloth which covered the

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upper body. This dress of the Hindu yogi is no impediment to the cross-legged posture called *padmāsana* (Fig. 3).

The sitting posture of the Buddha is called *paryañkāsana* (pallañka) in the Pāli texts and in Sanskrit books it is referred to as *vīrāsana*. The Yoga Sutras of Patañjali define *vīrāsana* thus: A man settled down rests one foot on the ground and the other is placed over the partially contracted knee: this is hero-posture. Most, if not all, of the early Buddha images of India are of *padmāsana* or the cross-legged posture. The Buddha in samādhi or the contemplative mood is rare among the Indian images.

The earliest Buddha images of Ceylon represent the *paryañkāsana* or the hero-posture (Fig. 4). And the majority of them are in samādhi mood. In South India, especially in the Tanjore district and at Kanchipuram, there are stone Buddha images in hero-posture as in the Ceylon images. But all these South Indian images in this posture are later than those of Ceylon by four or five centuries.

These facts raise a problem which can be solved by plausible generalisation. In Ceylon, Buddhist iconography developed for nearly a thousand years in a cultural milieu that can be described as eminently Buddhistic. It is true that there was a continuous migration f objects, ideas and customs from Buddhist India o Ceylon. Ceylon at first seems to have borrow d the art of sculpture from Āndhra. Mahāyānism, which developed in contact with the Hindu religion and ritual, was brought to Ceylon several times but never had a chance of

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establishing itself here as a separate sect. However the infiltration of Hindu cultural ideas and objects took place on a restricted scale, until the rise of militant Hinduism in South India probably after the seventh century under the guise of a *Vaishṇava* revival.

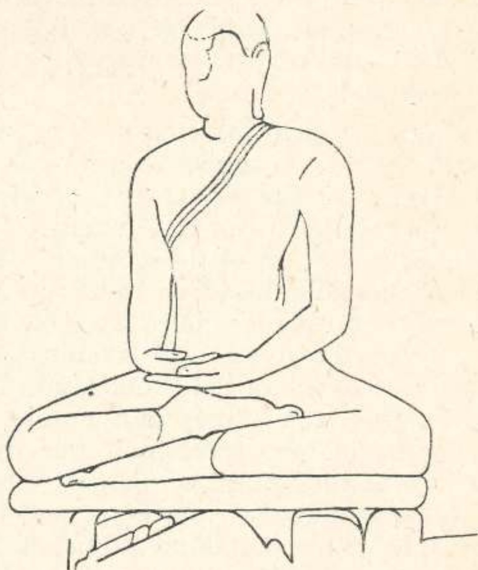

Fig. 4

It will be seen that Ceylon had a Buddhist cultural milieu continuously for over a thousand years, in which the Buddha image could develop strictly according to the canons of Pāli Buddhism. Buddhist artists of Ceylon seem to have concentrated on developing the Buddha image which, next to the stupa, became the most prominent object of devotion and worship. Ceylon Buddhism

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had no great gods except Sakka who was not worshipped by Buddhists. Pantheons of Mahāyānism and Hinduism developed in competition creating innumerable gods and demons. The iconography of Mahāyānism and Hinduism grew like a jungle with gods and demons sometimes with a thousand arms and weird symbols, and destructive weapons, and in terrifying moods. Early Ceylon sculptors were never called to create icons of these gods.

There was no rich merchant class in Ceylon who could spend on gigantic rock-cut temples and the carving of the Jātaka stories which gave birth to a form of beautiful and sensuous sculptural art, vying with the art of the painter. This narrative art developed in Buddhist India was naturalistic and more sensuous than the religious and secular arts of the West. In keeping with the austere attitude to life of Pāli Buddhism, the artists of Ceylon engaged by kings and monks seem to have concentrated on developing the stupa first and later the sitting Buddha image. These two, in spite of their austere simplicity, are the most beautiful and monumental creations of Buddhist art. The sitting Buddha image in samādhi mood attempts to express the ineffable, the beauty of the noumenal truth which the Buddha called Nirvāṇa.

Stella Kramrisch, speaking of the Mathurā school Buddha image (fig. 10,) calls it 'the face of Nirvāṇa.' But the perfection of the 'face of Nirvāṇa,' in the Anurādhapura samādhi statue, was achieved by the sculptors of Ceylon (Fig. 11). The Toluwila samādhi statue (fig. 12) at the Colombo Museum is beautiful but sculpturally inferior in

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mass and solidity. In suggestive parapsychological and spiritual symbolism the Anurādhapura statue is unique. In a sea-girt island, where Buddhism and its culture existed without violent changes, the art of the stupa and of the Buddha image seems to have had a continuous independent development during the classical age of Sinhalese culture.

In India, many Buddhist centres did not continue undisturbed and unaffected by upheavals for more than four or five centuries. Some archaeologists have suggested that Indian sculptors, especially from Amarāvati, in consequence of such upheavals, must have migrated to Ceylon in search of work. If they migrated to Ceylon they should have carved here the Jātaka stories in stone, for they excelled in that form of narrative sculpture. The Amarāvati and Nāgarjunikonda Buddha images in bas-relief do not prove that they were master artists in designing and executing the Buddha image in samādhi or the contemplative mood.

There are elaborate descriptions in Buddhist books of the different stages of contemplation of an *arahant*, leading to the attainment of mystic intuition by purging the mind of all desires and suppressing the activity of the senses. This mystic intuition is Nirvāṇa itself. "Joy, calmness, happiness, virtue and sense of the holy (saddhā) shine in the intuition of the *arahat*, like a sheathed mirror inside a box," says a Buddhist text. This spiritual ecstasy emanates from the face, the body, and the limbs of the Anurādhapura masterpiece. Stella Kramrisch shows an intuitive understanding of the implications of the samādhi image when she says thus in her book *The Art of India through the*

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Ages: "The influence of Rome pervaded the frenzied virtuosity of Amarāvati in the second century A.D. and remained in Nāgarjunikonda for another century. Thenceforward faces look inwards, reflecting the conquest and imminence of Release in the mirror of detachment, with concentrated, indrawn expressions and clarity of form."[13]

The Anurādhapura samādhi statue (Fig. 11) is the perfect concrete representation of this abstract idea. I have seen many old Indian Buddha images in stone and metal, and I have collected about a hundred photographs of Buddha statues from the Buddhist countries of Asia. After studying the samādhi Buddha image for about twenty years, I can say without hesitation, and without a tinge of national chauvinism, that the Anurādhapura stone Buddha statue in samādhi is the greatest masterpiece which represents the 'face of Nirvāṇa'.

But there is no evidence to prove or disprove the uncharitable suggestion of certain scholars who prefer pyrrhonism to critical scepticism that the stone images of Anurādhapura were the work of Indian sculptors who migrated to Ceylon. In Ceylon, unlike in India, we have an uninterrupted development of Theravādi Buddhist cultural tradition. In India Buddhist culture and art developed, not in isolation, but in contact with Hinduism, Tantrism, Jainism and other cults. This development also continued only for a few centuries in certain areas of India until it was replaced by Hindu culture which assimilated the Buddhist

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13. STELLA KRAMRISCH, *Art of India through the Ages*, Phaidon Press, London, pp. 32, 33.

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culture and religion. The independent and continuous development of Buddhist art and culture in Ceylon for about 1,200 years is the only evidence that can be adduced to refute the suggestion of these scholars.

There was a controversy on the origin of the Buddha image among archaeologists and art critics. Progress of knowledge, especially of anthropology, seems to have convinced the archaeologists and historians of the futility of attempts to solve questions of origin not only of the creations of man but also of man himself.

Early English ethnologists, Sir Edward Tylor, Sir J. G. Frazer and Eliot Smith concentrated on the study of origins and diffusion of culture, religion, and magic. Present-day anthropologists and ethnologists ignore questions of the origin of religion and man's creations. The ape emerged as a result of the gradual evolution of a quadruped during geological ages which can be calculated in billions and trillions of years. There is no origin to man or ape because they have been evolved through aeons by gradual change. The idea of this gradual and continuous change eliminates the concept of the origin of things.

The Buddha, who lived 2,500 years ago, pointed out the futility of searching for origins. He said there is no beginning and end to the process of becoming. Everything is in continuous flux. It is futile to search for the origins of being or inanimate and animate things.

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But in the historical sense it is legitimate to discuss the origins of things and human creations. On this level there is verifiable historical evidence for the inference that the first image of the Buddha was created by Greek craftsmen who migrated to India during the time of the campaigns of Alexander the Great. E. B. Havell said that the Greek craftsmen who migrated to India were not even second-rate artists. Some Gandhara statues of the Buddha represent the crude ideas of Greek craftsmen, who attempted to visualise the personality of the Buddha on second-hand information they received from Buddhist monks of the conquered territories of North India.[14] Indian artists recreated the Buddha image and perfected it in the course of two or three centuries. There is a great difference between the images representing Buddhahood and the early Buddha images.

The Gandhāra Buddha images are not symbols of Buddhahood. They are images representing the external features and appearances of the Buddha as visualised by Graeco-Roman craftsmen (Fig. 22). Buddhahood means completely detached consciousness from the world. This abstract idea of Buddhahood in all details and perfection seems to have been successfully reproduced in visual form by a Ceylon sculptor who carved the Anurādhapura Buddha image in samādhi mood (Fig. 11). There are many Indian Buddha images which as sculptural masterpieces are superior to the Buddha images of Ceylon except, perhaps, the colossal Avukana standing Buddha statue (Fig. 109). But

14. E. B. Havell, *The History of Aryan Rule in India*, Harrap, London, p. 133.

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the Anurādhapura Buddha image in samādhi mood as an abstract art creation surpasses all Indian images because it renders 'Buddhahood' in perfect visual form.

When the consciousness of the yogi is completely detached from the world it becomes more sensitive. His intuition becomes more acute in compensation for the suppressed intellect. His body and his sense organs become highly sensitive. It is sternly controlled by his detached consciousness. The Anurādhapura Buddha image, which is thought to be of the second or fourth century, is a symbol which suggests these aspects of the Buddha's consciousness completely detached from the world. An intelligent man not acquainted with Buddhism who concentrates his attention on this image and scrutinizes it will think that it suggests a body, limbs and a mind which can be compared to a musical instrument with perfectly tuned strings which vibrate at the slightest breeze. He will notice that the two hands do not rest idly in relaxation on the lap of the image but that they are controlled from within, allowing them only a very slight contact with the thin robe which covers the body and lap.

The Buddha image in samādhi mood, with consciousness detached from the world, is rare amongst old Indian images. Every Buddha image, of course, suggests serenity.

But serenity is not an original creation of Buddhist art. The Mohenjodaro figure of a horned god in contemplative mood suggests, in a crude way, serenity. Serenity is a prominent feature of African sculpture. Let us consider some of the Buddha

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images illustrated in this book. Among the old Buddha images of India there are two in contemplative pose or *dhyāna mudrā* (Figs. 7, 9). The one from Mirpur Khas is a crude attempt to objectify samādhi or Buddhahood. The other from Chandanar, Orissa, is probably of magical significance; its attitude and the position of the hands represent the contemplative pose, but there is a bowl on the two hands of the image. In all Buddha images one of the most prominent features is serenity. But serenity alone does not represent Buddhahood or transcendental intuition. There are many amongst the Buddha images of ancient Ceylon which represent Buddhahood with its psychological and spiritual implications as described in Theravādi metaphysics. Almost all the early and even later Buddha images of Ceylon are in *pallaṅka* or *paryaṅkāsana*, which is defined in Pāli literature. It is called *virāsana* in Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra*. Of the two Chinese images (Figs. 21, 28) one represents an unconventional mood which cannot be identified as samādhi unless we think that the artist who made the image was ignorant of Buddhist iconography. But if the artist, ignoring iconography, attempted to represent the Buddha in his human aspect sitting at one of his residential temples, it can be appreciated as a fine piece of creative sculpture. The colossal Buddha figure from China (Fig. 28) is completely unconventional but suggests an independent and stern intellectual conception of Buddhahood. The Buddha figure from Angkor (Fig. 19) is a creation of late Khemer art. Its sitting posture is the same as that of the Buddha images of Ceylon. Its

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iconography is probably derived from Ceylon or South India, because North Indian Buddha images in this *paryaṅka* sitting posture are rare. The oldest Ceylon statue in samādhi mood and the *paryaṅka* posture belongs to the second or fourth century A.D. South Indian images in *paryaṅka* posture are later than the 8th century. The Buddha image of Ceylon in this posture is the oldest. Though the archaeologists have surmised that the Anurādhapura masterpiece belongs to the third or fourth century, it is more plausible to think that it is of an earlier age which should be identified with the early phase of the development of Mathurā sculpture. Dr N. D. Wijesekera in his *Early Sinhalese Sculpture* surmises that the basic idea of the samādhi image of Anurādhapura may have been derived from the early Kushan image from Katra (Fig. 5). The chronology of Ceylon Buddha images is guess-work based on the so-called Indian schools of sculpture.

There are only two lines on the curve of the upper border of the robe of the Anurādhapura Buddha image and they indicate the thinness of the robe. A profusion of lines in the robe giving it the illusion of thinness are a feature of late Mathurā and Gupta images of the Buddha. Such a profusion is absent in the Anurādhapura image. The fewness of the lines in this image cannot be attributed to the external source of weathering. Dr Stella Kramrisch thinks that the Katra image belongs to the first century A.D.

As Buddhist culture developed in Ceylon in isolation in a predominantly Buddhist environment, the sculptors in Ceylon had ample opportunities

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to develop independently the image of the Buddha according to the tradition of Theravādi Buddhism. There was a perpetual cultural conflict in old India because of three main religions, Buddhism, Brahaminism and Jainism. Later Buddhist culture and the religion itself became a source of fierce sectarian quarrels in India. Buddhist culture in Ceylon was free from these disturbing influences until at least the 8th century in spite of the occasional attempts of Indian monks to introduce heretical doctrines.

To my knowledge no independent investigation has been made to determine the origin and development of the Buddha image in Ceylon. The Anurādhapura Buddha image perfectly represents, in visual form, the psychological and spiritual implications of the samādhi mood, and the sitting posture known as *pallaṅka* (*paryaṅkāsana*) which is a peculiarity of the Ceylon images (Figs. 11 to 15). *Paryaṅkāsana* is quite different from the cross-legged *padmāsana* of the Indian images.

Since 1959 I have been in India twice. I spent two months in South India in search of Buddha images and dwarf figures. I visited archaeological sites and old Hindu temples. In 1961 I spent about a month in New Delhi and Bombay visiting a few of the important Buddhist archaeological sites. I have collected during the last twenty years photographs of about a hundred different stone and metal Buddha images. I was able to identify the sitting posture called *paryaṅkāsana* only in some of the South Indian, Thailand and Khemer images of the Buddha, and in a few Mahāyānist images of gods of the late Bengal art school. All of them

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have been dated from the seventh to the fifteenth century. Archaeologists who examined the Anurādhapura statue agree that its date cannot be later than the fourth century. But some of them push its date as far back as the first century A.D.

The sitting Buddha images of other parts of India I have been able to examine are invariably in the posture called cross-legged *padmāsana*. The sitting images in different *mudrās* or attitudes such as preaching, arguing, blessing and pointing one hand towards the earth represent serenity in visual form but not the meditative mood in which the Buddha attains samādhi or 'consciousness freed from the world'.

This psychological aspect and the sitting posture called *paryaṅkāsana* which is different to the cross-legged posture of the Buddha images of India, are the two distinguishing features of most of the Buddha images of old Ceylon. These two features can be made guiding criteria in any investigation to adduce evidence in support of the theory of the independent development of the sitting Buddha image in Ceylon. Phaṇindranāth Bose in his introduction to *śilpaśāstra* (text and translation) says statues representing *paryaṅkāsana* are rare in India.[15]

D. T. Devendra, who was in the Archaeological Department of Ceylon for several years, in his book *The Buddha Image and Ceylon*, adduces evidence to prove that the Buddha statue was made independently in Ceylon earlier than in India. He

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15. Phaṇindranāth Bose, *Principles of Indian Silpaśastra*, Calcutta, p. 58.

