

# **A Study of the Spatial form of River Base Settlements at “Gurugoda Oya” valley**

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## **Abstract**

*The study attempted to investigate the spatial configuration of river based village settlements in ‘Gurugoda Oya’ valley at Kegalle District, Sri Lanka. It has conceptualized the distinguished patterns in the distribution of human settlements referring to colonial and pre-colonial eras. Diagrammatized layouts of two selected indigenous villages illustrate that the space has been arranged and rearranged by settlers in response to the community needs; in confined to prevailing natural and built elements of the physical setting as well as the culture, norms, values, beliefs, attitudes, and technical knowhow they behold.*

## **Introduction**

The spatial form of human settlements is configured into unique structures. Despite this uniqueness, some similar characteristics are apparent in the form of socio-cultural elements and in specific geographical locations. The studies on spatial form of indigenous settlements were developed on two approaches of physical planners and urban designers on one hand and archeologists on the other hand. In case of Sri Lanka the tank based settlements have been studied to a certain extent within the perspective of Hydraulic civilization (Roland De Silva, 1984; Senka Bandanayake, 1986) with reference to the first urbanization era of the country. These settlements have been located with a barricade across a tributary that was leading into the main water way in order to build tank that collect water in rainy seasons and could be used to paddy fields in dry season. Hence, Tank has been identified as the prime feature of spatial layout of the early village settlements belongs to hydraulic civilization. Nevertheless there was a set of villages in Sri Lanka at the contemporary era to hydraulic civilization which developed in the river valleys of the wet zone of the country. These also were agro-based settlements but rarely associated



with tanks. The few tanks available also very small in scale. They practiced rain fed agriculture and therefore used surface water which flows through rivers and streams. Since the tank may not be the key feature of these villages the way in which the spatial form configured in these settlements could be differ from the settlement of the dry zone. The spatial configuration of these settlements has not adequately examined from previous studies. In this context, the study has examined the spatial form of river based village settlements referring to the 'Gurugoda Oya' Valley, Kegalle district.

This study has focused on the spatial form which can be defined and explained by range theoretical and conceptual approaches. Yet the study has limited its scope to physical arrangement of spatial layouts in selected settlements though the typology, morphology, functions, values and number of other attributes are very important to discuss.

The data used in the study have obtained from secondary sources of information as well as the primary collections of field investigations. In addition to what we directly observed at reconnaissance survey, some other information was collected through focal group discussions with the senior citizens of the village as well as the random interviews with community presently settled at the vicinity of historically important sites. That was a collection of written published and unpublished documents as well as unwritten stories inherited by generations. Accordingly, the study attempted to investigate the spatial configuration of river based village settlements and the way in which they have been practiced within the socio-cultural and geographic context referring to 'Gurugoda Oya' valley at Kegalle District.

### **A Brief History on Human Settlements in Gurugoda Oya Valley**

Gurugoda Oya is one of the two main tributaries of Kelani river which starts from Ahupini-Ella and flow via *Aranayake*, *Alapalawela*, *Moronthota*, *Arandara* at Kegalle district. The area could be recognized as a human settlement even before the hydrolic civilization. Nevertheless the upstream had occupied by pre-historic man since a long time far beyond the hydraulic civilization. Geometrically shaped stoned micro instruments found from *Asmandala* caves evident on pre-historic settlements at the vicinity. Further as stated in '*Kohomba Kankariya*' Falk play, there had been few more settlements occupied by indigenous (*vedda*) community who were belonged to the era of hunting and gathering. Gurugoda Oya valley had consisted of several small agro-based village settlements during the period of hydraulic civilization. *Deewela* inscriptions



provide details on the history of the villages during Anuradhapura period. *Deewela* and *Kavudullagama* are two settlements which were ruled by King Pandukabhaya (432-367 B.C.). King Dewanampiyathissa has established Buddhist villages throughout the country at 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. As stated in Bodhi Wamsaya, *Wathura* is a village which comprises with a temple established “*Dethis Pala ruha Bodhi*” (one of the thirty two Sacred Bo trees). The Ancient route which had been used by the pilgrims who travelled from Anuradhapura to *Sri Pada* has found their way along this valley.

