

POYA, PUJA AND SHARAMADANA: BUDDHISM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN A SINHALESE VILLAGE

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1. Village, Temple and Castes

Dedication to Buddha is the cue to understand the rhythm and meanings of daily life in a Sinhalese village (Omori & Taniguchi 1984). Dedication ordinarily consists of attending monthly full moon festival (*poya*), cooking meals for monks and joining voluntary, collective works. *Poya* is the national holiday and the Buddhist need to quit any secular working and to spend all the day and the night at a temple, listening to edifying sermons, reciting scriptures with monks and sitting at the compound of the temple.⁽¹⁾ Every day laymen prepare food to bring to a temple. The Buddhist law (*Dharma*) prohibits monks to cook themselves (Karunatilake 1979). The member families by turn cook and bring food to the temple. Monks visit member families regularly on the occasions of anniversaries of the dead, funerals, weddings and building a house. Farmers also ask monks to visit them for healing diseases and for blessing rice plants to grow. Member families serve meals to monks at each visit or later. Villagers sometimes assemble to raise a fund at a monk's request on repairing temple facilities, for which every family makes a small sum of monetary contribution. The members willingly work together by extension of their activities connected with their temple. They collaborate to improve the infrastructure of the local community such as wells for cooking water, canals for irrigation, meeting halls, nurseries, roads and bridges (Lebbe et al. 1977). The spontaneous collaboration for public welfare is called *sharamadana*.

The village, Beralapanatara is originated from a cluster of the houses of tomtom beaters some hundred years old.⁽²⁾ It is located inland north to Matara city of south

Sri Lanka. The fifty-four square kilometers village is consisted of hills, tea farms on the slopes and terraced paddy fields at a basin, all of which are watered with moderate rainfall throughout the year. The inhabitants, numbered approximately 6,100, were farmers but more than 60% of the adults undertook some wameworks at tea estates, small shops, or tea manufacturing factories in the vicinity.⁽³⁾ The ethnic composition of the inhabitants was almost uniform. They were the low land Sinhalese.⁽⁴⁾ Discrepancies and a sort of alienation of a few villagers were brought in on account of their caste hierarchy. However, the villagers were all united by their faith in Buddha and adhesion to the village temple which was established more than one hundred years ago.

The Beralapanatara temple belonged to the Siam Sect of Theravada Buddhism and three monks resided there permanently. Not only its eight hundred member families but other residents in the neighborhood assembled and spent a full day and the night in the premise on major full moon festivals. In August 1982 some hundreds villagers crowded at the temple, listening to the monks' sermons and joining in the chorus the recitation of sacred scriptures. Besides, the premises were full by school children who attended the Buddhist class on Sundays. The monks and laymen teachers collaborated in teaching them Buddha's discipline. The member families donated the costs to supply textbooks and notebooks to the pupils.

The temple was located near the bazaar or a shopping center of the village.⁽⁵⁾ There were five constructions on a low hilltop: a *dagoba* (stupa), a main building for Lord Buddha and Hindu Deities, a hall of *nirvana* (dying Buddha), a preaching hall and monks' residence. A middle aged monk Rev. Guraratana, who was there since 1974 as the high priest, and two other "brother priests" resided at the temple.⁽⁶⁾ Every member family had to serve meals to the monks daily in turn. Meals were cooked at each house and brought to the temple at 8:00 a.m. and at 11:30 a.m. In the late afternoon tea was served with palm flower jaggery, which was very expensive and was rarely served at ordinary households in the village.

The monks not only served Buddha at the temple, but took care of the member families. Monks paid visits to the families on occasions such as funerals and succeeding commemorative days for the deceased (seventh day, three months later, one year after, and every anniversary), weddings (the day before) and house building. The member families, on the other hand, came to the temple repeatedly. There were occasional meetings on the full moon nights to make some monetary donation in response to the high priest's requests for the maintenance or repairing of the temple facilities.⁽⁷⁾

The villagers clearly recognize their caste ranking and strongly observed its accompanying rules of behavior such as keeping distance from one another even in their daily contacts. The caste differentiation originated with a variety of royal services to the feudal lords as well as the religious services offered to temples and monks during the feudal period. In reality the Beralapanatara residents were engaged daily in farming or working in tea estates or tea manufacturing factories. Few of the villagers earned their living by their traditional caste services. The caste affiliation, however, survived as a matter of the regulation of conducts (Omori 1981).