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bases his contention on the legendary history, *Mahāvaṁsa.* In support of his surmise he makes some legitimate conjectures contrasting the worship of certain Buddhist aniconic symbols by the early Buddhists of India and the absence of such symbols in early Buddhist Ceylon.[16]

The *Mahāvaṁsa* was written in the fifth century A.D. by a Buddhist monk. It refers to a Buddha image made in the third century B.C. and also to two golden Buddha images deposited in the treasure chamber of the colossal stupa built by king Duṭṭha Gāmaṇi in the second century B.C. A critical student of Ceylon history will refuse to accept the evidence of the *Mahāvaṁsa* which refers to historical incidents that occurred several centuries before the time of its author. But Devendra's reference to the absence of any aniconic symbols which were worshipped by the early Buddhists of Ceylon cannot be dismissed as mere speculation.

Buddhism was introduced to Ceylon about three centuries after the death of the Buddha. The worship of substitute symbols which represented the person of the Buddha must have originated in India during these centuries. The hesitation of the learned monks to encourage sculptors to make the image of the Buddha can be attributed to their metaphysical scruples, but not to a superstitious fear. The fundamental basis of Buddhist metaphysics is the denial of soul, person and personality. The monks could not have tolerated the representation of the Buddha as an individual

16. D. T. Devendra, *The Buddha Image and Ceylon,* Colombo ch. 7.

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with a personality or self. Buddhist metaphysics admit only the reality of *saṅkhāras* or causal events. The representation of the Buddha's personality in stone or metal would pave the way for people to believe in the existence of a self which would lead them to believe in the reality of an individual soul. There is abundant evidence from the oldest inscriptions to prove that the people of Ceylon were religiously fascinated by the simple and strictly ascetic life of the Buddhist monks. Their transparent sincerity and simplicity seem to have generated intense piety in the hearts of the peasant population who cultivated communal land. They felt that the monks were closer to them than their feudal lords. The monks first lived in caves and huts made for them by the people. Later, large and architecturally elaborate temples and shrines with colossal Buddha images were built by kings and feudal lords. But still the peasants thought that the king, the feudal lords, and they were equals in congregational worship at these temples.

The old Vedic religion of India was not iconoclastic. Nor did it encourage the worship of icons. Most, if not all, the Vedic gods were personifications of natural phenomena. The Vedic religion and the Brahminical culture did not create an atmosphere which would urge people to make icons and worship them. That aspect of religion was developed probably during the Gupta age with the growth of popular Hinduism. The *purāṇas* or Sanskrit epic poems recreated the Vedic nature gods as inhabitants of a vast supernatural world which was an imaginative projection of the aristocratic life of India. These poems

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narrated the exploits of new gods in romantic language. The old Vedic religion was monopolised by a joint Brahmin - Warrior caste oligarchy. Buddhism arose as a protest against this oligarchy.

Before the rise of Hinduism, Buddhism developed as a congregational religion with the worship of icons in India. In Ceylon there was no Vedic tradition and oligarchic culture which discouraged congregational worship. Buddhism quickly developed as a congregational religion. Feudal lords and the peasants intermingled in the worship of Buddhist symbols such as the white-domed stupa, the Bodhi tree under which the Buddha attained Buddhahood, and the Buddha image. In India monks and sculptors hesitated to make the figure of the Buddha. They substituted for the person of the Buddha, symbols such as his two feet, his seat, or the diamond throne and the wheel. Buddhists worshipped these symbols until the Buddha image was first made in India, probably by Greek craftsmen.

In Ceylon we have no archaeological or literary evidence to induce us to surmise that the early Buddhist substituted symbols to represent the person of the Buddha as happened in India. Unrestrained by Vedic tradition and the culture of a sacredotal caste, Ceylon monks and sculptors could have made the Buddha image earlier than it was made in India. Therefore the reference in the *Mahāvamsa* to the Buddha image made in Ceylon earlier than in India cannot be ignored. The warrior King Duṭṭha Gāmaṇi fought victoriously the greatest war recorded in the historical chronicles of Ceylon. According to the *Mahāvaṁsa*,

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Duṭṭha Gāmaṇi announced that he was fighting to save and protect Buddhism from the Indian king Eḷara who was ruling the kingdom of Anurādhapura during the second century B.C. He roused the religious fervour and patriotism of the monks and the laymen of the kingdoṁ of Ruhuṇa which comprised the present Southern, Eastern and Uva Provinces and a part of the Western Province.

The *Mahāvaṁsa* says that at the laying of the foundation of the great stupa Swarṇamāli which was built by the king in commemoration of his victory, monks from all Buddhist countries were present. The ceremony on this historical occasion has been narrated by the chronicler in absurdly romantic and hyperbolic language. This colossal stupa, renovated by the Buddhists of today, still stands with its shining metal pinnacle dominating the landscape of modern Anurādhapura (Fig. 30), as though in corroboration of the core of truth behind the *Mahāvaṁsa* story.

Buddhism was only one of the religions which dominated India. During the time of the emperor Aśoka, Buddhism spread throughout India but it never became the sole dominating religion uniting the vast heterogeneous population as one nation. After the victory of Duṭṭha Gāmaṇi Buddhism dominated Ceylon, uniting the people as a homogeneous community under a powerful ruler.

The clerical chronicler depicts the character of this king as a devoted and fervent Buddhist. His enthusiasm and religious fervour seem to have roused the people as a whole. This unifying religious and national atmosphere could have inspired

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the monks and sculptors of Ceylon to make the image of the Buddha independently of India.

The Vedic Brahmins identified themselves with the Kshatriya ruling class of India. Before the advent of Buddhism there were two nations: the Kshatriya-Brahmin oligarchy and the common people who were divided into inferior castes living in isolation. Buddhism challenged this Kshatriya-Brahmin oligarchy.

Ancient Ceylon was a country of peasants with whom the king identified himself at the annual ceremonial ploughing. Therefore Ceylon was one of the most congenial countries close to India for the birth of congregational worship in which rulers and the common people participated in the great religious ceremonies in commemoration of the birth and death of the Buddha.

The *Mahāvaṁsa* was written by a monk who lived in the fifth century. His reference to historical happenings which took place seven centuries earlier will be questioned justifiably by critical students of Ceylon history. But have they any justification to surmise that the oldest Buddha images of Ceylon were made by Indian sculptors or that the Ceylon monks borrowed the idea of the samādhi Buddha image from India? The sitting posture and the psychological implications of the samādhi or 'consciousness without contents' suggested by the Anurādhapura Buddha image contradict all such speculation.

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Symbolism and Originality

There are other independent sculptural creations by artists of Ceylon which corroborate the theory that the samādhi Buddha image in *paryaṅkāśana* and certain other aspects of Buddhist art were developed independently by sculptors under the guidance of the Theravādi tradition. One of them is the semicircular stone slab called a moonstone placed at entrances to many of the shrines at Anurādhapura. The design consists of a half-lotus in the centre surrounded by concentric zones of ornamental decorations of a row of geese, a foliated creeper, and a procession of animals. They are the elephant, horse, lion and bull (Figs. 31, 32, 33).

Archaeologists and art critics who have studied these creations of Ceylon sculptors are unanimous in appreciating them as masterpieces of sculptural art. But some of them differ in regard to their decorative motifs. They have attempted to interpret different elements of the moonstone as elaborate metaphysical or cosmographical symbols. In this attempt they seem to have forgotten the primary significance of the moonstone as a purely decorative piece of sculptural art.

Metaphysical and mythological considerations are justifiable in interpreting the meanings of the old creations of Buddhist sculptors. But we must rationally examine metaphysical and mythological interpretations of the decorative motifs of the moonstone.

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An artist may have studied metaphysics or been influenced by metaphysical ideas. But when he is not making the image of the Buddha or of a particular god, he will be guided by his inspiration and the conventions in developing the form and pattern of a particular piece of decorative sculpture. H. C. P. Bell, a pioneer of Ceylon archaeology, identified the four beasts, the elephant, horse, lion and bull, as symbols signifying the four quarters. Professor Benjamin Rowlands identifies the row of haṁsas with the figure of a haṁsa represented on the Maurya pillar at Sānchi as a symbol of the fifth direction or zenith. William E. Ward, attaching greater significance to the central lotus motif, tries to give a new interpretation to the moonstone. He says that the moonstone is the first step to a temple or a monastery. It is plausible to consider that this 'lotus' step becomes part of the symbolic offering of oneself when entering a temple.

Dr Paranavitane, retired Professor of Archaeology of the University of Ceylon, in an article contributed to *Artibus Asiae* attempted to give a new elaborate metaphysical interpretation to the moonstone after considering all preceding interpretations of the symbols which adorn it. He says Bell and others took into consideration only the procession of animals, and William E. Ward considered only the significance of the lotus symbol. "In my opinion," says Dr Paranavitane, "any satisfying interpretation of the symbolism of these moonstones must concern itself with the idea behind each one of their several features. And just as the formal aspect of the design needs the

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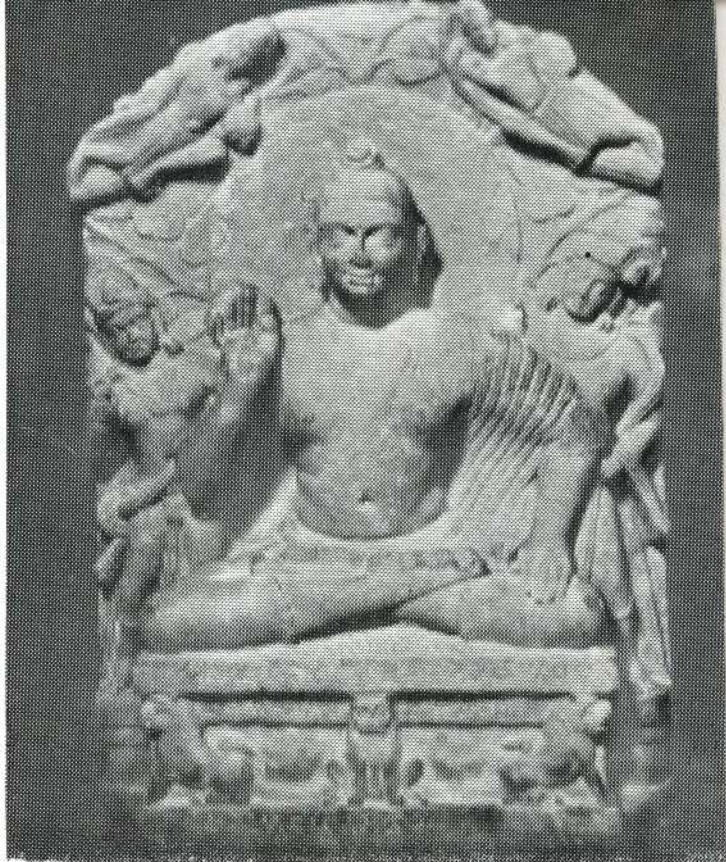

Fig. 5

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Fig. 6

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Fig. 7

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Fig. 8

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Fig. 9

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Fig. 10

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Fig. 11

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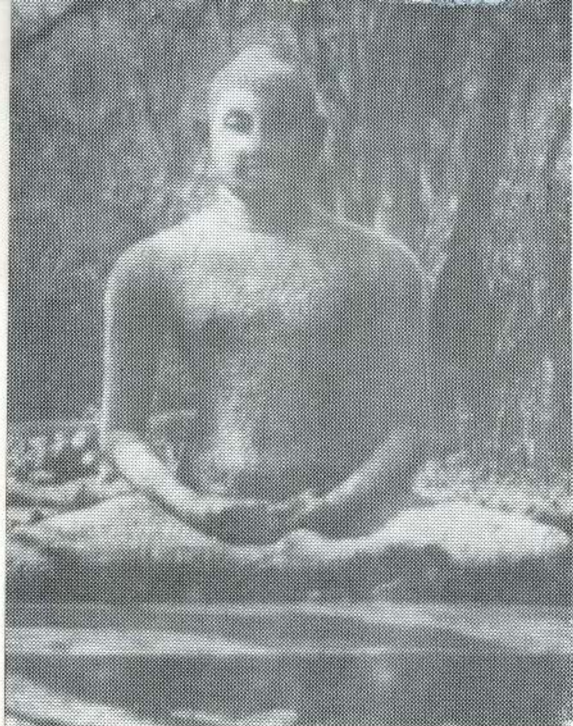

Fig. 12

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Fig. 14

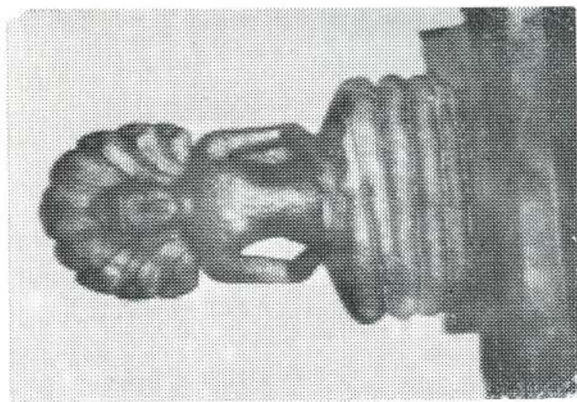

Fig. 13

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Fig. 15

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Fig. 16

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Fig. 17

Fig. 18

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Fig. 19

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Fig. 20

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Fig. 21

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Fig. 22

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Fig. 23

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Fig. 24

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Fig. 25

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Fig. 26

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Fig. 27

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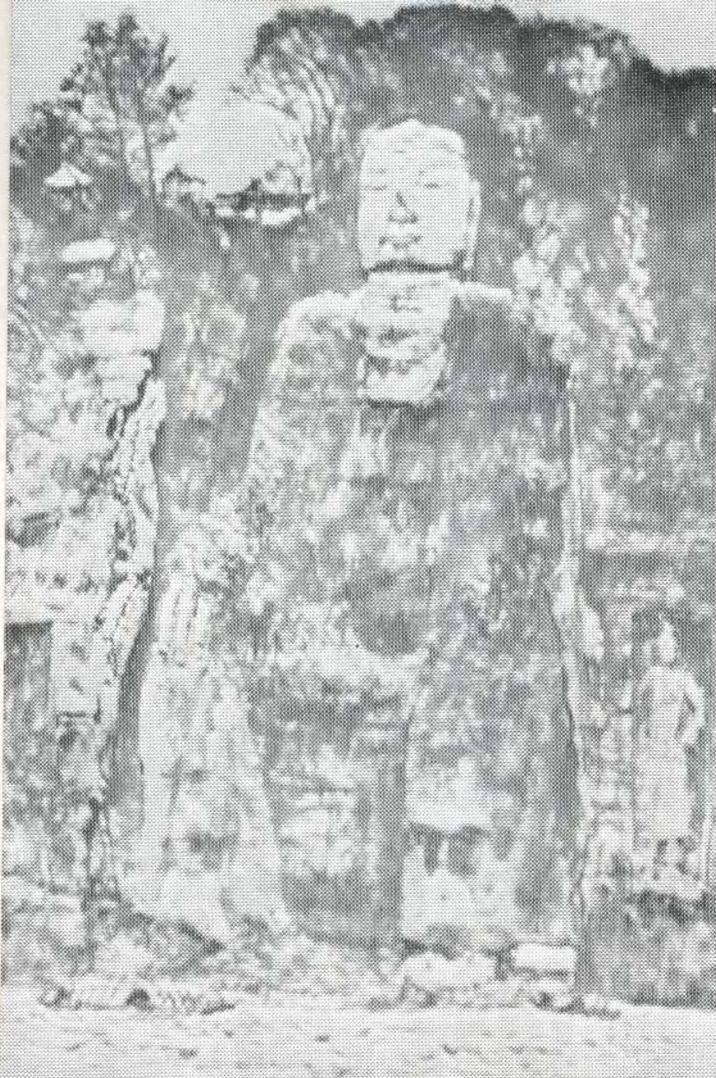