At the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, human settlements development of the area subjected to a significant change. This was mainly influenced by the shifting of kingdoms towards South-West part of the island. This caused to establish few more villages in and around the valley. Further, Gurugoda Oya valley functions as the gateway to the upcountry at that time which connects *Seethawaka* and *Gampola* kingdoms to *Kandy*. The road continued from *Seethawaka* divides into two to *Kandy* and *Gampola* at *Iddamalpana* intersection which is located at the middle of the valley. ‘*Mayura Sandeshaya*’ (1373 A.C. -1379) and *Davy’s* travel records at British Period provide brief descriptions about the villages at Gurugoda Oya valley.

This area was captured by Portuguese in 1615. There were several civil attacks among Sinhalese Kings with Portuguese and Dutch invaders at ferries as *Arandara*, *Iddamalpana* and *Attapitiya*. Portuguese general *Don Jeranimo Asewedu*, who had a great loss at “*Balana satana*” built *Arandara* fort at 1580 and *Deewela* and *Attapitiya* forts at 1601. There was a guard room of Portuguese at *Moronthota* (*Mura* + *Uon* + *Thota*) and their ferry at *Hungampola*.

There were drastic changes occurred at the distribution of human settlements with the introduction of commercial crop plantations by British ruling. Establishment of the rail transportation system in early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the construction of *Kandy* road at 1822 from *Colombo* via *Mahara*, *Kadawata*, *Yakkala*, *Nittambuwa*, *Warakapola*, *Kegalle*, *Mawanella* to *Kandy* attracted population to hilly areas. As a consequence, the staple food production based paddy cultivation which was confined to valleys in the lower terrain and its associated human settlement developed at lower rate compare to hilly terrain. The significance of the valley has gradually undergone after the rapid urbanization took place along the road and railway networks where as the lower terrain by and large confined to a less urbanized or village settlements and still remain with low density compare to higher terrain.

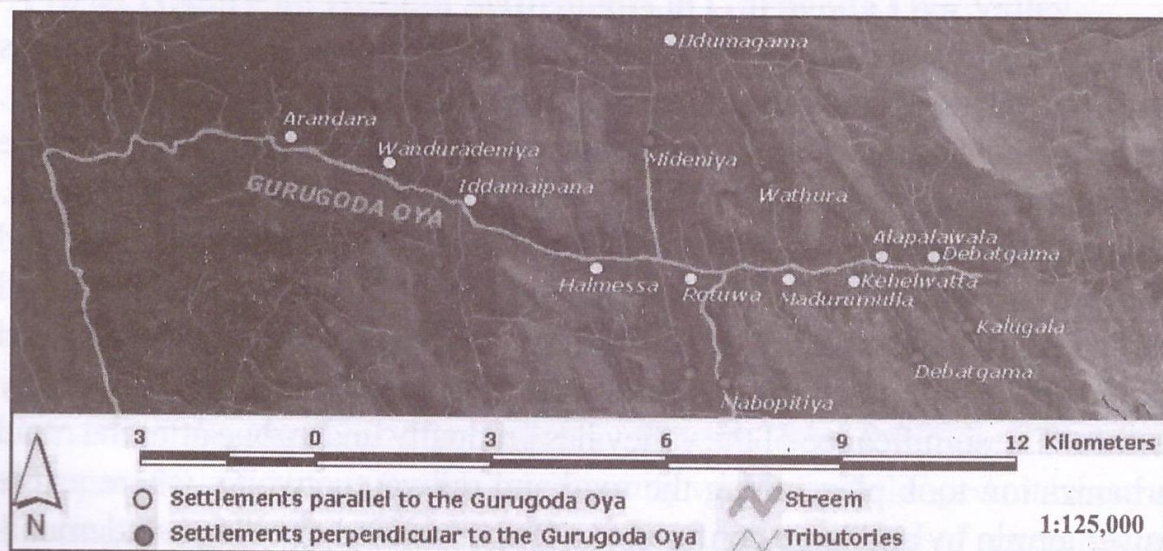


## Distribution of Ancient Human Settlements at Gurugoda Oya Valley

This study has focused on the historical settlements in Gurugoda Oya valley which were established at the period of hydraulic civilization. Though there were settlements at the vicinity in pre historic era, as illustrated in the diagram below (figure: 1), none of those recorded settlements were located at valley. All were located at high elevations varying from 500 m to 2000 m above msl in altitude. Mountain range is in a way which recognized into semi-circular pattern and the correspondent pattern of settlements was dispersed on isolated hilltops. Surface water bodies are distributed all through the area at different scale from narrow streams, tributaries to the river. Each of the recorded settlement associated with small water course at upper stream.