The "*goyigama*" (farmers) insisted on their supremacy and the "fishermen" were ranked just below them. They were followed by the "goldsmiths" and then, by the "jaggery makers", and other service castes. The "washermen", the "musicians" and the "dancers" came next below these upper caste ranks, but were categorized as low caste people to whom the upper caste villagers would not allow access at least privately. It was said that any low caste visitor would not be offered an ordinary chair but a smaller sized one to sit. Any sample of intermarriage between the different caste categories was not heard by us. No food or drinks, even a betel, would be accepted by the upper caste member from hands of the lower caste people. Occasional fights occurred at the tea manufacturing factory when an employee of a low caste dared to drink water from a cup of an upper caste member.⁽⁸⁾

The high boundary of castes was, however, cut across and the local residents

were brought into a more equal relationship when they join the activities of the rural development societies (RDS).⁽⁹⁾ The RDS is a voluntary, government assisted organization to improve the level of living of the inhabitants. Members of a RDS elected a chairman and three other executive staffs who exercised their leadership to accomplish the RDS's projects. The chairman called meetings in which every member could discuss the agenda freely. A member of the RDS was asked for paying a small sum of the annual fee, two rupees or so.

As any RDS had to ask the government for financial and technological assistance in pursuance of its projects, an Assistant Rural Development Officer took care of ten to fifteen villages. The officer was usually invited to attend the RDS meetings and took the motion into governmental consideration. In 1981 there were five RDS in Beralapanatara: three men's and two women's RDS. Major activities of the men's RDS were collective labors such as road repair and construction of retaining (cement) wells. A women's RDS was active to undertake batik works at the temple preaching hall regularly. The women members had pursued the working for four years and were awarded five thousand rupees (US\$ 263) from the Swedish government as an expenditure for necessary materials.

2. Rural Development Schemes

The Uduhupitia & Kandakumbura RDS was organized by 160 families of the two neighboring hamlets in 1977. The UKRDS had accomplished the following five major projects by August 1982: 1) construction of a retaining well, 2) completing four concrete bridges, 3) rerouting a main canal, 4) distributing some useful plants, and 5) building a conference hall (Omori 1985).

The chairman of the UKRDS was Rev. Dhammananda, who was born in the Uduhupitia hamlet and was then, one of the resident monks at the Beralapanatara temple. Sirisena Gunawardena and his paternal cousin, P.S.Y. Gunawardena were the secretary and the treasurer, respectively.⁽¹⁰⁾ In principle all of these executive

staffs had to be newly elected at the annual general meeting, but these three men had actually occupied the posts continuously since the establishment of the UKRDS in 1977. Among the 160 families 76 were permanent members who paid two rupees each as an annual fee. Any inhabitant in either of the two hamlets were eligible to attend the UKRDS's meetings and to join its activities without any restriction. In this sense, no substantial difference emerged between the permanent and the non permanent members of the UKRDS.

Construction of a public well

The society made a contract with the government to construct a public well for the inhabitants of the Uduhupitiya hamlet on December 19, 1980, and was awarded Rs. 7,500 which was originally granted from the Swedish government. First, the Society opened an account with the Bank of Ceylon, to which the money was paid in installments in accordance with the progress of the work. For the initial deposit, the secretary advanced his private money.

The well was dug near the hamlet center of Uduhupitiya. It was six feet wide and twelve feet deep. The inside of the well was covered with piled stones and on top of it, people set a solid well crib which was made of cement. The well crib was about two feet high above the ground. The materials for construction costed Rs. 7,300 and nothing was paid for the labor services of the inhabitants. The balance, Rs. 200 was deposited back in the account.