Fig. 28

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Fig. 29

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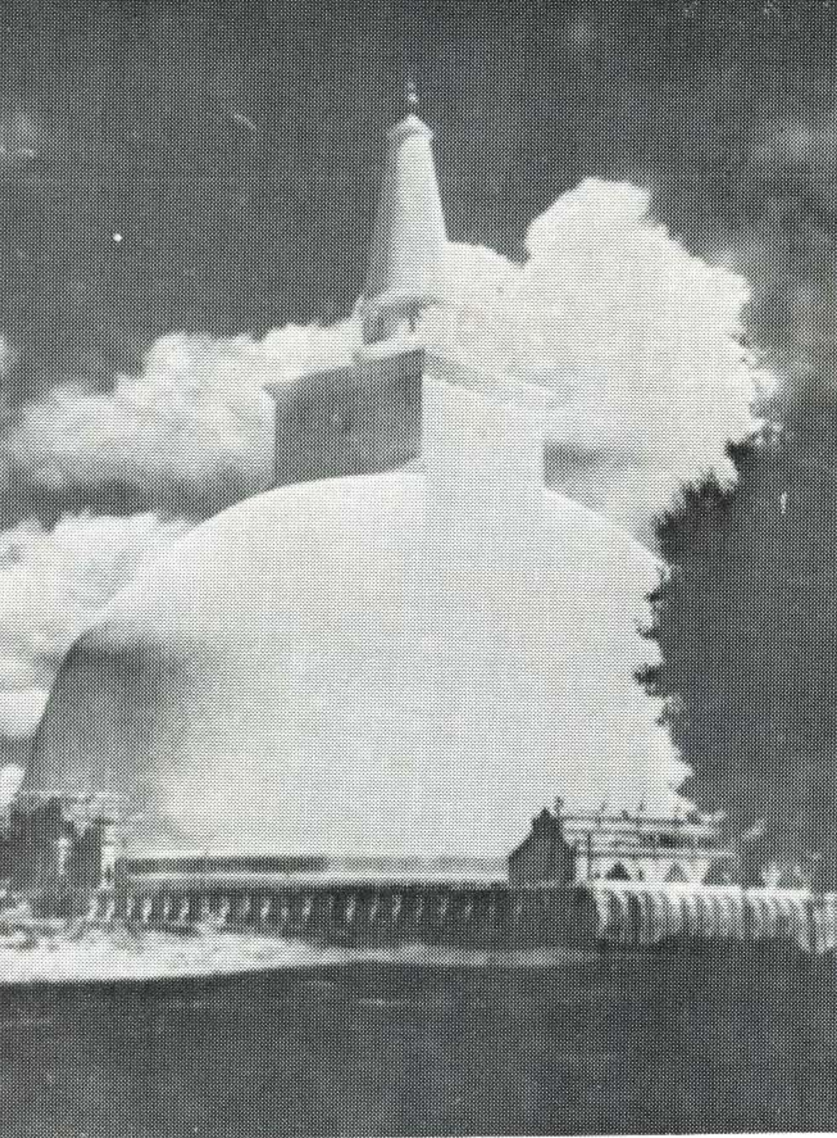

Fig. 30

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integration into a satisfying whole of the various elements which comprise it, the interpretation of one of the constituent features must have a bearing on that of the others."

According to Dr Paranavitane the moonstone is a representation of *saṁkhāraloka* which is a metaphysical and impersonal conception. The lotus which occupies the highest level of the moonstone symbolises the highest conceivable plane of existence in the intelligible or sensible world. This higher plane of existence in the world of form or the abode of pure beings is *Suddhāvāsa*. These pure beings remain in bliss for incalculable aeons of time before the final attainment of Nirvāṇa. The four animals on the moonstone are meant to symbolise the four perils: birth, decay, disease and death. These animals are following each other in a never-ending circle. This is *saṁsāra* with its never-ending circle of birth, decay, disease and death.

The outermost ornamental border of the moonstone has been described by J. G. Smither and William E. Ward as foliage or *palāpeti* pattern. Dr Paranavitane, to suit his interpretation of the moonstone as an integrated metaphysical symbol, identifies this outermost circle of ornament as a flame. But it is really a *palāpeti* or leaf ornament. Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy in his *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art* traces the development of the *palāpeti* ornament in Ceylon: "It is much employed in Sinhalese art, and in all Indian art; it is a border or moulding consisting of lotus petals. It is sometimes greatly elaborated with *liya-paṭa* ornament."

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Coomaraswamy gives fourteen small line drawings to show the various patterns of the *palāpeti* ornament developed by Kandyan artists. T. U. de Silva in his booklet *Ancient Siṁhala Decorative Art* gives twenty-one line drawings to show the development of the *palāpeti* ornament. Illustration No. 14 appearing in Coomaraswamy's book and in T. U. de Silva's are one and the same pattern It looks like a direct development of the *palāpeti* pattern of the Anurādhapura moonstone (Fig. 34, p. 74). The same *palāpeti* ornament can be seen on the top edge above the band of dwarf figures in every pillar capital now lying on the ground with other ruins of the Brazen Palace at Anurādhapura (Fig. 35). The enlarged section of the moonstone (Fig. 36) shows details of the foliated creeper which runs between the row of geese and the row of beasts. The ornamental border of the outer edge of the moonstone can be identified easily as a half of this foliated creeper without the stem. Dr Paranavitane identifies the lotus in the moonstone as a symbol representing *Suddhāvāsa* or the abode of Pure Beings. The *Anāgāmin* or the Never Returner is one who has attained the third stage out of four in the breaking of the bonds which keep a man back from arahantship. Arahantship is the highest goal and is equated with Nirvāṇa. A monk who attains the state of *Anāgami* or third stage of contemplation is born in the *Suddhāvāsa*. Thereafter he is never reborn in the *saṁsara* world. So the *Anāgāmin* who was pure being born in the *Suddhāvāsa* metaphorically stood at the gate of the city of Nirvāṇa.

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The moonstone is a sort of threshold-stone to be trod by all who enter the courtyard of a stupa or shrine house. Is it possible that monks and sculptors would join together and carve a symbol representing a sacred place which is regarded as the gate of the city of Nirvāṇa on a threshold-stone to be trodden by every visitor to the stupa or the temple?

There is a more plausible and simple interpretation of the decorative symbols of the moonstone. Buddhist writers have described in detail the wheel symbol and the auspicious marks which were on each sole of the feet of the living Buddha. Amongst them are these marks: white umbrella, white lotus, *ushnisha*, *swastika*, *śrivatsa*, *nandyāvarta*, *bhadrapīṭha*, pair of gold fish, circular weapon or disc, garuda, lion, tiger, cobra king, sishumāra, gander, bull, elephant. . . . .

These objects and animals are sacred symbols of the Hindu religion. *Śrivatsa* is an epithet of Vishṇu. And it is also a word which denotes a curl of hair on the breast of Vishṇu. The meaning of the word *Nandyāvarta* is obscure. *Nandi* is an epithet of Vishṇu and Śiva. Ā*vartaya* means lock of hair or whirlpool.[17] It can be interpreted as Vishṇu's whirlpool of cosmic destruction. *Bhadra-pīṭha* means throne of Siva or seat of happiness. Lotus is an epithet for Brahma, Vishnu and his incarnation as Rāma. *Ushṇīsha* means the knot of hair on the top of the head of an ascetic or the Buddha. *Ushṇīshin* is an epithet of Śiva. Fish is an incarnation of Vishṇu and *garuda* is the

17. HEINRICH ZIMMER, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilisation*, Harper, New York, p. 44.

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vehicle and emblem of Vishṇu. *Chakrāyudha* or the disc is a destructive weapon in the hand of Vishṇu. The bull is the vehicle of god Śiva and the lion of his consort Devi. The haṁsa is the vehicle of Brahma and one of the archetypal transformations of Vishṇu,[18] the elephant is the vehicle of god Indra. Sidhārtha renounced home and rode on the horse Kaṇṭaka to live the life of an ascetic. *Sishu-māra* is probably an epithet of Sri Krishṇa. *Sishu-han* is an epithet of Krishṇa. The words 'māra' and 'hun' have the same meaning. Buddhist monks have invented many stories satirising Hindu gods and caste - ridden Brahmins. Some of them have been re-written in Sinhalese by Ceylon monks and lay writers with the intention of sharpening their satirical elements. These new versions of the Pāli stories can be seen in the old Sinhalese prose works, the *Amāvatura* and the *Umagga Jātaka*, and in the collection of Sinhalese Jātaka stories.

Monks and sculptors must have introduced these symbols into the moonstone with the aim of inspiring worshippers. They were some of the auspicious marks on the soles of the Buddha which collectively suggested his greatness over all gods and other supernatural beings. In the Polonnaruva period the figure of the bull disappears from the moonstone. A militant form of Hinduism was introduced to Ceylon when it became a territory of the Choḷa kingdom. Even in the 12th century Saivism seems to have held second place only to Buddhism in Polonnaruva. The

18. HEINRICH ZIMMER, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilisation*, Harper, New York, pp. 47, 50.

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remains of Śiva temples in the city suggest that there were adherents of Saivism among the Sinhalese aristocracy. So it is legitimate to infer that the disappearance of the bull from the Polonnaruva moonstone was due to the influence of militant Hinduism and its culture.

On the Anurādhapura moonstone a row of geese appear at the bottom next to the central half-lotus. The row of geese closely associated with the lotus on the Anurādhapura moonstone perhaps openly suggested Brahma. Transference of the row of geese to the topmost row of the moonstone by the Polonnaruva sculptors may be due also to the influence of Hindu culture which was influencing Buddhism and co-existing with it in the 12th century.

Dr Paranavitane points out that on a moonstone at Nāgarjunikonda in India there are the figures of deer, boar and buffalo in addition to the figures of elephant, horse, lion and bull. The boar is an incarnation of Vishṇu. The buffalo is the symbol of a mighty demon finally destroyed by the great goddess Kāli. These additional figures of deer, boar, and buffalo on the Nāgarjunikonda moonstone imply that its motifs are only decorative or symbols employed by artists to suggest the superiority of the Buddha to all gods and demons.

Symbols or marks on the soles of the Buddha's feet are said to be concentrated within two wheel marks with rims, spokes and naves. The moonstone perhaps represents half of this wheel mark. The Sanskrit word for the nave of the wheel and navel is the same. Brahma was brought forth by Vishṇu from the lotus calyx grown on Vishṇu's

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navel, [19]. The words *nābha nābhi* become synonyms which suggest several meanings: nave of the wheel, navel, calyx of the lotus. Therefore the word *Padmanābha* (Padmanābhi) acquires the status of an epithet of Vishṇu. This epithet must have evolved and acquired the meaning of Vishṇu during the time of the Vaishnava revival or the worship of Vishṇu as the supreme god of Hinduism in India.

The calyx of the lotus sculptured with the intention of giving it the highest level in the moonstone to be trod by the Buddhist worshipper corroborates the theory that the symbols of the moonstone suggest indirectly the superiority of the Buddha to all gods and demons of the Indian pantheon. To induce Buddhist worshippers to trample unintentionally the symbols of gods, demons and kings is an ironical way of proclaiming the superiority of the Buddha.

The making of Buddha images in India developed as a commercial enterprise which was exploited by other religionists too. In Ceylon, the making of the Buddha image developed not as commercial art but as religious art under the guidance of monks and sculptors who derived inspiration from their devotional worship. Very pretty Buddha images with the sex appeal of the Sarnath type and later Mathurā type seem to me to betray a feature of commercial exploitation. It is said that there were more than thirty studios or factories in Mathurā during the Gupta period

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19. Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilisation*, p. 5.

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alone for making Buddhist, Jain and Hindu icons. Amongst the oldest sitting Buddha images of Ceylon there is none which represents the Sarnath or ornamental Mathurā type.

Ceylon monks seem to have conservatively and fiercely stuck to their austere conception of the iconography of the Buddha image. The sitting Buddha images of India offer evidence to support the hypothesis that the Buddha image in samādhi mood or the psychic condition called 'consciousness without contents' was achieved by the sculptors of Ceylon. The psychological path which leads to this transcendental intuition has been elaborately and analytically described by commentators of Theravāda Abhidhamma. When the Buddha attains this mood his serenity, peace, and inner joy or ecstasy in unity shine in his detached consciousness, like a bright mirror enclosed in a purse. This metaphorical description of the conception of the transcendental consciousness of the Buddhist yogi in which harmony, serenity and inner joy shine has been rendered in visible form by the Ceylon sculptor.

The Katra image maker (Fig. 5) attempts to objectify serenity and inner joy unsuccessfully by giving it a slightly mundane smile which betrays irony rather than ecstasy and compassion of the detached consciousness. The seated Mathurā Buddha (Fig. 10) is called 'face of Nirvāna' by Dr Stella Kramrisch. It is the best seated Indian image which attempts to objectify the detached consciousness of the Buddha. But the sculptor's attempt to catch the psychology of detached consciousness is not very successful. It represents

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detached consciousness tinged with pessimism and also sternness, which are attributes purged by the Buddha in attaining transcendental intuition.

Dr Stella Kramrisch is one of the best students of Indian sculpture who appreciated, with penetrating artistic insight and knowledge of Indian religions, the abstract psychological and metaphysical implications and the bewildering mythology of Indian sculptural masterpieces. In examining the Indian masterpiece, the Mathurā Buddha image, she observes: "The Bodhisattva from Bodhgayā is the first image in India which by its form signifies what its name implies. . . . . . In Mathurā during the first and second centuries A.D., the discrepancy between 'Buddha'-hood and 'Buddha'-image had been unsurmountable. Now, however, not only characteristics of supernormal appearance matter, nor do symbolic gestures, but the entire conduct of lines, planes and all visual relations itself signify that reality which is hinted at by the very name.

"Neither spiritual realisations such as that of the Buddha, nor the system built on them, necessarily synchronise in India with an art form which expresses them. As in the case of the Bodhisattva-Buddha image, a millennium may lie between them. The inscription rightly calls also this image Bodhisattva. The state of mind shown in this image belongs to a stage prior to the attainment of Nirvāṇa.

"Although the Bodhgaya Buddha is the earliest image, in a truly spiritual sense, there must have been others made at the same time. The Buddha

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from Anurādhapura, Ceylon, near in date, is also not far from it in meaning. The Bodhgayā image is not a precursor. It belongs to the age that produced it to the same extent as the Sānchi reliefs belonged to the first century B.C."[20]

Dr Kramrisch's remarks reveal a penetrating insight. She clearly distinguishes the vast difference between the Buddha image which represents the iconographical features correctly and the image of the Buddha with all the psychological implications of Buddha-hood which Dr Kramrisch herself characterized in metaphorical language as 'face of Nirvāṇa'. The Anurādhapura Buddha image (Fig. 11) easily surpasses the Mathurā image in representing in visual form the implications of Buddha-hood or Nirvāṇa.

The Mathurā image is in *abhaya mudrā* which does not necessarily imply samādhi or the supernormal state of 'consciousness without contents'. When the Buddha preaches or bestows blessings he is not in this supernormal psychological state or samādhi mood. He attains it when he is in the samādhi mood which is called *prajñā* in Buddhist philosophy. The word *prajñā* can be rendered into English as 'consciousness without contents'. When the Buddha is released from this supernormal psychological state his mind and consciousness begin to function normally under perfect control. Samādhi images are very rare in India and the few discovered by archaeologists do not represent the psychological implications of Buddha-hood or the samādhi mood.

20. STELLA KRAMRISCH, *Indian Sculpture*, Calcutta, 1933 pp. 61, 213, 62.

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The Buddhagayā image treated by Dr Kramrisch as the greatest Indian masterpiece does not represent samādhi or *dhyāna mudrā.* But its face and the body controlled from within suggest Buddhahood. The Anurādhapura image represents the correct sitting posture which does not strain the legs. The right hand rests on the left palm but both hands and arms are controlled from within instead of being left to relax idly on the lap. Cheeks and lips reflect inner ecstasy which shines like a mirror in the detached consciousness.

Fig. 34

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Dehumanized Art: The Old and the New

The development of modern art in the West began as a reaction against naturalism and realism. Naturalism and realism in turn arose as a protest and reaction against sentimental romanticism. The notion of realism in literature and reaction against romanticism arose because of the development of the empirical philosophy and consequent social changes in England and France. Modern physics destroyed the theory of matter and atoms of the old materialists. The concept of the atom as a billiard-ball-like particle of matter supported the theories of naturalistic art.

Modern physics reduced the atom to electrons, protons and neutrons, which are not particles of solid matter but forces. Analytical scientific philosophy reduced the table to a collection of electrons and protons in motion. According to Bertrand Russell, the table is a vast collection of electrical charges in violent motion. Scientific philosophy has dissolved the old notion of the reality of a static nature including men, animals, trees and stones.