A new phase of Sri Lanka history was established after the arrivals of Aryans which here refers as '*hydraulic civilization*' that economically based on agriculture. The staple diet became rice and therefore paddy became the dominant agriculture practice above many crop plants. This generally accepts as the transitional point of hunting to farming in social evolution of mankind in Sri Lankan written history. The fundamental arguments those (i) whether the same hunter-gathering communities were transferred from hills to valleys or the foreign immigrants were newly settled in these valleys and (ii) Whether Sri Lankans had any pre-historic civilization prior to Aryans are not address in this paper. Whether they were immigrants or not, the study noticed that they were the first settlers of the valley according to the remaining evidence.

Figure 1 : Pre-Historic & Ancient Human Settlements Distribution along Gurugoda Oya Valley



Source: Author constructed, based on Yatawara, 1997; Sri Lanka Thilake, 1994; Diwakara, 2005



There is a series of settlements established at Gurugoda Oya Valley at this period. Flood plains of the tributary were gradually transferred into paddy fields. Accordingly, the settlement pattern which had been located at hilltops was reshaped in the valley.

### **Pattern of the Human Settlement Distribution at Gurugoda Oya Valley**

Human settlements in Gurugoda Oya valley were located on lower elevations usually less than 500m above msl in altitude. They were usually boarded by mountains in two or three directions where there is sufficient space to grow. All of the settlements were merged with a surface water body is either Gurugoda Oya or its tributary.

Distribution of the settlements could be recognized into two types according to the orientation to Gurugoda Oya valley. First, the settlements were parallel to the Gurugoda Oya valley and second, the settlements were perpendicular to the Gurugoda Oya valley.

The settlements which were parallel to the Gurugoda Oya, were directly connected to that and associated with the main access way. *Arandara, Wanduradeniya, Iddamalpana, Halmessa, Rotuwa, Madurumulla, Kehelwaththa, Alalpalawela* and *Debatgama* are arranged into a line which distinguished as a pattern.

The settlements which were perpendicular to the Gurugoda Oya were not directly connected to that. They were associated with the tributaries of Gurugoda Oya. Further, those settlements were connected to main access way through perpendicular pathways. *Mideniya, Wathura, Mabopitiya, Debatgama* and *Kalugala* are examples for this sort of settlements in Gurugoda Oya Valley.

The distance between two settlements was different each other by the two distinguished patterns. Accordingly the settlements parallel to Gurugoda Oya valley were located about 1.5km to 2km distance to each other. The settlements perpendicular to Gurugoda Oya locate about 1.5km to 2km distance away from the Gurugoda Oya. In some cases, there was more than one settlement arranged into a line along the perpendicular tributary. This sort of incidents occurs on where the tributaries are lengthy enough (more than 3km) to double the distance. Nevertheless in some cases though the settlements were lengthy enough if the flood plain is too narrow the number of settlements has limited to one.



Figure 2 : Pattern of the Human Settlements Distribution along Gurugoda Oya Valley in Ancient Period