Building the concrete bridges

Three bridges were constructed in the Uduhupitiya hamlet. The first one was built under a government subsidy amounting to Rs. 24,977. The bridge's contract, made on December 19, 1980, stipulated its size to be approximately ten feet long, sixteen feet wide and eight feet high. The second and the third bridges were constructed with financial aid from the United Nations amounting to Rs. 35,536. The

contract for these was signed on January 12, 1981. The size of the second bridge was approximately seven feet long, sixteen feet wide and eight feet high. The third bridge constructed was much smaller. Any inhabitant who worked for the construction was paid Rs. 20 per day with lunch.

It took full twelve months to complete the first bridge. The delay was caused mainly by natural calamities such as floods which also interrupted the visits of technical experts from the district capital, Matara. For constructing the second and the third bridges, the contract had fixed a strict term. Thus, they were completed by the end of March 1981, i.e., within three months. On account of their hardworking collaborations, the three officials were invited to the radio station at Matara for a broadcast which praised the construction project.

Rerouting the main drainage system

A stream flowed through the valley where the Uduhupitiya hamlet and paddy fields were located. The stream which wound along the eastern hillside, readily overflowed everywhere along its route. In 1979 the Uduhupitiya & Kandakumbura Society applied for a government subsidy for rerouting the stream, and made a contract on November 7, 1979. This time no cash was granted but, with the help of the United Nations, the government supplied wheat flour (1,731 pounds), sugar (55 lb.), dhal (163 lb.), dried fish (289 lb.) to the Society.

In the initial year 250 man-days were spent for the work on the bus road up to the second bridge. Then, in the following year 400 man-days completed all the rerouting work to make the drainage almost straight for 1.2 kilometers. No monetary rewards were given to the inhabitants for their labor services, but foodstuffs were distributed among them in the following proportions: wheat flour (3 lb.), sugar (1 oz.), dhal (4 oz.), and dried fish (6 oz.) per person.

Supply of useful plants

Due to the Swedish government's financial assistance, the Uduhupitiya & Kandakumbura Society distributed some useful plants such as coconut palm, coffee tree, pepper vine and nutmeg tree. Among these, each young coconut plant was supplied to the farmers at a subsidized price of Rp. 1, while the normal price would be Rs. 2. Other plants were also given out free of charge. In 1981 around 180 coconut plants were supplied at a subsidized rate. Such plants as mangos and jackfruits were distributed by the Society upon request. No money was charged for these plants and all of them were then transported on a government motor vehicle.

Building a conference hall and other works

The residents at Uduhupitiya had suffered from a shortage of public meeting places in their vicinity. They had to walk more than a mile to come to the temple or to the primary school of the Beralapanatara village. To overcome that difficulty, the Society set out to build a conference hall at the center of the hamlet in Uduhupitiya in May 1980. No financial aid was expected for the work, except for a small amount of lumber which had come from within the government owned land. The timber acquired was used for constructing the roof. Lumber for pillars was also donated by some of the members from the Uduhupitiya & Kandakumbura Society. In addition to labor services of construction, every member of the Society was requested to donate ten sheets of tiles for roofing the conference hall. On my visit to the building in August 1982, the hall was half-completed; a building with a tiled roof and four wooden pillars one at each corner but no outer wall coverings at all. The building's completed size was to be approximately twenty-three feet wide and sixteen feet deep.

Another major task undertaken by the Society was the widening of the main road of the Uduhupitiya hamlet. The road ran through the hamlet for a distance of approximately one mile and a half from the north to the south. It was planned to widen the road to a width of twelve feet. The Society started the work in December 1977

and carried it on intermittently. The members usually started to work at 7:30 a.m. on certain Poya days and continued until 3:00 p.m. There was no governmental assistance but some of the wealthy people in the vicinity, i.e., the owners of tea manufacturing factories or shops, occasionally served lunch for the workers, e.g., 100 pounds of bread at one time. The latest work was completed on April 7, 1982 and the road had been widened for one mile from the bus road in the south up to the hamlet's center.