Science has inspired artists too to search for reality behind changing appearances. The old artists painted the figure of a man and the figure of a woman embracing each other to express the love of two lovers. But a modern artist inspired by scientific philosophy would prefer to express 'the same idea by uniting two complementary

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colours, their mingling and their opposition, the mysterious vibrations and kindred tones'.[21]

Modern symbolism in painting and sculpture is a movement which aims at dehumanizing art. The feeling evoked by naturalistic art is not pure aesthetic emotion. The figure of a pretty woman with well-developed sharp breasts rouses erotic sentiment or sensual feeling. This feeling is not aesthetic emotion or aesthetic pleasure. A talented artist symbolises the intense love of a man and a woman by mingling two colours, bringing appropriate tones which suggest aesthetic feeling. Such a painting, argue the defenders of the new art, will not be appreciated by a man who treats his own emotion evoked by naturalistic painting as aesthetic pleasure. To appreciate modern or dehumanized art a special kind of sensibility is required which has to be cultivated.

The development of science and philosophy inspired modern painters and sculptors to break away completely from naturalistic art. But some of them have been directly influenced by African, Chinese, Mexican and Indian religious art. It is said by some critics that modern artists are trying to 'objectify the subjective'. This was done by Buddhist and Hindu sculptors of India and Ceylon about 2000 years ago, and later by African sculptors. Elsy Leuzinger in his *Africa: The Art of the Negro Peoples*, says: "So far as sacral sculpture is concerned, the Negro artist experiences an impulse and desire to give concrete form to an

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21. VAN GOGH, Quoted by Herbert Read in his *Philosophy of Modern Art*, Faber, London p. 34.

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abstract idea. To his mind art serves to make the invisible visible. What prompts and inspires him is a vision which cannot be expressed purely in the naturalistic forms familiar to him from his environment."[22]

Primitive religious beliefs and artistic intuition inspired African sculptors to evolve, unintentionally, an art idiom to make the invisible visible.[23] Philosophy, science, and psychology inspired modern European artists to invent and develop individual styles to express abstract ideas in unconventional visible form.

Buddhist sculpture in India first originated as a crude naturalistic art in the hands of Graeco-Roman craftsmen who migrated to India. Later an aspect of it was developed as abstract art by Indian sculptors inspired by Buddhist philosophy. But the Buddha image in transcendental mood and the stupa as dehumanized abstract art were developed to perfection in Ceylon by Buddhist sculptors and structural artists during the first or third century A.D.

Professor Hermann Keyserling in his *Travel Diary of a Philosopher* says that the figure of the Buddha is an absolutely perfect embodiment of spirituality in the visible domain.[24] The same is

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22. Elsy Leuzinger, *Africa: The Art of the Negro Peoples*, p. 47.
23. "To him art serves to make the invisible visible."
24. Herman Keyserling, *The Travel Diary of a Philosopher*, Jonathan Cape, London.
    "The figure of Buddha is an absolutely perfect embodiment of spirituality in the visible domain." p. 280.

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said by Leuzinger in defining African sculpture.[25] But the Buddha statue in samādhi mood and the white-doomed colossal stupa were created by artists who had been inspired not by animism but by intellectual mysticism and highly developed metaphysical ideas.

The white-domed colossal stupa of Ceylon is a completely dehumanized creation by Buddhist architectural sculptors (Fig. 30). The stupa is a descendant of the funeral mound of the Vedic Aryans. But the abstract idea which inspired the ancient architectural sculptor was the Buddhist concept of *anichcha*, *anatta*, or the notion of impermanence. There are many types of stupas in India and Ceylon. The shapes of the major stupas of Ceylon, according to Ceylon Buddhist iconography, have been suggested by the bubble, or the dew-drop on a blade of grass, a heap of paddy, and the inverted begging bowl of a monk.

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25. ELSY LEUZINGER, *Africa: The Art of the Negro Peoples*, "Some thirty years ago Edward Von der Heydt, a prisoner in the fields of folk art, discovered, half forgotten in a shop, a negro figure. It so took his fancy that he acquired it, knowing that it was the visible and tangible expression of a true religious feeling. . . . . Whoever comes in contact with African plastic art perceives at once that it suggests a sublime spirituality. Half-closed eyes and forms that have nothing in common with nature attain almost to a high verity. . . . . A breath from the beyond wafts towards us." p. 14.

LADISLAS SEGY: *African Sculpture*, Dover, New York, 1958 Introduction I, p. 1.

"And it was observed that this African art anticipated in practice many of the most modern theories of artistic creation and technique."

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The bubble or the dew-drop which evaporates with the rays of the morning sun symbolises the evanescent nature of life according to the concept of *anichcha*. The mound of paddy suggests the concept of a living being as an aggregate of the changing elements of mind and matter. The begging bowl suggests the hollowness or the essenceless nature of all phenomenal things. The philosophical meaning of *dukkha* is emptiness or hollowness.

In symbolism and idiom the stupa is not unrelated to certain sculptural creations of Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Navum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner (Figs. 38, 39, 40). The last two are Russians who had to migrate to France and England because of the opposition of later Communist critics who supported socialist realism. Gabo himself in a letter to Sir Herbert Read called his art 'constructivism'. Gabo says that all truths and values are our own constructions, subject to the changes of time and space as well as to the deliberate choice of life in its striving towards perfection. Navum Gabo says:

"I could easily tell where I get the crude content of my form, provided my word be taken not metaphorically but literally.

"I find them everywhere around me, where and when I want to see them. I see them, if I put my mind to it, in a torn piece of cloud carried away by the wind. I see them in the green thickets of leaves and trees. I can find them in the naked stones on hills and roads. I may discern them in a steamy trail of smoke from a passing train or on the surface of a shabby wall. . . . . . I look and

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find them in the bends of waves on sea between the open work of forming crests; their apparition may be sudden, it may come and vanish in a second, but when they are over they leave with me the image of eternity's duration.

"These are the wells from which I draw the crude content of my forms. Of course I don't take them as they come, the image of my perception needs an order and this order is my construction."[26]

There is a strange similarity between the contents of forms which inspired the Buddhist constructive artists and those which inspired the constructivist art of Gabo, Henry Moore, and others. Buddhist artists used bricks, mortar and metals for their constructional sculpture. Gabo used plastic or metal for his sculptural creations.

Herbert Read in *A Concise History of Modern Sculpture* says:

"*Eclecticism* is an attitude in art that permits a free choice and combination of styles other than one's own; *exoticism* implies that these styles are borrowed from a culture other than one's own.

"The past hundred years have witnessed the injection of at least seven exotic styles into the stream of modern art. They may be listed as follows:

1. Far Eastern art.
2. African tribal art
3. Primitive art (folk art, child art, naive art)
4. Prehistoric art (especially neolithic carvings)
5. Pre-Columbian art of America.

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26. Navum Gabo, quoted by Herbert Read in his *Philosophy of Modern Art*, p. 241.

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6. Early Greek and Etruscan art.
7. Early Christian (especially Romanesque) art." [27]

In the Buddha's discourses there is philosophical poetry which suggests and inspires painters and sculptors to produce original abstract creations. The Buddha in the *Ādittya Pariyāya Sutta* compared the sense organs, senses, sense objects, body and mind to a burning flame. Professor C. H. Waddington, in his book *The Scientific Attitude*, says that the typical thing one must expect to find in nature is not something like a stone, which apparently stays the same for ever, but something like a flame or an animal. Professors Whitehead and Karl Pearson expressed the same thought earlier in other words.[28]

The Buddha in another Sutta *Aggi Vachagotta* compared the life process to a flame. The flame of life goes on as long as the fuel of life is supplied by lust of life and clinging to it. The *Dhammapada* (Chitta Vagga) says that the mind which seeks to overcome death quivers and throbs like a fish out of water. There are many philosophical and poetical utterances in the spiritual discourses of the Buddha. They have the power to stimulate the imagination of painters and sculptors to express them in concrete form in abstract creations.

In Ceylon we have in our very old sculptural tradition a conventionalised idiom of abstract art. A boy who enters the grounds of a Buddhist

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27. *A Concise History of Modern Sculpture*, Thames and Hudson: London, p. 43.
28. C. H. Waddington, *The Scientific Attitude*, Pelican, p. 99.

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temple is first attracted by the colossal white-domed stupa. Next when he enters the shrine-house his eyes and mind are captured by the colossal Buddha image, and then only is his attention drawn to the wall paintings. This age-long order of worship is capable of instilling an unconscious feeling for abstract sculpture in the minds of the young.

The future is promising for the sculptors and painters of Ceylon. Buddhist temples, festivals, and exhibitions increasingly require their services. There is a new craze for installing sculpture in the parks and public places. At present builders of temples and organizers of Buddhist festivals prefer sculpture and paintings done in naturalistic form even if crude. But in a few years even conservative monks will prefer abstract sculpture to crude naturalistic creations. The modern plaster Buddha image retains certain abstract qualities of the stone images created by ancient master sculptors.

The philosophy of Buddhism was responsible for the introduction of causal realism to many of the Jātaka stories about 2,000 years ago. But Buddhist sculpture developed as a dehumanized anti-naturalistic art three or four centuries after the death of the Buddha. The stupa and the Buddha image in samādhi mood are two such creations.

In Ceylon monks and laymen until very recently refused to introduce naturalistic Western art for paintings in temples. Buddhist culture lost its independence probably after the 8th century A.D. A great and heroic effort to inaugurate a renaissance was made in the 12th century by the powerful king Parākramabāhu the First. But it ended

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as a revivalist movement. The old tradition of stone carving and temple painting seems to have gradually decayed and been lost after the 16th century. About the beginning of the 16th century Buddhist monks seem to have adapted the *sittara* folk art style for paintings in temples.

Some students of *sittara* art think that it is a Buddhist readaptation of a form of the folk art of India. Ananda Coomaraswamy in his *Medieval Sinhalese Art* says that the painted trees of the Kandyan vihāra and the sculptured trees of the Bharhut (India) have much in common. The lost school of Bharhut painting, if such existed, must have been very much like the Kandyan.[29]

There are certain similarities in the folk arts of people who were and are living separated by space and time. Unless there is definite evidence, it is wrong to infer that similarities of folk art of one ethnic group to the art of another ethnic group are due to borrowing. Folk artists are not sophisticated enough to imitate or recreate the borrowed elements. *Sittara* art and the masks of Ceylon supply evidence to support this surmise. The *sittara* artist in his attempt to draw the figure of a Sinhalese in European costume unintentionally caricatured him. The carver of masks applied his technique to carve masks of the Anglicised Sinhalese, the Englishman, the chettiyar and the butcher. Sarcasm and a malicious laugh lurk behind these masks. Distortion and sarcasm are due to his folk style and racial unconscious where

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29. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art*, Pantheon Books, 1956, p. 253.

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lie hidden his hostility to foreigners and to the Anglicised Sinhalese who desecrated his religion and cultural taboos.

Sittara art was probably a development of Sinhalese folk art under the influence and guidance of monks. It was usual in such art not to emphasise or exaggerate sexual characteristics in the figures of women and men. On the other hand slender waists, broad and round hips, well developed breasts and thick lips are features of old Buddhist sculpture and painting in India. This cult of exaggeration of the sexual characteristics can be seen in the early Buddhist sculpture of Bhārhut and Sānchi and in the paintings of Ajanta and Sigiriya.

The early Buddhist sculptors of India must have adapted without modification the primitive art which, perhaps, was developed, like Sanskrit court poetry, under the patronage of kings who were genuinely pious but enjoyed the sexual pleasures of harem life. The *sittara* art of Ceylon was a religious and ascetic reaction against the romantic naturalism of Sigiriya art.

Many years ago some of our painters broke away from the naturalistic art which was encouraged by the Government College of Fine Arts. At present the majority of our young painters are trying to develop styles of their own by breaking away not only from naturalism but also from the influence of Ajanta, Sigiriya and certain modern Indian art styles developed on the basis of Ajanta and Moghul paintings. An effeminacy and a sickening sentimentality pervade some of the Ajanta,

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Sigiriya, and modern Indian paintings in spite of their beauty and technical perfection.

The recent exhibition of sculpture by contemporary Ceylonese artists is the first revolt from naturalistic sculpture. Tissa Ranasinghe's exhibition of sculpture (see figs. 41, 42) held a few years ago, seems to have paved the way for the revolt of these young artists. The influence of his sculpture can be seen in many of the exhibits, including those of Pushpānanda Weerasinghe who won all the major prizes for exhibits in all sections except the stonecarving section in which he had placed no exhibit.

Ortegay Gasset, the Spanish metaphysician, in one of his studies on art enumerates certain tendencies in Modern art: (1) to dehumanize art, (2) to avoid living forms, (3) to see to it that the work of art is nothing but a work of art, (4) to consider art as play, nothing else, (5) to be essentially ironical, (6) to beware of sham and to aspire to scrupulous realisation, (7) to regard art as a thing of no transcending consequence.[30]

Of these tendencies the first three could be seen behind most of the exhibits except the wood carving of Pushpānanda Weerasinghe labelled 'Nude' for which a third prize was awarded. In an exhibition of naturalistic art, I think, it would have won the first prize. Pushpānanda Weerasinghe's wood carving 'Victory' which was awarded a second prize suggests irony. It is a completely dehumanized piece of sculpture. It has no realistic

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30. Ortega Y. Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Writings*, Double Day, New York, p. 13.

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features of the human body. 'Victory' suggests a soldier with a gun in his hand ready to shoot down a bomber plane or an enemy soldier. But the figure has only one leg. The other is shattered. Its irony is directly suggested by the title 'Victory.'

H. A. Karunaratne, who held his second exhibition of paintings (see figs. 43, 44, 45) sometime back, is one of the persistent abstract painters of Ceylon. He shows an exquisite feeling for colour which makes his paintings sensuous. By avoiding living forms he completely dehumanizes his paintings. The men and women in his creations, devoid of all human sexual characteristics, have an affinity with the figures of living things in children's drawings. But his strong sense of colour and his genius for blending colours endow some of his paintings with an obscuranticism or ambiguity which sometimes evokes erotic feelings.

In Karunaratne's paintings, all the figures undergo a process of dehumanization, which sometimes generates a tragic and pessimistic feeling in a man of sensibility who looks at them critically. This suggestive aspect of most of his paintings, I believe, is an unconscious manifestation of a mind disciplined by Buddhist culture and modern art.

The persistent and prominent creative aspect which pervades George Keyt's paintings is the exaggeration of the sexual aspect of the woman. The exaggeration of the breasts, buttocks, hips, and the roundness of the face, limbs, and the suggestive soft smoothness of the flesh of his female figures are not due to any influence of Western art. This aspect of his creations seems to have

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been inspired by Indian Sanskrit poetry, which influenced the Sinhalese poetry of the twelfth century.

The exaggeration of the sexual aspect of a woman's figure and her life is not an invention of Sanskrit poets. They are poetic renderings of the racial features of women of certain parts of India, and the sexual life of the king and the feudal lords. Vātsyāna, who lived probably in the third century A. D., described in his *Kāma-Sūtra*, in exact terminology like a modern anthropologist, the sexual life of the aristocracy and the feudal lords of India. Sanskrit poetry of the post-Gupta period renders, of course, in hyperbolic language, the sexual life of the aristocracy.

Large hips, protuberant breasts, and round arms are prominent features of the early Indian sculpture of Bharut, Sanchi and Orissa. The actual features of women in certain parts of India and their representation in stone sculpture seem to have inspired the poets to use hyperbole in describing them in Sanskrit poetry.

"The busts (of women in Uriya sculpture) are more protuberant than in Europe and Egypt," says Rajendra Lal Mitra in his monumental work *Indo-Aryans*. "But this is probably due to a faithful representation of Orissan life. The female breasts are much more developed in India than in higher lattitudes; and in Orissa and Bengal they are particularly so, leading to early pendulocity to an extent unknown even in the North-Western Provinces."[31]

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31. RAJENDRA LAL MITRA: *Indo-Aryans*, Edward Stanford, London, 1881, Vol. I, p. 121.

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George Keyt, in applying the poetic idiom to his paintings of the female figure with creative boldness, surpasses the old Indian poets and the Sinhalese poets who imitated them.