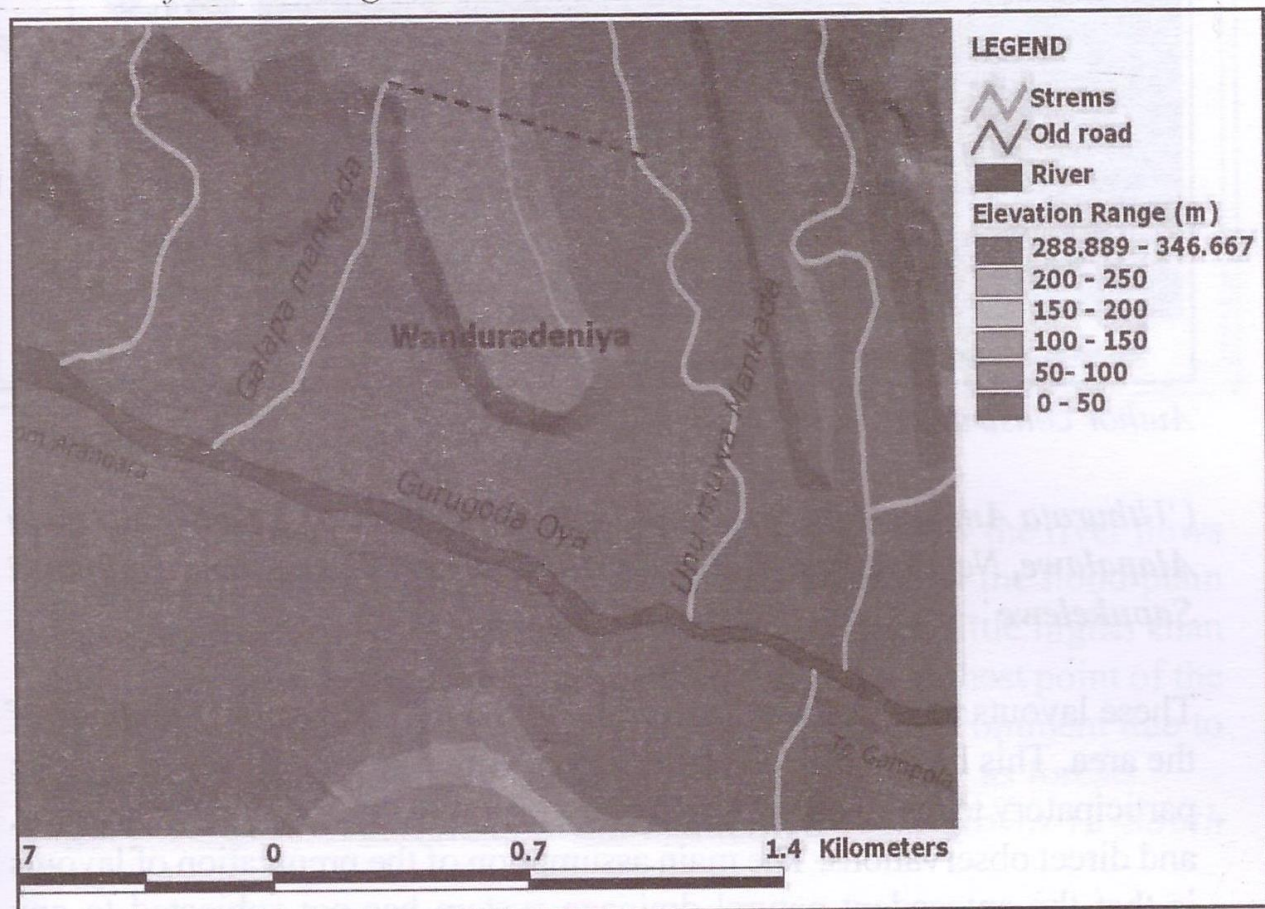
Source: Author constructed, based on Yatawara, 1997; Divulapitiya, 1997; Rathnapala 2003; Suddhami, 2005



Despite the fact that there are similarities in arrangement, the study noticed the distinguishable difference among them at the selection of case studies. Accordingly, two settlements have been selected for the detailed casestudies from two distinguished types respectively are *Wanduradeniya* and *Wathura*. *Wanduradeniya* located at parallel to the *Gurugoda Oya* while *Watura* is perpendicular to *Gurugoda Oya*.

#### *Boundaries of the Selected Settlements*

*Figure 3: Boundaries of Wanduradeniya Source: Author constructed, based on field investigations*

