

BUDDHISM AND HINDUISM IN SRI LANKA :
SOME POINTS OF CONTACT BETWEEN
TWO RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

(Circa A.D. 1300—1600)

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Hinduism and Buddhism which had their origins in India and had spread widely in the countries of South and South East Asia, have interacted closely in many countries of the two regions since pre-Christian times. The pattern of their interaction and the developments resulting from it assumed different forms in different societies and were reflected in architectural forms, iconographic tradition, literary themes and social institutions. There has been no uniform and consistent trend in their interaction even within each country.

The two religious traditions could co-exist and interact closely as they were not mutually exclusive and in certain respects they were even complementary. The belief in the theory of *karma* and rebirth are common to both and intrinsic to their respective ideologies. The veneration and worship of gods or *devas* which was an essential feature of Indian religion in its pre-Buddhistic phase of development was not entirely discarded by Buddhism and was in fact adopted by it, in course of time, though in a modified form. The theory of incarnation as found in Vaishnavism owed its development to Buddhist inspiration and was largely influenced by the concepts of *pacceka* Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*. In the medieval period Hinduism also adopted from Buddhism the concept and form of monastic institutions based on the order of celibate monks. The philosophy of the Mahayāna was profoundly influenced by Hindu metaphysical thought and the worship of images was common to the two religious systems. The two religious traditions underwent a course of development which ultimately resulted in their convergence and the evolution of a national synthetic tradition in medieval India.

The forms of ritual and worship introduced into Buddhism and conducted with intense devotion and piety as in the case of theistic religions like Saivism and Vaishnavism, the incorporation of the ethical ideas of Buddhism into the