H. A. Karunaratne, in contrast to Keyt, effaces all of these sexual features by dehumanising the living forms with a fierce ascetic feeling and discipline. He was in Japan for several years studying art. His attitude as an artist to the female figure seems to have been inspired by three joint sources of influence: his Buddhist culture, his life in Japan where women have no protruding breasts, his predilection for dehumanizing the human figure.

Karunaratne utilises two human figures and the figure of a horse and a splash of colours in his paintings 'Mischievous' (Fig. 43) to suggest a mood. In 'Forms' (Fig. 44) he reveals a dehumanizing feeling suggestive of fierce sarcasm. 'Echo of Melody' (Fig. 45) suggests an erotic rhythm which perhaps is enhanced by the blending of colours.

Most Buddhist leaders and learned monks are not interested in Buddhist art, temple, and worship of Buddhist symbols and their intimate relationship with the Buddhist way of life. Their interest is in the study of abhidhamma because of its anti-theistic attitude. Textbooks of abhidhamma have been prepared by monks for students of the age of ten or twelve to twenty. Over a hundred thousand boys and girls sit annually for the abhidhamma examination.

The abhidhamma is a form of monastic metaphysics developed later by commentators. Only

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a very few adults out of a thousand have the ability to study metaphysics and understand the deep philosophical problems involved in it. The present day abhidhamma consists of about seventy-five per cent of monastic casuistry which destroys the sense of the holy or *saddhā* and *puṇya-chetanā*, without which no religion is worthy of its name. Religious worship and reading of Buddhist spiritual poetry are two inspirational sources for developing the sense of the holy in a Buddhist.

The art of temple painting and sculpture has gradually decayed because of the introduction of crude naturalism in place of the *sittara* art. Even the plaster Buddha image has been converted into an Apollo-like figure with glaring red lips and rosy cheeks and a varnished body which jointly destroy the sense of the holy by stimulating mixed sensual feeling in the heart of young worshippers and monks who live in isolation. Monks and professors of Buddhist universities should join together and encourage our young artists to evolve new inspiring styles of temple painting and sculpture. Jayantha Premachandra and Susil Premaratne, I believe, are two promising young artists who are capable of developing new styles and techniques of temple painting which will appeal to both educated and uneducated Buddhists.

Premachandra's cement carvings and mosaics can be adapted and developed for temple painting. Some of his paintings have aspects which connect them to Sinhala folk art and *sittara* art. Even in the non-representational figures of Jayanta Premachandra, there is a gesture or a feature which suggests the atmosphere of Ceylon and Sinhala life.

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The mosaic of the mother and children suggest (Fig. 46) the home life of a Sinhala family. The wet cement painting *Rabana Players* (Fig. 48) looks like an individualistic adaptation of *sittara* art. It has movement which is rare in *sittara* painting. The unconventional mosaic of the Buddha and the gazelle (Fig. 47) reveals the artist's painstaking devotion and patience and his conception of the unity of life and *mettā* which pervades the Jātaka stories as an artistic motif.

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Fig. 31

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Fig. 32

Fig. 33

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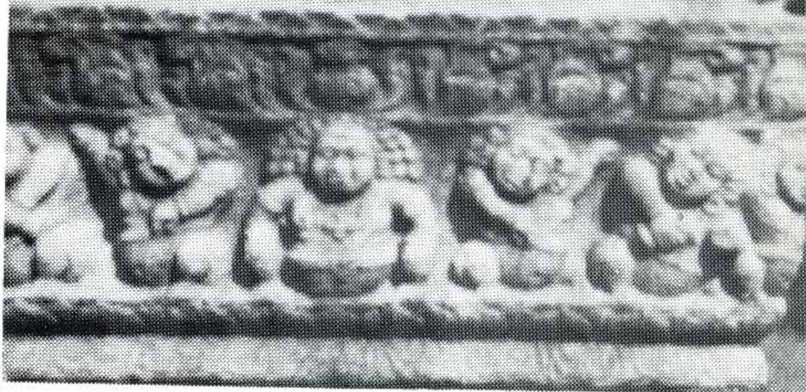

Fig. 35

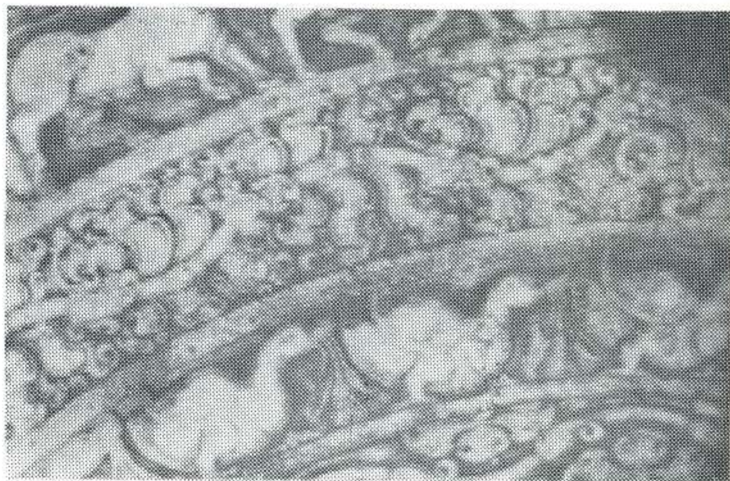

Fig. 36

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Fig. 37

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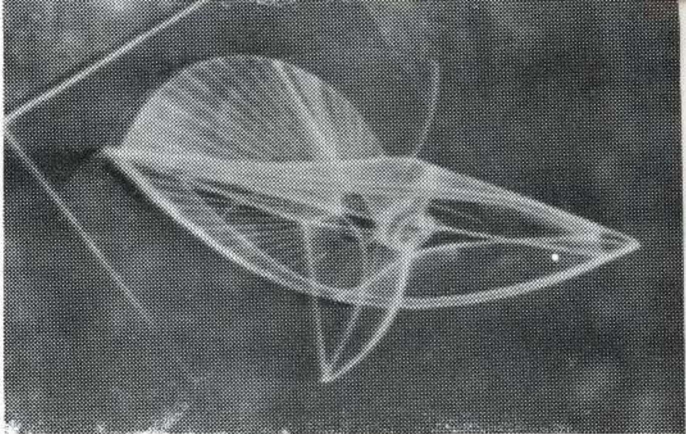

Fig. 38

Fig. 39

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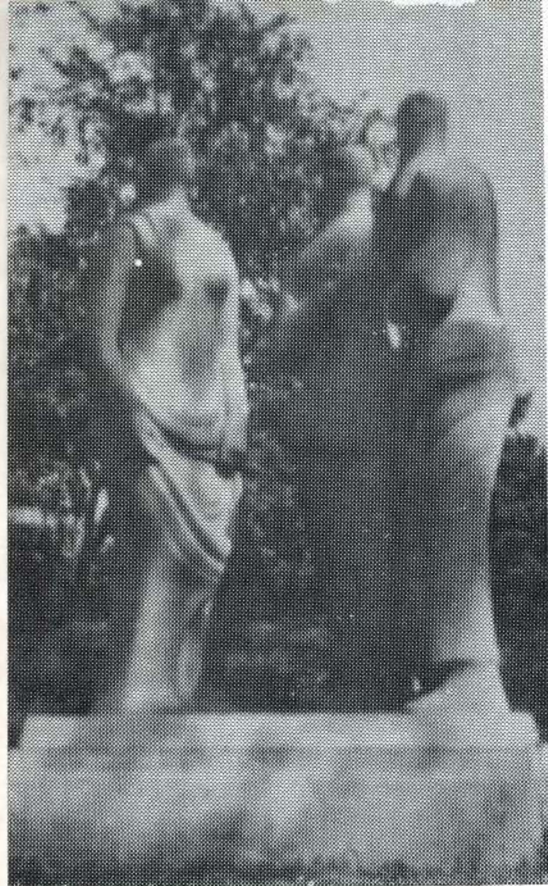

Fig. 40

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Fig. 43

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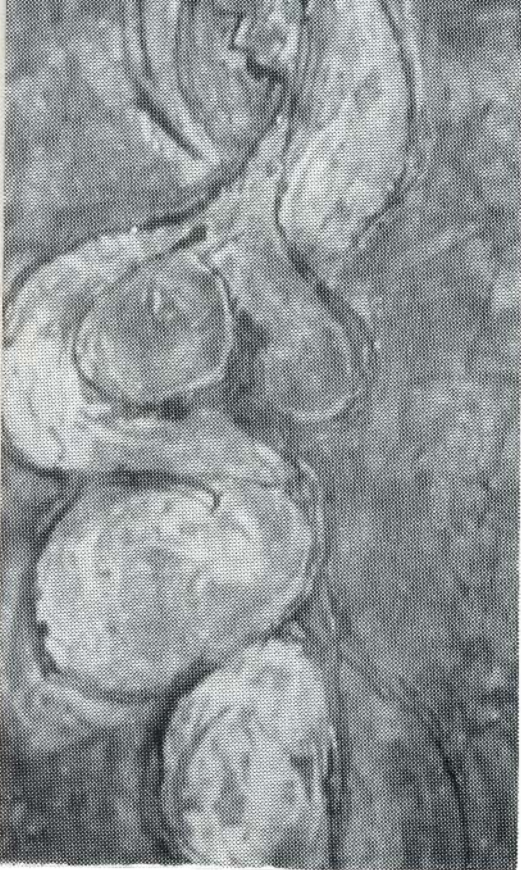

Fig. 44

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Fig. 45

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Fig. 47

Fig. 48

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Fig. 49

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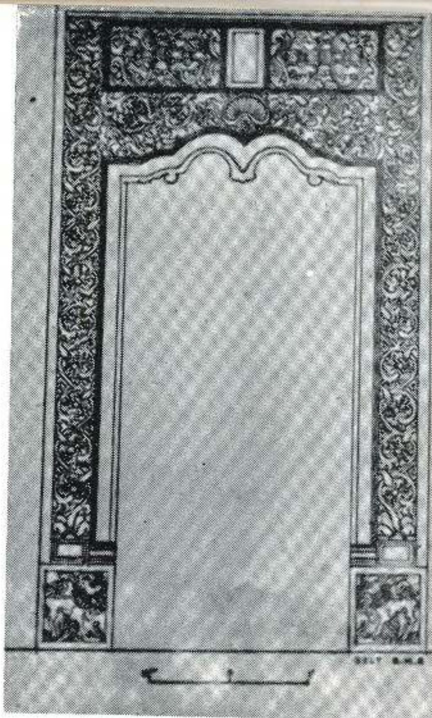

Fig. 50

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Fig. 51

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Human Comedy in Sculpture

E. Thurber writing on Tolstoy's life and religion said: "Religion and art may lie down together like the tiger and the lamb, but the lamb must always lie inside the tiger."[32].

Today progress in the study of the unconscious and the development of science and philosophy have demolished the stone-wall boundaries of art, religion, and science. Dogmas behind all these changing human creations are melting under the unifying development of knowledge. Religion is becoming closer to art and psychology with its exploration of the racial and the personal unconscious. Therefore it would be more appropriate to say today, if religion wishes to survive it should lie inside art and culture. The tiger should lie inside the lamb.

Buddhist and Hindu sculpture have been treated as religious art. Therefore an art critic might think that Indian art supports Tolstoy's attitude to art. When we examine Indian sculpture ignoring the label 'religious art' attached to it, we find evidence of the opposite of Tolstoy's view. The Buddhist sculpture of Ceylon and the Hindu sculpture of India suggest the idea that if religion wishes to survive it should live inside of art.

The statue of the Buddha in contemplative mood is an artistic creation which symbolises his consciousness completely detached from the world.

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32. E. Thurber, *Life of Tolstoy*, Crowell Co., New York.

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In Buddhist philosophy or abhidhamma this conception has been developed as a metaphysical and psychological dogma. In spite of all the logical and analytical writings of Buddhist monks of all sects, it remained as an extremely abstract notion or an imaginative metaphysical idea. The man who created the perfect symbol in stone visualised imaginatively the mystical concept of detached consciousness.

He was an independent artist though he was disciplined by his religion and its dogmas. In this creation of the Buddhist sculptor, religion survives because it entered the womb of art. Whether an artist is inspired by religious concepts and dogmas or purely artistic concepts, he expresses his inspiration through visual art which may be abstract or realistic.

The creations of Hindu sculptors are not different from the creations of Buddhist artists in spite of the rich mythological symbolism of Hinduism. It is more appropriate to say that if religion wishes to survive it should live inside art, and inside science in its creative aspect. Art and science are gradually swallowing and digesting the metaphysical and dogmatic aspects of religion. The unconscious which was exploited by mystics and psychologists is now exploited by novelists, artists, and unintentionally by scientists. Buddhist art and its implications have a relevance to the idea of the unity of the truths of religion and philosophy and their relation to artistic and psychological truths.

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The Buddhist conception of Nirvāṇa is closer to analytical psychology and art than to metaphysical dogmas. The Buddhist concept seems to have anticipated the unity of art, religion, philosophy, science and even metaphysical theology, if the theologians and Buddhist sectarians are prepared to shed their notions of unchanging dogmas.

Personality is defined as the integrated and dynamic organisation of the physical, mental, moral and social qualities of the individual. Personal identity is the sense of feeling of being the same person, based mainly on common sensibility and continuity of aims, purposes and memories. These are psychological definitions of personality and sensibility. When we apply these to the concept of changing universal consciousness and its form Nirvāṇa, they become metaphysical and artistic definitions. Here the philosophy of art and the philosophy of religion merge.

Buddhist thinkers analysed the cart into its components and argued that it is not a reality and that the individual is a bundle of sensations, perceptions and feelings. There is no permanent substance or soul. But here they ignored the form. Each cart has its own form which is eternal and unchanging when the cart is separated into its components. Two rubber balls of different dimensions have two independent and unchanging forms. When the two balls are destroyed, their forms survive.

The statue of the Buddha in samādhi mood symbolises the artistic and mystical creative aspect of the Buddha's concept of the noumenon.

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The Buddha himself said that Nirvāṇa is beyond reason and logic. It can be experienced by the wayfarer who enters the path and who by contemplation frees his consciousness from all its contents. The form of this detached consciousness is Prajñā, which is Nirvāṇa with the substratum of being. By detaching his consciousness from the world he has destroyed the process of re-becoming. At his death his detached consciousness merges with the form or the unity of the changing universal consciousness. It will be seen that the way of experiencing Nirvāṇa is a process which is nearer to art and psychology than to metaphysics and science.

All the major creations of the ancient Buddhist sculptors suggest serious themes. Archaeologists and art critics of West and East have concentrated solely on the study of these major Buddhist and Hindu sculptural creations which are symbols of the abstract ideas of Indian religions and philosophies and myths. But there are a large number of minor pieces of sculpture in Ceylon which have not caught the attention of archaeologists and art critics. They mainly consist of innumerable small dwarf or *vāmaṇa* figures carved by ancient sculptors on stone pillar capitals.

Until a decade or two ago, my sole hobby was reading and writing. I became tired of reading and turned cynical about books good or bad, serious or light. I had no other hobby, and it seemed too late in life for me to acquire a taste for a new one. I disliked the cinema because of its preponderant sentimentality and sensationalism which a man mature in age could hardly have appreciated.

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From that time I resorted to sojourning in rural areas and in our ruined cities of Anurādhapura and Polonnaruva. The sad and pensive atmosphere that pervaded them appealed to me. Since then I have visited the ruined cities in ten or twelve trips each running into two to four weeks. The study of ancient sculpture became a new hobby and an escape from life. I became more interested in the figures of dwarfs by ancient sculptors, carved with care and infinite patience mainly on pillar capitals and sometimes on the vertical sides of stone steps. The dwarf figures carved in bas-relief on pillar capitals are not larger than four or five inches.

My attention was first directed to those figures by L. K. Karunaratne, the draughtsman of the Archaeological Department. The contortions and incongruous attitudes of these dwarfs seem to have roused his sense of humour and stimulated him to copy a few of them. With the delight of a child who collects stamps, I learned to enjoy thoroughly these figures of midgets in their infinitely varying attitudes and boisterous humour. Though small and insignificant as sculpture in comparison with the colossal statues of the Buddha and the life-sized figures of gods and goddesses, they collectively depict and represent a part of the human comedy of ancient Ceylon.