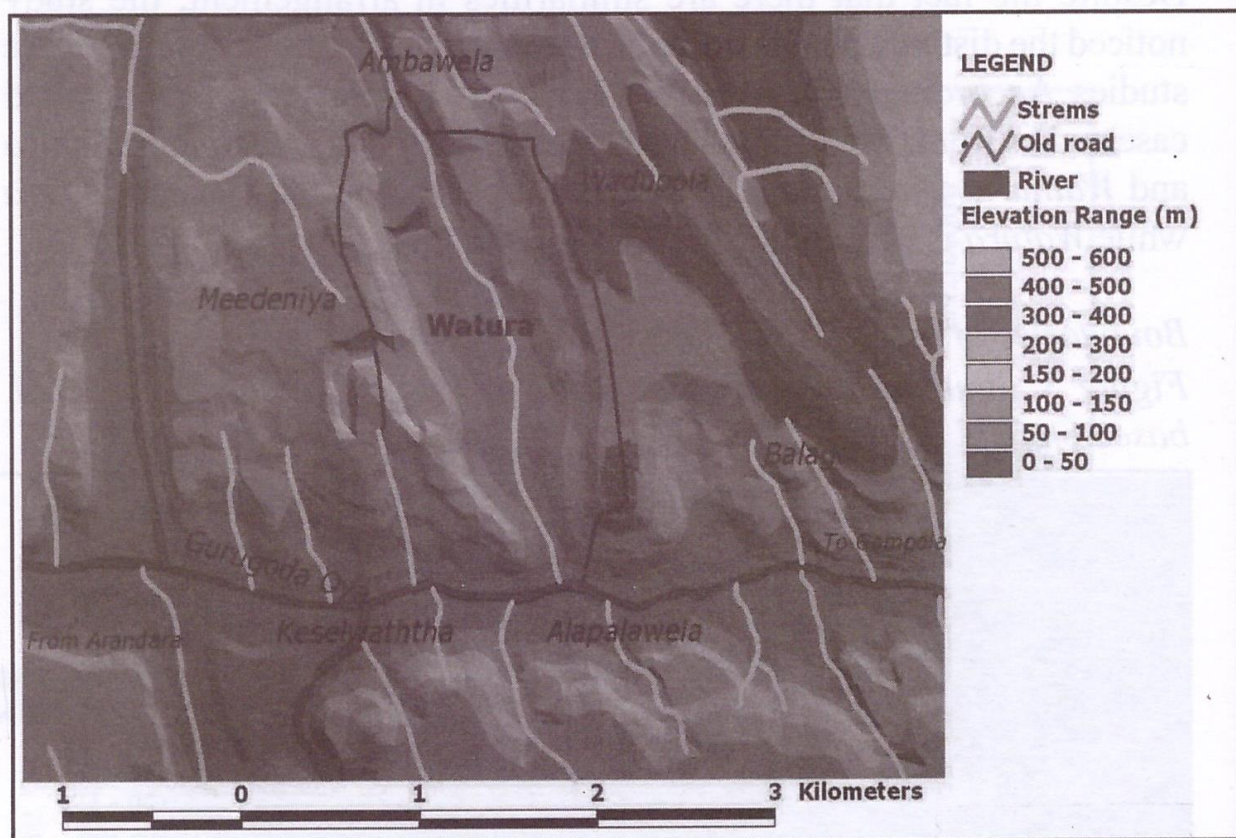


*Wanduradeniya* has bordered by two streams in west and east. Western boundary; '*Galapa mankada*' is a small perennial stream. Eastern boundary; '*Unu muwa Mankada*' is a seasonal stream and the Southern boundary is '*Gurugoda Oya*'. These are the natural boundaries which used to demarcate administrative boundaries during the period of king *Pandukabhaya*. Northern boundary is not physically apparent at present. Hence, it has demarcated on certain assumptions (marked in dotted line; figure 3).

The existing boundary of *Wathura* village (figure 4) overlapped with historical boundary except from western and North West. Two boundaries have adjusted according to the literature available.



Figure 4: Boundaries of Watura



Author constructed, based on field investigations

(*'Uthurata Ambawelai Oya Gal thalawe, Dakunata Keselwathu kona Alapalawe, Neganahirata Balagala Wadupolewe, Wature awara mihideni Sapukelewe'* - Yatawara (2003))