One bypass road cutting through a hillside was also under construction. Kandakumbura was an isolated hamlet which was surrounded completely with high peaks and had only one narrow path which led across one of the peaks to the hamlet's center of Uduhupitiya. Around 180 inhabitants (thirty-six families) of Kandakumbura had to make a long detour to the bazaar, the temple and the schools all of which were located along the bus road farther south. The Uduhupitiya & Kandakumbura Society, then, decided to open a bypass road leading directly across steep hillsides from the bus road to the Kandakumbura hamlet. The work began in 1978 and by August 1982 about one quarter (0.75 mile) of the entire route (2.5 miles approximately) had been completed. All the labor services were on a voluntary basis and no governmental subsidy was granted. Instead, the Society was requesting the government's financial assistance for the construction of a clinic, a school and a water filtering facility as well as a toilet for each homestead.

3. Concluding Remarks

In the Beralapanatara village major cleavage appears to be the result of the caste system, different standards of living, and political antagonism between the supporters of two opposing parties: the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the United National Party which was in power continuously after 1977. The political conflict did not emerge during my stay in the village, but its influence was actually felt underlying the intercourses among the village residents. I, at the same time, recognized much

clearer integration of the villagers specifically in the religious events centering on the village temple, as stated above.

The Buddhist value supports all the religious and secular activities of the rural inhabitants, individually and collectively. Attendance at the *poya* festival means layman's dedication to Lord Buddha, having spared all the secular activities. Serving meals to monks equals to donation of food to Buddha himself. Voluntary labor services are generally deemed to be self-sacrifice done with gratitude for Buddha's immense favor. Every faithful conduct leads the person to better life not only in this world but also in the other world, namely, afterlife. The Sinhalese call the dedication "making merits".⁽¹⁾

Buddhist monks help to increase integration and cohesion of the local community. The caste ideology severs the people from any exchange of food or of spouses, or even from free contacts in daily life. Lower ranked caste persons suffer in common from a variety of social segregation. However, monks accept food indiscriminately from any person and pay a visit to any family on occasion of necessity. Moreover, every family can attend the *poya* celebration and the members' assembly at the temple. All the residents are also expected to join the collective activities of the rural development society. The Buddhist values, consequently, make up a lot of clefts which have developed along the boundaries of different caste people in the local community.

Note

1. Buddha is believed to be born, enlightened and die on the day of full moon. In Sri Lanka all Buddhists celebrate every full moon day which is also a national holiday.
2. Beralapanatara means the village of tom tom beaters, who assertedly settled down in the locality for the first. A group of the drummers caste lived in nearby the village temple.
3. The villagers were classified by their occupation into the following categories: 1) "farmers" (cultivators of their own paddy land); 2) "estate workers"; 3) "economic cultivators" (cash crop growers); 4) "government servants" (government officials and employees in related organizations); and 5) "businessmen" (shopkeepers). The proportion of the villagers who were engaged in works in these categories is approximately as follows: "farmers" 20%, "estate workers" 40%, "economic cultivators" 30%, "government servants" 2%, and "businessmen" 6%. (figures from the Beralapanatara North Village)
4. The Sinhalese people were divided into two categories; Highland Sinhala and Lowland Sinhala. The Highland Sinhala were those born and raised in the places where the Kandy Dynasty had ruled till 1815 and Sinhalese tradition had been kept well consistently. The Lowland Sinhala were, on the other, those who had long been under the influence of Western civilization as early as 16th century on account of their habitats ruled by the Westerners such as the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the Briton.
5. The bazaar was a cluster of about 35 houses, of which at least 15 small retail shops were counted. In these shops they sold a variety of commodities such as soap, tooth cream, notebooks, ball-point pens, match boxes, mosquito coils, razor blades, cooking pans, metal or earthen containers, green vegetables, fruit, rice, salt, canned fish (mackerel), clothes, threads, flashlights and batteries.
6. Rev. Guraratana succeeded to his predecessor who had passed away in 1974. Rev. Guraratana had majored Buddhism at a college nearby Colombo and accomplished a BA degree. He was fluent in speaking English.
7. Self-restraint against "desire" is prerequisite to achieve good life in the other world. Any devoted Buddhist, even a layman, observed "sitting sil", i.e., to live as monks did: spending

all the day and night in a temple, sitting on the ground, and not eating anything after mid-day till next morning and meditating for enlightenment. One is accordingly required to abstain from undertaking any secular work or pursuing any worldly desire so that the one may be liberated completely from sufferings in this world. Full dedication of oneself to Buddha is the essential moral of the Sinhalese Buddhists' daily life.