Most of these figures indirectly give one an idea of the labour and toil spent by unknown and insignificant folk artists for the delectation of feudal lords. The figurines represent musicians, drummers, dancers, acrobats, comedians and contortionists. My enthusiasm for the study of these

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figurines began to develop into an uncontrollable mania which stimulated me to refer to ancient texts of religion, poetry and folk arts and to archaeological reports. To escape from this new form of the old hobby of reading I began to hunt for dwarf figures in every nook and corner of Anurādhapura and Polonnaruva. On three or four occasions, I trudged four or five miles along foot-paths through dense forests in search of archaeological excavations which were not easily accessible.

In 1959 I visited South India on a holiday. During the two months I spent half of my time hunting for dwarf figures in many ancient Hindu temples of South India. I was able to find only a few of them in the temples I visited. Some of the Hindu temples at Kanchipuram and Māmallapuram are the oldest in South India. I was able to collect copies of a few new figures of dwarfs at Māmallapuram and a few humorous carvings from the Alagar Kovil, which we visited on our way from the Meenakshi temple of Madura (Figs. 83 to 87). The Alagar temple was built about the fifteenth century A.D.

Ancient sculptors have been disciplined by tradition and religious convention. They had to serve their masters who employed them in building religious monuments. There were Buddhist monks to check them if they deviated from the religious texts and conventions in making the statues of the Buddha in different moods and gestures. They had to follow rigid conventional rules and the descriptions of head-dresses and gestures enumerated in the stories of a god or goddess in carving their

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statues. Their sense of humour and joy of life had to be inhibited in making the statues of the Buddha and of gods in austere moods. But in carving the dwarf figures they availed themselves of an outlet and seized the opportunity to express their suppressed feelings even boisterously, sometimes riotously.

They used dwarf figurines as decorative motifs. In Hinduism dwarf figures have religious significance but not in Buddhism. Dwarfs are called *vāmanas* in Sanskrit. They are the retinue of the elephant god Gaṇeśa who is himself a dwarf. Kalidāsa, the great Indian poet, refers to their antics in his poem *Kumāraśambhava*, which depicts an aspect of the life of the god Śiva and his consort Pārvati.

Amongst the stone sculptures of Ceylon, figures of the Buddha in various attitudes predominate. Their postures and the gestures of the hands differ according to the sculptor's choice or patron's preference for a particular aspect of the Buddha's personality. Moods and gestures might differ but the figure of the Buddha always represents suppressed emotions and detachment. Dwarf figures, in violent contrast, represent the joy of life and the exuberant conviviality of pleasure-loving men and women.

The dwarf figures of Isurumuniya (Figs. 53 to 57) are some of the oldest stone carvings of this kind. Dr Paranavitane, the retired Professor of Archaeology of the University of Ceylon, thinks that they belong to the Gupta age (4th and 5th centuries A.D.). Some archaeologists and art critics who have studied Indian sculpture generalised that Buddhism tended to enervate the people

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who adhered to it continuously and undermined their martial spirit. E. B. Havell, supporting the Hindu caste system, criticised Buddhism for inculcating the idea of peace and uniform thinking.

Archaeologist and anthropologist A. M. Hocart in his posthumous book *The Life-Giving Myth* attributed the decadence that began in India during the late Gupta period to the moral bias of Buddhism which undermined the martial spirit of the Indian people. Muslim and other invasions of India roused the people to revolt against Buddhism which encouraged peaceful living and the ideal of the brotherhood of man.[33]

The history of Ceylon and the development of sculpture do not support this generalisation. Duṭugämunu or Duṭṭha Gāmaṇi and the later kings Vijayabāhu I and Parākramabāhu the Great during a period of about 1400 years successfully made devastating wars against invaders. Parākramabāhu in the 12th century invaded India. Aryan chivalry seems to have permeated the

33. A. M. Hocart, *The Life-Giving-Myth.* "Gupta art, like all art, passes its zenith and declines into a florid and elegant but nerveless accomplishment. Then comes the revolt against form without content. . . . 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."
"The romantic art of India delights in the presentation of old myths which had suffered the eclipse of Buddhism, but it is not the story that really interests the artist but the opportunity for emotional expression and for flaunting an aggressive creed." pp. 240, 241.
"Early Buddhist art is happy and sensual. It delights in alluring female figures and worldly pleasures." p.247.

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people of Ceylon during the time of Duṭṭha Gāmaṇi. Historical legends refer to the valour and chivalry of the soldiers and commanders of Duṭṭha Gāmini's army. In spite of the moral bias of Buddhism, people practised archery and killed wild animals with bow and arrow. They ate the flesh of these wild animals, they drank toddy. Some of the commanders of Duṭṭha Gāmaṇi had gargantuan appetites for eating and drinking. Their life as described in legend resembles the life of pagans rather than that of an enervated and emaciated people who practised ascetic morals.

There are remains of minor sculpture which seem to have encouraged people to cultivate a martial spirit. These may have been carved under the inspiration of the post-Gupta Hindu art of India which arose as a revolt against the peaceful spirit of Buddhism. But in Ceylon this martial spirit had an unbroken continuity until the 12th century in spite of the austere moral bias of Buddhism which, according to Hocart, is typical of decadence. A carving from Polonnaruva represents an aspect of a military tournament with an ironical touch.

The soldier is in the posture of a contemplator who wishes to experience peace and serenity. But he holds a sword behind his neck which suggests that his aim is to feed his martial spirit to cut the necks of the enemy in the battlefield (Fig. 79). Figure 80 also a carving from Polonnaruva, represents a soldier who is on his way to the battlefield with his sword, shield, and the short dagger hanging from his waist belt. The small female figure

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perhaps, represents a goddess with whisk or fan in her raised hand. In many Sinhalese poems of the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries there are allusions to an Indian legend which was probably propaganda to rouse the valour of the king's soldiers. The legend is that the soldier who fights bravely and dies in the battlefield is born in heaven to be embraced by goddesses. The image of a god on horseback (Fig. 81) is one of the four metal statuettes found inside the relic chamber of the stupa at Mahiyangana which was rebuilt in the 11th century. The old stupa was excavated a few years ago in order to build a new one over it. The figure probably represents a guardian god on horseback with his consort. The god is about to strike at the enemy with the sword in his raised hand. The horse is in the act of crushing the enemy with his raised forelegs. On the four walls of the same relic chamber were paintings of Buddhist monks and over their heads were paintings of the four flying figures of warlike gods with drawn swords.

It is unusual to find these metal figures of warriors in the act of destroying enemies and the paintings representing gods or soldiers with raised swords threatening to kill their enemies in the relic chamber of a Buddhist religious monument. They probably represent the martial spirit which prevailed in Ceylon during the 11th and 12th centuries, a period in which sanguinary wars occurred and extended over the whole of Ceylon except the inaccessible mountain region.

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The dancing dwarfs with exuberant joy (Figs. 53, 54, 55 56, 57) are from the stone carvings of Isurumuniya at Anurādhapura. These carvings belong to the fourth and the seventh centuries. The uncontrolled movements and riotously merry moods of these dwarfs express the hilarious attitude to life of the Buddhist stone carvers. The dwarfs in Figures 63 to 74 are from the fallen stone pillar capitals now lying strewn on the ground of the ruined monastery Lovā Mahā-Pāya or the Brazen Palace at Anurādhapura. The dancer (Fig. 70) mimics a dance pose which evokes smiles. The dwarf (Fig. 71) dances merrily with a cobra ready to strike coming out from under his arm. Figure 72 represents a cheerful drummer. The sculptor intentionally gives this dwarf the posture of a child. The drum in his hand is called ḍamaru (uḍekki in Sinhalese). It is the same kind of drum which god Śiva holds in one of his hands in his terrifying cosmic dance. Because of this drum and the child-like posture of the dwarf in the act of drumming, it evokes the ironical laughter of the intelligent man who looks at it.

In my last excursion to Anurādhapura in search of more dwarfs, I discovered four or five new figures to my childish delight. Three of them are the drummers (Figs. 66 and 67) and the daring cobra charmer (Fig. 74). The drummers are in the act of playing a drum of the shape of a pitcher or bottle-gourd. The curiously humorous and exaggerated posture of the head of one of the dwarfs (Fig. 66) and his two hands in the act of drumming suggest the posture and contortions of the head and hands of an experienced modern

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tabla player who tries to move his head, like the wand of a music conductor, to synchronise with the movements of the drumming hands and fingers.

The *tabla* is a dual drum but the dwarf's is a single drum. The cobra charmer (Fig. 74) holds the huge cobra with its head raised ready to strike. The dwarf is humorously simulating a snake charmer. Its dilated eyes and raised eye-brows and the contracted and contorted lips as in puffing or whistling simulate fright but suggest daring.

The pottery figures of dwarfs in the half-round decorating the fillets of the dado of the outer walls of a ruined image house called the Northern Temple at Polonnaruva represent a further development of this sculptural art of caricature in Ceylon. Archaeologists who lived about fifty or sixty years ago have counted about two hundred and fifty of these figures each differing from the other in grimace and posture. Weathering and decay have effaced most of these figures which collectively represent human grimace in its infinite variety (Figs. 88 to 96). Archaeological Commissioner Bell, who sometimes referred with sarcasm to the attempt of some scholars to make use of ancient monuments to boost nationalism, wrote in one of his annual reports an enthusiastic appreciation of the art and caricature in these pieces of pottery.

"Above the fascia and fillets is a lesser dado of *gaṇas*. So crowded together are these merry little persons, in their *pradakshiṇā* circumambulation of the building from left to right, that as many as two hundred and fifty and upwards once joined the gay throng that goes laughing along the foot of the temple walls.

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"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 *gaṇas* are worthy of attentive study; they forcibly illustrate the breadth, power and wondrous skill of the potters' hand which could fashion this engrossing procession of life-like figurines—these jolly figurines bursting with the full joy of life."[34]

The masked dancer (Fig. 91) wears a mask which resembles the lion mask worn today by the Ceylon dancer who performs the same folk dance on the Sinhalese new year day. He covers his upper body with a bushy garment made of straws resembling the lion's mane. There is no trace of such a garment in the masked dwarf figure from Polonnaruva. A dwarf figure representing a man or boy who put two fingers in the corners of his mouth and tries to stretch them (Fig. 99, third figurine from left) is also from Polonnaruva. In modern Ceylon there are village boys who contort themselves in this way and try to whistle, which they achieve through regular practice. Of females (Fig. 100) two are displaying their uncovered posteriors without puritanical restraint. One of the female figurines (the last one) with well developed breasts is trying to attract the attention of visitors by a pretended gesture of modesty or by trying to hide one of the breasts behind the lower part of one arm and holding up the other breast with both palms.

34. H. C. P. Bell, *Archaeological Survey of Ceylon*, Annual Report, 1909, Colombo, p. 11.

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Among the dwarf figures of which I have copies from three or four South Indian temples there are some curious ones (Figs. 84, 85, 87). Of the three the first two are from the Alagar Kovil of South India. A hefty woman tries to tame her husband with a kick on his breast and by turning one of his eyelids. The dwarf in Fig. 85, is trying to stretch the corners of his mouth and whistle in exactly the same way as the Polonnaruva dwarf of Fig. 100.

In carving and modelling dwarf figures the sculptors of Ceylon and India seem, without any religious restraint, to have made use of their own experience and knowledge to instill life in their pet creations. Four of the six Indian dwarf figures are from South Indian temples built after the thirteenth century. The Ceylon dwarf figures belong to the fifth and seventh centuries and the Polonnaruva pottery figures to the twelfth century.

Indian sculptors seem to have found an outlet for releasing their suppressed emotions and exuberant joy of life in the unrestrained depiction of sex life which became an aspect of Tantric religion. In Ceylon the monks waged an unceasing and fierce war against the introduction of the Tantric cult. Therefore the Ceylon sculptors found an outlet for releasing their natural emotions by manipulating the conventional dwarf figure to depict the human comedy of old Ceylon. In making the images of the Buddha and his ascetic disciples artists strictly observing religious and

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artistic conventions had to suppress their sense of the joy of life, humour and irony. But in carving the dwarf figures they expressed their intimate knowledge of life and sense of joy in it with boisterous laughter tinged with irony and satire.

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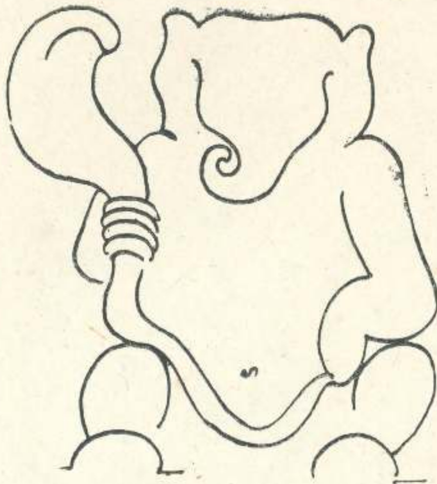

Fig. 52

Fig. 53

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Fig. 54

Fig. 55

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Fig. 56

Fig. 57

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Fig. 58

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Fig. 59

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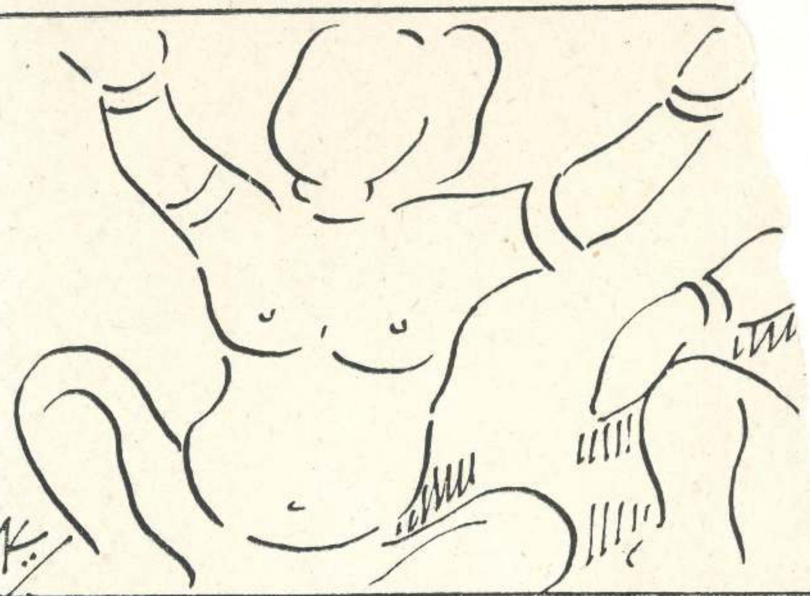

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Fig. 62

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Fig 63

Fig. 64

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Fig. 66

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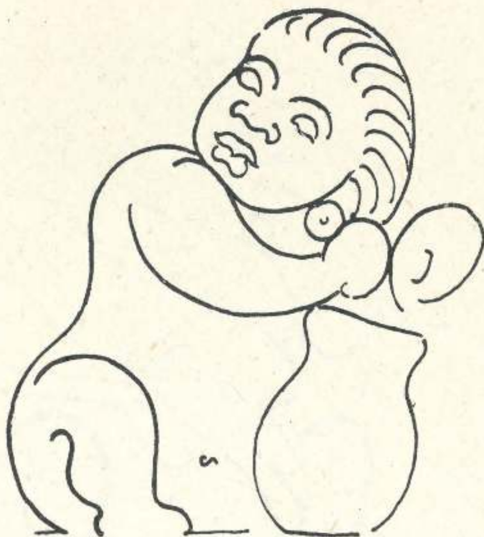