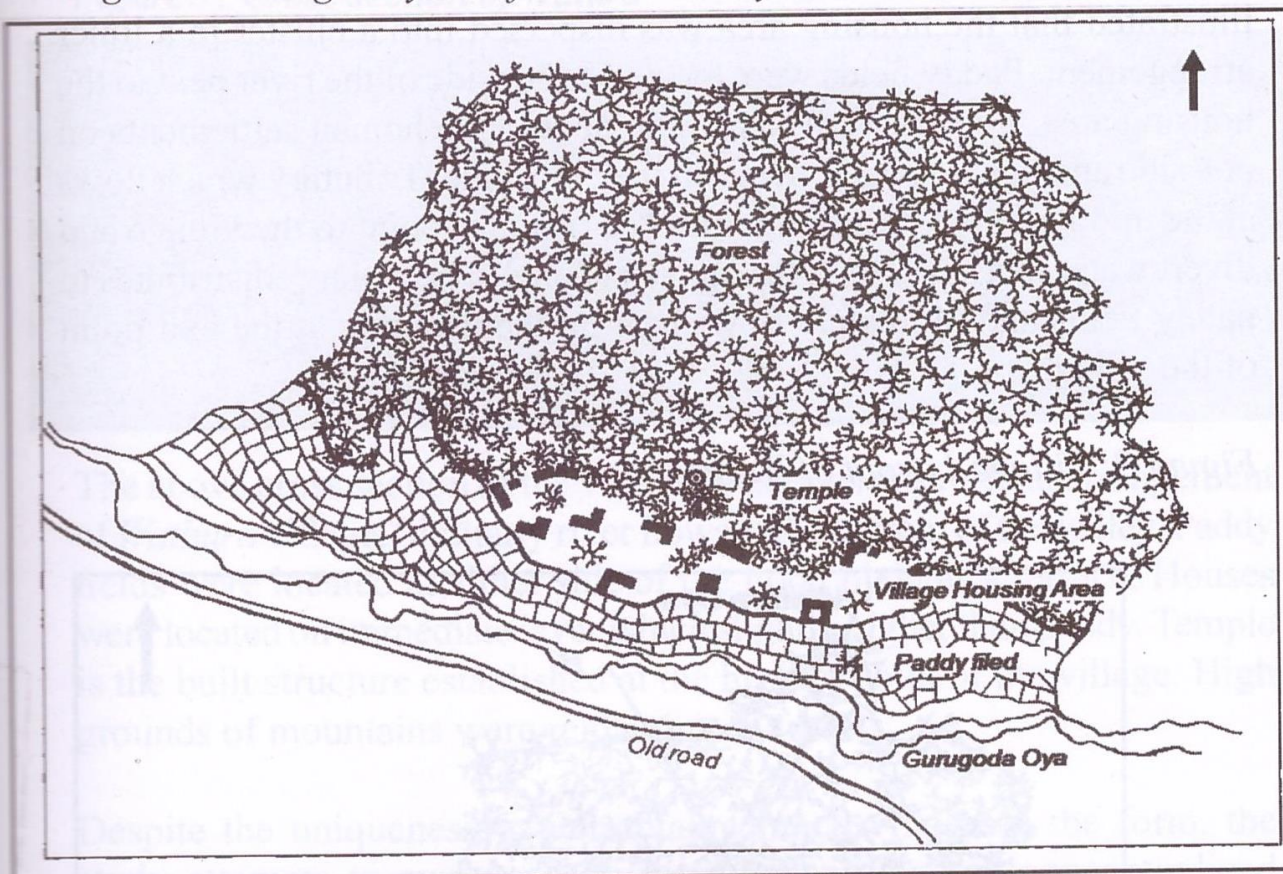
These layouts have prepared according to the literature survey findings of the area. This has modified at field survey with a support of several public participatory techniques as Participatory mapping, focal group discussions, and direct observations. The main assumption of the preparation of layouts is that the antecedent natural drainage system has not subjected to any considerable tectonic change over last fifteen centuries.

### Layout of the Human Settlement Distribution at Gurugoda Oya Valley

The conceptual diagrams (figure: 5) which represent the layout of *Wanduradeniya* village illustrated that the human settlements were dispersed into a cluster in a linier arrangement. Paddy fields were merges with the river and located next to the housing area. Forests were remaining on the other side of the housing area. Road lay parallel to the Gurugoda Oya but apparent to be deviate from the village due to the barricade across the river.