8. This is a personal information learned from the villagers in 1982.
9. The Rural Development Society was formally started in 1948 at the time of independence. The Sri Lankan government trained some youths as leaders for the RDS at several Training Centres. It also offered financial aid as well as technical assistance to the RDS projects which were designed by the local residents themselves and submitted to the Department of Rural Development, the Ministry of Local Government & Home Affairs which appointed Rural Development Officers for supervising local RDSs. There were 6,676 RDSs composed of men and 1,500 RDSs comprised of women in 1973, of which around one third were active and another one third were occasionally operative (MARGA 1974b: 153-154).
10. The Secretary, Sirisena Gunawardena was 32 years old in 1982. He had passed the Advanced Level Education Certificate and had served as a Cultivation Officer since 1977. He cultivated his father's 7 acres of rice fields. The Treasurer, P.S.Y. Gunawardena owned 3 acres of rice fields and 2 acres of tea farm, but had no governmental job at that time.
11. The Sinhalese Buddhists also believe in Hindu faith and horoscope. Hindu deities are worshipped not only in Hindu shrines but in Buddhist temples. The deities allowed worldly requests of the worshippers: success in business, healing injury or illness, recovery of lost items, etc. Horoscope is also referred to repeatedly to know most suitable person to get married, date of wedding or setting up something such as building a house, going for a travel, and so forth.

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ポーヤ、プジャ、シャラマダーナ — シンハラ人の村の仏教と農村開発

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〈要 旨〉

政府間援助ODAや非政府組織NGOの活動が脚光を浴びるが、同時に発展途上国の官民レベルの自助努力への配慮も欠かせない。むしろ“富める”側からの、他力本願の援助よりも、“貧しい”側の自助努力と厚生がいっそう重要だろう。地域社会住民の生活向上だけでなく、人間開発すなわち自主奉仕と協調を通じて最大限の自己能力発揮と可能性の追求が果たされる。因習と貧困に埋もれた人びとが、自信と活力に満ちて改革に踏み出す。

国際シンポジウム「南アジアの人間、家族、社会—開発、女性の地位、伝統」では、谷口佳子、高桑史子両氏と私がスリランカ南部の農村と漁村で調査した自主開発事業の経緯と成果を解明した。むらの生活諸面で男性優位が際立つシンハラ社会だが、現金取得に依り家庭及び地域社会における女性の役割と責任の比重が増した。ジェンダー問題を主軸にした谷口、高桑両氏には及ばないものの、私が訪れたベララパナータラ村住民の協調と開発事業にも女性の寄与がいちじるしい。

隣接の2集落160戸から成るウドゥフピティヤ・カンダクンブラ農村開発団体(UKRDS)は、1977年から3年間に政府の財政・技術援助を得て、全住民参加の開発事業を進め、井戸、流水路、橋と道路、集会所ほか社会生活基盤(インフラストラクチャー)を整備した。なおカースト制度が残り、貧富の差も目立つが、障壁を越えた連帯と協調が実現された。その基底には、村の寺院を中軸にする信仰、行事、僧侶と檀家の交流があった。満月の祝祭(ポーヤ)の参籠、輪番の食事奉獻(プジャ)、檀家訪問がカーストと貧富の隔壁を崩して、地域住民の一致協力を導いた。

村びとの自主奉仕には、シャラマダーナの精神が底流を成す。仏陀の無

辺の慈悲に応え、無私の奉仕を願う心である。ポーヤには世俗の一切を断ち、寺院で説教と読経に専念して、ひたすら来世の功德を願う。出費をいとわず献立を調べ、仏陀と僧侶に食事を奉げる。私欲を抑え、ともに利他に尽くすシャラマダーナの精神こそが、全村挙げての事業推進に役立つ。

満月の夜ごとに清水と灯明を携え、白衣で参籠するのは主に女性である。奉献の食事調製も女性に負う。女性だけの農村開発団体の活動も、他集落ながら、活発であった。UKRDSの集会和事業は男性、女性の別なく参加できた。ベララバナータラ村住民の協調と開発促進への女性の寄与は大きい。