Fig. 67

Fig. 68

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Fig. 69

Fig. 70

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Fig. 71

Fig. 72

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Fig. 73

Fig. 74

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Fig. 75

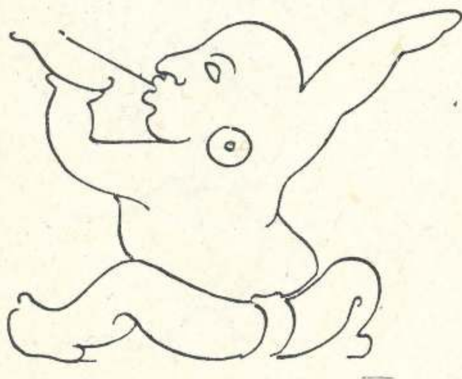

Fig. 76

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Fig. 77

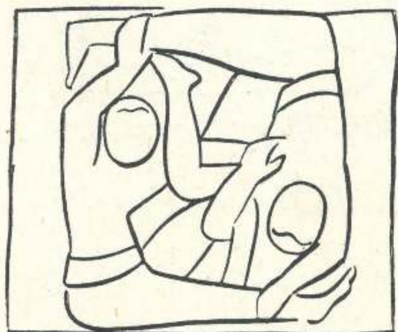

Fig. 78

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Fig. 79

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Fig. 80

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Fig. 81

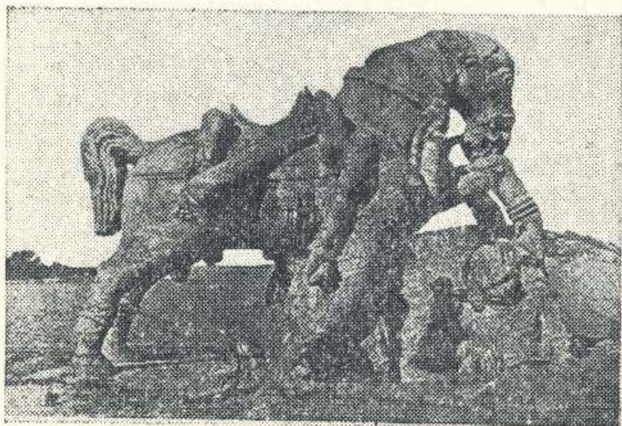

Fig. 82

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Fig. 83

Fig. 84

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Fig. 85

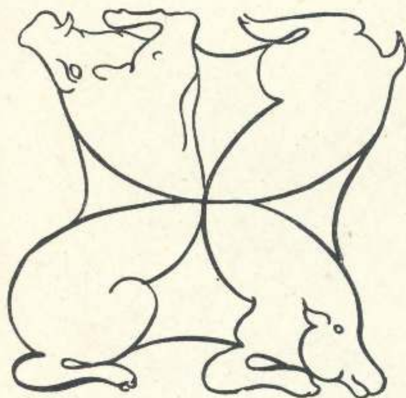

Fig. 86

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Fig. 87

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Fig. 88

Fig. 89

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Fig. 90

Fig. 91

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Fig. 92

Fig. 93

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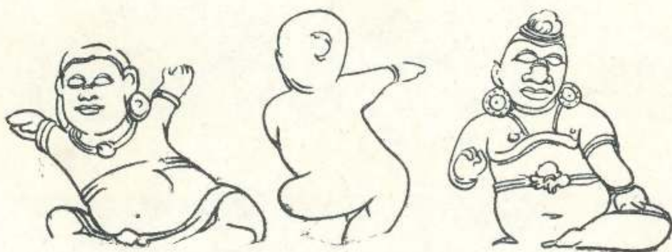
Fig. 94



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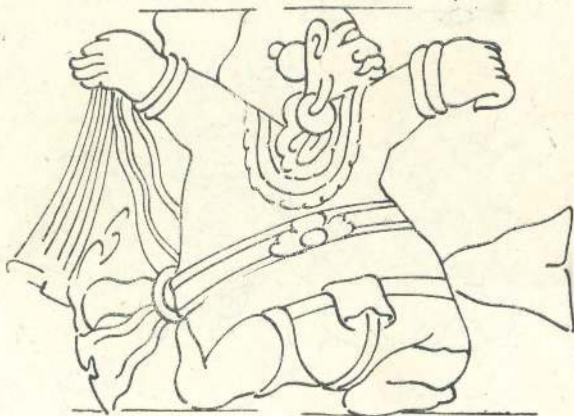

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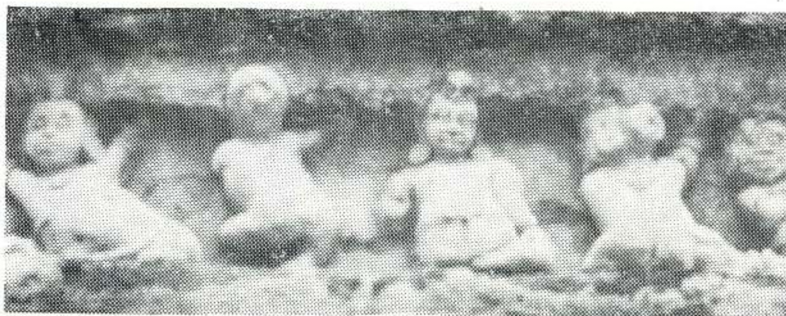

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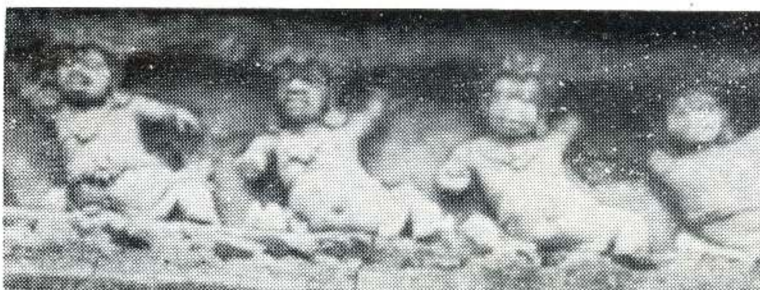

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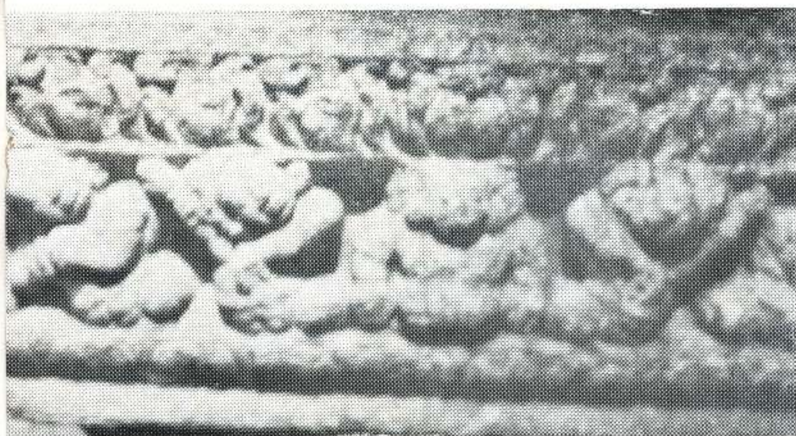

Fig. 108

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Fig 109

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Explanations of Illustrations

The illustrations of the Buddha images of India and Ceylon which I have selected will enable the reader to draw his own conclusions regarding the independent development of the Buddha image in samādhi mood in Ceylon by sculptors who had been disciplined and inspired by the Theravāda tradition.

Fig. 1. p.19. The sitting Buddha image in unconventional attitude is from an Amarāvati bas-relief of the 3rd century A.D. Note the position and the gesture of the raised hand which suggests signalling rather than of preaching or blessing. The sitting posture is contrary to the iconography of the Buddha image.

These bas-reliefs were probably the works of early Indian sculptors who were not disciplined by Buddhism and Buddhist teachers.

Fig. 2. p.20. The Buddha in an unusual posture (Nāgārjunikoṇda). This sitting posture is very natural but more unconventional than that of the Amarāvati image (Fig. 1). The positions of the hands seem to represent the Buddha in the act of releasing a part of the robe which covers his upper body.

Fig. 3. p.21. The Buddha preaching in the cross-legged sitting posture which is called *padmāsana*. From Sarnath. Early Gupta period. Most, if not all, of the early Indian Buddha images are in the *padmāsana* posture.

Fig. 4. p.23. The Buddha in samādhi mood, Ceylon, 2nd or 3rd century A.D. Almost all of the sitting Buddha images of old Ceylon are of this sitting posture called *paryankāsana* (Pāli: Pallanka) or *Vīrāsana*. *Padmāsana* or the cross-legged sitting posture is that of the Hindu yogi. *Paryankāsana* was probably developed by sculptors of Ceylon disciplined by Theravāda Buddhism.

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Professor Phaṇindra Nath Bose in his *Principles of Indian Śilpaśāstra* says that vīrāsana (paryankāsana) is not generally found in Indian images. In its place there are images in *ṣukhāsana* or happy posture which is defined by Bose thus: The left foot is placed on the right thigh and the other foot is stretched downwards. This is known as the *ardhaparyanka* posture.

Fig. 5. p.41. The Buddha in *abhaya mudrā*. The cross-legged sitting posture in which the legs are interlocked. This image labelled Bodhisattva is from Katra, India. Probably first century A.D.

Fig. 6. p.42. The Buddha preaching or blessing. Amarāvati bas-relief. Second century A.D. The sitting posture is contrary to Buddhist iconography.

Fig. 7. p.43. The Buddha in *samādhi* (meditating pose). Terracotta from stupa at Mirpur Khas in Sind, now at the Prince of Wales' Museum, Bombay. 4th to 5th century A.D. The sitting posture is *padmāsana*. The features of this figure are crude. It gives the impression of a novice who is trying to sit in meditating posture for the benefit of the sculptor.

Fig. 8. p.44. The Buddha in *bhusparsha mudrā* from Chandanar, Orissa. 11th century A.D. A more successful attempt to capture the inner psychological mood. The sitting posture is cross-legged *padmāsana*.

Fig. 9. p.45. The Buddha in unusual posture from Buddhagayā. Image holds a begging bowl in both hands. In Ceylon the figure of a disciple of the Buddha called Śívali is always represented in this sitting posture holding a rice bowl in one hand and the other inside the bowl. Ceylon Buddhists believe that the family who adore the image will be prosperous.

Fig. 10. p.46. Seated Buddha figure in cross-legged *padmāsana* of Mathurā school from Buddhagaya. Early 4th century A.D. Dr. Stella Kramrisch regards this as a masterpiece of Indian sculpture (*Indian*

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Sculpture, p. 169, Heritage of India series, Calcutta, 1933). As a piece of sculpture it is undoubtedly a masterpiece, but as abstract sculpture which represents detached consciousness of the Buddha or the 'face of Nirvāṇa', it cannot be compared to the Anurādhapura image. The hands are broken but it can be definitely decided that the image does not represent the samādhi mood (*dhyāna mudrā*). Stella Kramrisch says: 'The left hand rested on the left knee; the right hand was raised in the gesture of granting of fearlessness.' The cross-legged posture of this image is that of the Hindu yogi. The hip and the thighs are rigid and not natural because of the artificial and uneasy sitting posture.

Fig. 11. p.47. The Buddha in *samādhi*. Anurādhapura, Ceylon. 2nd or 4th century A.D. *Samādhi* and *prajñā* are equated with *Nirvāṇa*. It is a conception which can be grasped through metaphysics and depth psychology by a student of modern philosophy. Apart from the reality or unreality of this conception in relation to scientific truth, its perfect objectification in visible form with all its subtle implications was a creative achievement of the ancient sculptors of Ceylon.

The nose of this image was damaged by weathering or accident. It was restored with mortar a few years ago by a mason who was working in the Archaeological Department.

His crude restoration has disfigured the face of the image Ananda Coomaraswamy in the essay 'Hindu view of Art' in his *Dance of Siva* quotes from Sukrāchārya these instructions for sculptors: "The imager establishes images in temples by meditation on 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."

The sculptors of ancient Ceylon must have been trained by monks to meditate on the Buddha in samādhi as described in detail in the *Abhidhamma*. It is legitimate to surmise that the ancient artist who made this particular image in samādhi was influenced by his unconscious.

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A comparison of this masterpiece in detail with the Indian images will reveal the genius and the achievement of the Ceylon sculptor. The face, eyes, and lips reflect the inner calm, peace and ecstasy that shine in the mirror of intuition or transcendental consciousness. The body and the arms are perfectly controlled but show the sensitiveness of the tuned strings of a violin which will vibrate at the slightest breeze. The hands do not rest on the lap like a dead-weight. They are controlled from within just allowing them a very light sensitive contact with the thin robe which covers the soft flesh of the body and the legs.

Fig. 12. p.48. Toluwila Buddha in samādhi. Anurādhapura, Ceylon. 4th or 5th century A.D. Now at the Colombo Museum. The Toluwila image with its smooth, thin and soft features suggestive of a prettiness that belongs to the female figure, is surpassed by the other Anurādhapura Buddha in samādhi (Fig. 11).

Fig. 13. p.49. The Buddha sheltered by the Nāga King. From Seruvila in the Eastern Province of Ceylon. This is another masterpiece of the sculptors of Ceylon. As abstract sculpture it cannot be compared with the Anurādhapura masterpiece (Fig. 11), but in conception and execution it is a remarkable achievement. The cobra and the Buddha merge into a harmonious single piece of sculpture. The coils of the cobra and the bent legs of the image suggest a rising spiral body: the trunk and the head of the image emerge from the spiral body. The nine-hooded head of the cobra suggests the halo which the Indian sculptors developed into a very beautiful ornamental disc as in the Sarnath Buddha image. The sculptor disciplined by the philosophy of Buddhism succeeds in effacing from the cobra all its venomous and terrifying aspects.

Fig. 14. p.49. The Buddha in samādhi. Bronze. Colombo Museum. 5th or 6th century A.D. Probably a creation of the same sculptors who produced the standing Buddha image in bronze (Fig. 26).

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Fig. 15. p.50. The Buddha in preaching attitude. Colombo Museum. 5th or 6th century A.D. Some of its features are contrary to the tradition of the Buddhist sculptors of Ceylon. The open eyes, charming smile, absence of erectness of body and neck suggest the human aspect of the Buddha when he was preaching. Probably the creation of an artist who ignored the conventional iconography or of a Dravidian artist who was not a Buddhist.

Fig. 16, 17, 18. pp.51-52. Buddha images of South India-Tanjore and Kuvam in Chingleput. These three images in samādhi are dated from the 8th century to the 10th or 12th century A.D. The sitting posture of all of them, in contrast to all early Indian sitting Buddha images, is that of the Ceylon samādhi image of the 3rd century, A.D.

Fig. 19. p.53. Buddha image from Angkor, Java, in *bhumisparsha mudra*. 12th century A. D. or later. The Angkor artists,' attempt to represent the psychological implications of the samādhi mood succeeds in giving a forced mundane smile to the image.

Fig. 20. p.54. Buddha image from Angkor. 12th or 13th century A.D. This is a masterpiece of Khemer Buddhist art. It is an attempt to represent the samādhi mood without knowledge of its psychology. The sculptor's attempt to represent the detached consciousness of the Buddha succeeds in giving the image a very compassionate mundane smile which pervades the face and body. The cobra behind the head of the image is an abstract creation which suggests equanimity or serenity with which the Buddha endured enmity, hate and malice. The cobra is a symbol of passion, hate and revengefulness in Buddhist literature.

Fig. 21. p.55. A sitting Buddha image from China. 4th or 6th century, A.D. This image was exhibited at the Buddha Jayanti Exhibition held in Delhi. An unconventional masterpiece representing the

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Buddha as he appeared sitting at the monastery. The simple image suggests the Buddha's tolerant and serene human aspects.

Fig. 22. p.56. The Buddha image in samādhi, Gandhāra, North India. As Havell suggested, this is probably a carving by a Greco-Roman craftsman who could not understand the psychological implications of samādhi.

Fig. 23. p.57. The Buddha in *bhumisparsha mudrā* from Thailand. 13th or 14th century A. D. The sitting posture is *padmāsana* with the legs interlocked as of Indian statues. It is a fine piece of sculpture probably inspired by the Sarnath image.

Fig. 24. p.58. The Buddha image from Thailand in *bhumisparsha mudrā*, 15th or 16th century A. D. The sitting posture is like that of the Buddha image in early Ceylon. Probably influenced by South Indian Buddha images of the 10th or 12th century.

Fig. 25. p.59. Standing Buddha from Sarnath. Gupta age. This is one of the beautiful Apollo-like Indian Buddha images. During the Gupta period the making of Buddha images developed as a commercial enterprise. The undisguised sex appeal which pervades this image may be due to this commercialisation and the Tantric cult.