Figure 5: Village Layout of Wanduradeniya

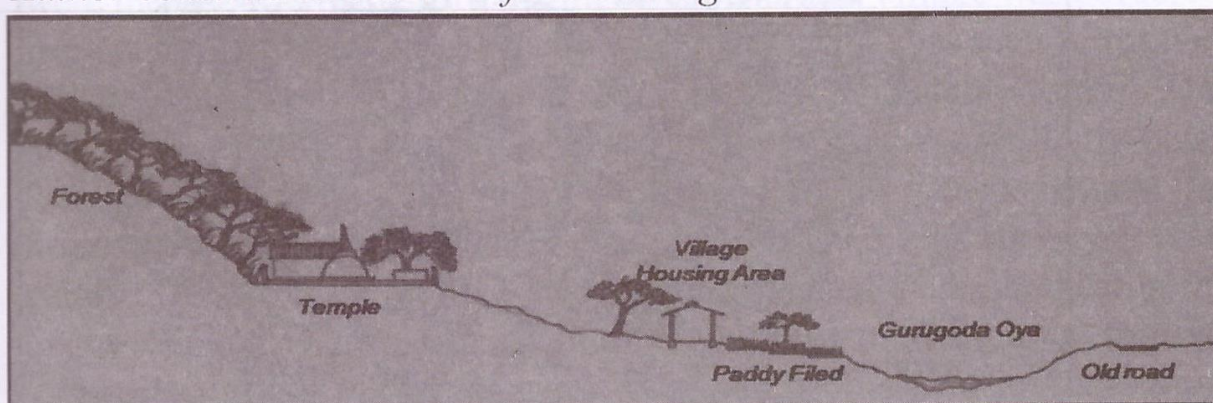


Author constructed, based on field investigations

The vertical order of the village arrangement depicts how the river flows at the bottom of the valley; Paddy fields were located at the flood plain associated. Houses were located on upper layer which little higher than paddy. Temple is the built structure established at the highest point of the village. *Stupa* which was grand in scale became more prominent due to the location. High grounds of mountains were remaining as forests.

Figure 6: Cross section of Wanduradeniya from North to South direction

Author constructed based on field investigations



Author constructed, based on field investigations



The conceptual diagram (figure: 6) which represents the layout of *Wathura* illustrated that the housing area was dispersed into a cluster in a linier arrangement. Paddy fields were located either side of the river next to the housing area. Forests were remaining next to the human settlements on one side and next to paddy fields on the other side. Tributary which flows at the middle of the village has blocked on entry point to the village and divert water to a small tank through a channel. The water redistributes to paddy fields and ultimately flows back to the tributary at the exit point of the village.