Fig. 26. p.60. Standing Buddha image from Rijks Museum, Amsterdam. Dated 3rd century, A.D. and treated as Ceylon sculpture. Bronze around a core of cement-like material.

Fig. 27. p.61. Bronze Buddha from Medawachchiya, Ceylon. 2nd century A.D. C.E. Godakumbura, Archaeological Commissioner, says there is a striking similarity between this statue and the colossal Avukana stone statue which is about 39 feet in height.

Fig. 28. p.62. A colossal Buddha statue from China. It is one of the most powerful Buddha images in unconventional sitting posture. Its face suggests a stern intellectual attitude appropriate to its sitting posture and colossal height.

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Fig. 29. p.63. Buddha image in *Dharmacakra* attitude from Nasik, India. Cave 23, 3rd century, A.D.

Fig. 30. p.64. Colossal stupa built by Duṭṭha Gāmaṇi at Anurādhapura in the 2nd century B.C. Appearance after the restoration and renovation. In spite of its colossal dimensions and massive solidity it symbolizes the evanascence of life according to the Buddhist concept of *anichcha*. The shape of this stupa was suggested to constructionist artists by the dew-drop on the blade of grass which evaporates with the morning sun.

Fig. 31. p.91. One of the moonstones with depth carving near the Basavakkulama tank to the west of the Ruvanveli stupa at Anurādhapura.

Fig. 32. p.92. Moonstone at a shrine near Thupārama stupa, Anurādhapura.

Fig. 33. p.92. Moonstone at the northern entrance to the Watadāge at Polonnaruva. 12th century A.D.

Fig. 34. p.74. A section of the moonstone enlarged to show the ornamental *palāpeti* (leaf) pattern on the top.

Fig. 35. p.93. Pillar capital with dwarf figures of the Lóvamahāpāya, (Brazen palace) Anurādhapura. The leaf pattern forms the upper border.

Fig. 36. p.93. A section of the moonstone showing the enlarged pattern of the *palāpeti* motif which fills the semi-circular middle band between the row of animals and the row of geese. It differs from the border pattern (Figs. 34 and 35) in showing two rows of leaves with the stem between them. The border pattern has only one row of the same leaves without the stem.

Fig. 37. p.94. Popularly known as the Isurumuniya lovers. Stone carving from Isurumuniya temple, Anurādhapura. Probably 4th or 5th century, A.D. This fine piece of sculpture was first identified as Śiva and Pārvati. As this identification became untenable it was abandoned. The two figures are now identified as man and woman.

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The man can be definitely identified as a soldier because his sword and shield are behind him, probably attached to his right shoulder by a strap. Whether the figures represent man and woman or god and goddess, the thematic interpretation would be that they represent two lovers. The bathing-trunk-like attire of the male was the dress of ancient Sinhalese soldiers. It was a development of the span strip of cloth that covered the privities, the dress of cultivators working in paddy fieds.

The original theme of the sculptor can be read and interpreted thus according to the gestures enumerated by Nandikeṣvara in his *Abhinaya Darpaṇa* translated into English entitled *Mirror of Gesture* by Dr Ananda Coomaraswamy. The meaning of the gesture of the female hand with two fingers and thumb raised and the third finger bent is the union of man and woman. Her neck slightly bent to one side means 'being in love.' Her half-closed eyes suggest two meanings: subject to another's will; greeting. Three fingers of the right hand of the male are stretched out and the tips of the third finger and the thumb meet together. Two of the several meanings given to this gesture by Nandikeṣvara are: stroking the hair; wiping away tears. The gesture of the head of the male figure can be definitely identified as a *nihañcita mudrā* which is denoted by raising the shoulder and touching it with the head. The meaning of it is 'pleasure at seeing the beloved.' That the eyes of the man indicate love can be understood without referring to the text. According to the text of the *Abhinaya Darpaṇa* the gesture of the eyes of the male means 'love born of great joy in the toil of love.' The raising of the eyebrows and looking out of the corners of the eyes mean 'mutual glances of those who are fast bound by amorous desires.' The Isurumuniya lovers is a refined piece of erotic sculpture.

Fig. 38. p.95. Construction in space: Spiral theme by Navum Gabo.

Fig. 39. p.95. Twining forms by Barbara Hepworth.

Fig. 40. p.96. Three standing figures by Henry Moore.

Fig. 41. p.97. Assault of Mara, plastic metal by Tissa Ranasinghe. The Buddha sitting in contemplation under the Bodhi tree gained transcendental

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intuition by overcoming all human passions. Old Buddhist artists used figures of Mara and his army of demons to represent the passions. Tissa Ranasinghe substitutes abstract symbols to represent human instincts and passions.

Fig. 42. p.98. Tonsure of Siddhartha. Plaster relief by Tissa Ranasinghe. Artist successfully blends folk and abstract art in this plastic relief. Buddhist folk artists have been influenced by the karma theory which stressed the unity of life and the identification of man with nature. This belief influenced folk artists to feel the brotherhood of man and depict kings and feudal lords and ladies in their own image, giving them the status of peasants. In conception and manner of portrayal, relief of Siddhartha suggests the unity of nature. The figures of the Prince, his servant and his riding companion, the horse, tree, the river which he crossed and the gods who bring ascetic robes suggest the simple feeling in the brotherhood of man and the unity of nature. Siddhārtha looks at the horse with intense feeling and the horse reciprocates with human understanding, as believed by the Buddhist peasants.

Fig. 43. p.99. Mischievous by H. A. Karunaratne

Fig. 44. p.100. Forms by H. A. Karunaratne

Fig. 45. p.101. Echo of Melody by H. A. Karunaratne

Fig. 46. p.102. Mother and Children by Jayanta Premachandra

Fig. 47. p.103. The Buddha and the Gazelle by Jayanta Premachandra

Fig. 48. p.103. Rabana Players by Jayanta Premachandra

Fig. 49. p.104. Toothless old farmer pulverizing his chew of betel—Wooden sculpture by folk artist reproduced in rubber by Richard Pieris & Co. Ltd.

Fig. 50. p.105. Door frame from Kelaṇiya

Fig. 51. p.106. Cuban Modern Painting 1935; Romero Arciaga

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VĀMANA FIGURINES CARVED ON STONE

These figurines which are not more than four or five inches high are from Mihintale and the Lovāmahāpāya or Brazen Palace at Anurādhapura. The dwarf figures at Mihintale are creations of sculptors who lived probably during the 5th to the 8th centuries A.D. A century or two later, it is conjectured, the classical period of Sinhalese culture began to decay. Parakramabahu I, in the 12th century, made an attempt to revive the lost Sinhalese classical tradition on a colossal scale. But it failed because of the Brahminical Sanskrit tradition which permeated monastic education and held sway over the Sinhalese aristocracy of the city of Polonnaruva. This Sanskrit tradition was an offshoot of the post-Gupta militant Hindu culture which arose in India as a reaction against the peaceful humanitarian Upanishadic-Buddhist culture which seems to have enervated the martial spirit of the Indian warrior class.

The Isurumuniya dwarf figures belong to the classical period of Sinhalese culture. Some of the dancing dwarfs (Fig. 53, 54) assert the joy of life if not a feeling for riotous living. The gestures of the two hands of these dwarfs suggest two particular *mudrās* of a classical dance. But the artist who carved them deliberately introduces at the same time a boisterousness which is contrary to classical convention.

Fig. 52. p.122. Elephant god Gaṇesha holding a cobra, which is a very unusual gesture. Mihintale.

Fig. 53. p.122. Dancer with exuberant conviviality. Isurumuniya, Anurādhapura.

Fig. 54. p.123. Riotous dancer, Isurumuniya.

Fig. 55. p.123. Dancer, Isurumuniya.

Fig. 56. p.124. Dancer, Isurumuniya.

Fig. 57. p.124. Dancer, Isurumuniya.

Fig. 58. p.125. A man or god with hoe or axe, Lion Bath, Mihintale.

Fig. 59. p.128. Offerings for Gaṇesha, Kantaka Cetiya, Mihintale.

Fig. 60. p.129. Dancers and flute blower, Lion Bath, Mihintale.

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Fig. 61. p.130. Dancers, Kapārārāma near Kūttam Pokuṇa, Anurādhapura.

Fig. 62. p.131. Guardstone of a building near Kūttam Pokuṇa, Anurādhapura.

CARVINGS ON STONE PILLAR CAPITALS AT LOVĀMAHĀPĀYA

Fig. 63. p.132. Acrobat, Lovāmahāpāya (Brazen Palace), Anurādhapura.

Fig. 64. p.132. Pot Dancer, Brazen Palace. This dance still survives in Ceylon.

Fig. 65. p.133. Udekki (ḍamaru) drummer, Lovāmahāpāya.

Fig. 66. p.133. Drummer playing the gourd-shaped drum. The modern *tabla* player moves his head and hands in unison with the tune. This dwarf figure portrays the movements of head and hands of the tabla drummer.

Fig. 67. p.134. Another drummer playing the same type of drum.

Fig. 68. p.134. Vina Player.

Fig. 69. p.135. This figure probably represents a devi[illegible]

Fig. 70. p.135. Dancer. Movements and rhythm humorously suggest a child mimicking a difficult dance pose.

Fig. 71. p.136. Dancing dwarf with a cobra coming out from under his left hand.

Fig. 72. p.136. Udekki (damaru) player. Seems a deliberate caricature.

Fig. 73. p.137. Dancer with lute.

Fig. 74. p.137. Cobra charmer. He simulates fright to conceal his daring.

Fig. 75. p.138. This figure represents the dance of the god Natarāja. It is probably a readaptation of the cosmic dance of Siva to suit the Buddhist conception of gods. From a carving at Gadalādeniya. 16th century.

Fig. 76. p.138. Probably a conch blower. Gadalādeniya. 16th century

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Fig. 77. p.139. Tambourine player. Gadalādeniya. 16th century.

Fig. 78. p.139. Wrestlers. Gaḍalādeṇiya. 16th century.

Fig. 79. p.140. Stone carving from Polonnaruva. 12th century. A soldier participating in military exercise or tournament. He is in the posture of ascetic meditation. But he holds a sword behind his neck which suggests that the object of his meditation is not peace and calm but the aim of effectively cutting the necks of enemies in the battlefield.

Fig. 80. p.141. Stone carving from Polonnaruva. 12th century A.D. It probably suggests an Indian legend which has crept into classical Sinhalese poetry. The soldier who dies fighting in the battlefield is reborn in heaven to be embraced and caressed by beautiful heavenly nymphs. The carving represents a soldier in battle dress, sword and shield in hand, entering the battlefield ready to attack. The female figure suggests a heavenly nymph with a flywhisk who waits to receive him in heaven if he is killed. A piece of propaganda sculpture to rouse the martial spirit of the people.

Fig. 81. p.1·2. Metal figure from the Mahiyangana stupa in the Uva Province. 10th or 11th century, A.D. This metal sculpture represents a god on horseback, drawn sword in hand with his consort behind him. Four of these figures were found in the four corners of the relic chamber of the ruined stupa which was excavated recently for rebuilding. The horse is trying to crush an enemy with his hoofs. One of the greatest battles against the invaders of Ceylon was fought in the 11th century. The martial spirit and the bellicose mood manifested in these sculptures seem to have been provoked by the South Indian invaders who made Ceylon a colony of the Choḷa empire in the early part of the 11th century.

The metal figure of the horse in the relic chamber of *Mahiyangana stupa* closely resembles the colossal stone statue

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of the horse in Konāraka temple, Orissa, who tramples an *asura* on the command of a warrior who is on the ground. Havell in his *Indian Sculpture and Painting* said:

"The thought occurs that had it by chance been labelled Roman or Greek, this magnificent work of art would now be the pride of some metropolitan museum in Europe or America.

"Here Indian sculptors have shown that they can express the pride of victory and the glory of triumphant warfare with as much fire and passion as the greatest European artists: for not even the Homeric grandeur of the Elgin Marbles surpasses the magnificient movement and modelling of this Indian Achilles, and the superbly monumental war-horse in its massive strength and vigour is not unworthy of comparison with Verochio's famous masterpiece at Venice." pp. 147, 148.

Fig. 82. p.142. Horse and warrior at Konāraka, Orissa. 13th century.

VĀMANA FIGURINES FROM INDIAN TEMPLES

Fig. 83. p.143. Soldier in action. Mahabalipuram, India.

Fig. 84. p.143. Woman taming the male with a kick on his chest and by holding one of his eyelids. Alagar Kovil, South India.

Fig. 85. p.144. A man stretching the corners of his mouth and trying to whistle. Alagar Kovil, South India.

Fig. 86. p.144. Pig and hare. Alagar Kovil, South India.

Fig. 87. p.145. A man with two wives. Kānchipuram, South India.

POLONNARUVA POTTERY FIGURINES

Pottery figurines decorating the fillets of the outer walls of an Image House at Polonnaruwa (12th century) are deliberate caricatures. These 'jesting and sporting' men and women suggest ideas and attitudes that inspired the old caricaturists. Ancient artists always had to work within rigid conventions in making images of the Buddha and the gods. The Buddha image represented the mood of suppressed emotions and detached mind. The figures of gods invariably represented piety and reverence and a benign

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gesture. In carving those images the sculptors had to control their own convivial spirit and hilarious joy of life. In carving dwarf figures they were free to infuse their conviviality and hilarious joy of life into them with a boisterousness which bursts through repressed emotions.

Fig. 88. p.146. Two dancers.

Fig. 89. p.146. Two dancers and conch blower.

Fig. 90. p.147. Caricatures of male and female dancers.

Fig. 91. p.147. Dancer in lion mask. The Lion Dance still survives in the villages of Ceylon.

Fig. 92. p.148. Caricatures of human grimace.

Fig. 93. p.148. Caricatures of human grimace.

Fig. 94. p.149. Probably a dance instructor and a woman dancer.

Fig. 95. p.149. Dance instructor and two dancers. One dancer is a female who cunningly exposes her posterior.

Fig. 96. p.149. Caricatures, probably of a man who claps and a man who is friendly with the clapper and the other who is trying to sermonise.

Fig. 97. p.150. Probably a devil dancer (front view).

Fig. 98. p.150. Same dancer (back view). These stone carvings are from Polonnaruva (12th century).

REPRODUCTION OF POTTERY FIGURES OF POLONNARUVA

Fig. 99. p.151. These figurines represent dancers, contortionists and a conch blower. The third figure from left represents a man or a boy who attempts to whistle by stretching with two fingers the corners of his mouth. Next to him is the conch blower.

Fig. 100. p.151. Female dancers with their instructor (middle figure). Two of the females who expose their fully naked posteriors to the gaze of the worshippers are sarcastic creations of the sculptors who have been forced by monks to suppress their lighter moods and emotions in making the figures of the Buddha and the gods. The figurine five

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represents a woman who is attempting to protect her breasts from the gaze of the worshippers who entér the temple. It is only a ruse resorted to by the artist to call attention to one of the breasts of the female. She craftily holds out her left breast with both hands to the gaze of the onlooker.

Fig. 101. p.151. Dancers and contortionists.

Fig. 102. p.152. Dancers with their instructor. Figure two from left represents the instructor.

Fig. 103. p.152. A dancer attempting to caress his female partner's breast. Dancer cunningly suggests that it is an integral gesture of the dance.

Fig. 104. p.153. Male and female dancers. The last figure is that of a female dancer. She exposes her well developed breasts. The sculptor by taking advantage of the sculptural convention successfully avoids the exposure of her sex organ.

Fig. 105. p.153. Caricature of dancers.

Fig. 106. p.153. Dancers representing different moods.

DWARF FIGURES FROM PILLAR Capitals AT LOVĀMAHĀPĀYA, ANURĀDHĀPUR

Fig. 107. p.154. Dancers and the drummer.

Fig. 108. p.154. Dancers, drummer and Vina player.

Fig. 109. p.155. Colossal Buddha image from Avukana, Ceylon. 5th to 8th century. Dr Godakumbure in his booklet *Buddha Statues* says: "The statue has been carved out of a large boulder to which it is still connected by a strip of rock left uncut although the statue has been cut almost completely in the round."

"Avukana may well be the *Kalasāla* of the *Mahavamsa:* (Ch. 382, 66) which had an image which King Dhatusena (A.D. 459-477) is said to have advanced. The image house at the spot has been in existence in the 8th or 9th century." p. 23

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