Figure 8: Village Layout of Watura

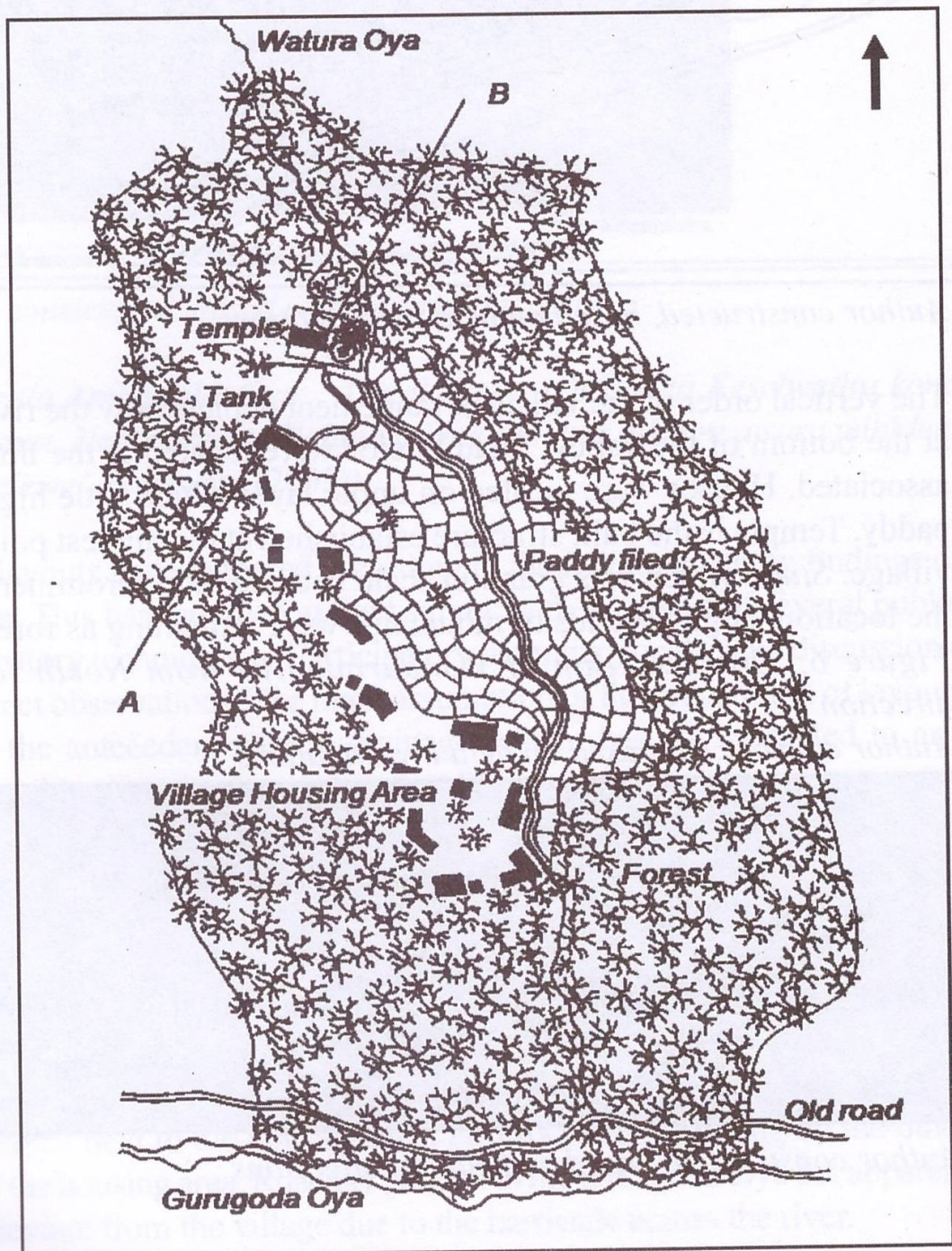
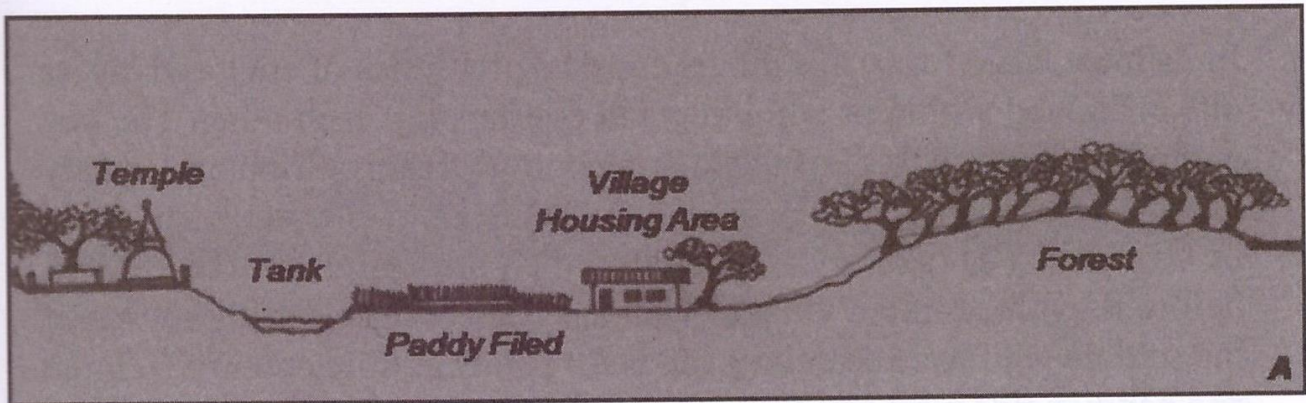




Figure 7: Cross section of Watura



The above cross section of the village illustrates the vertical arrangement of *Wathura* village. Similarly river flows at the bottom of the valley. Paddy fields were located at either side of the flood plain as a terrace. Houses were located on immediate layer which slightly higher than paddy. Temple is the built structure established at the highest point of the village. High grounds of mountains were remaining as forests.

Despite the uniqueness which obtained each village in the form, the study attempts to explore certain commonalities and conceptualized them into a distinguishable pattern. As reveals in the comparison, few differences were apparent between two layouts. The paddy fields were locating either side of the water body at *Watura* while they formed to be one side at *Wanduradeniya*. Further the *Watura* temple located at the middle of paddy fields and settlements while *Wanduradeniya* were at the edge of settlements. Nevertheless both were merge with forest on one side. Accordingly, In spite of the minor differences, the two layouts were generally similar to each other. Built form of the village were stretched along the water body and the shape of layers were confined to the shape of water way. Three layers of paddy, houses, and forests were merged each other in a distinguishable order. Village was bordered from natural boundaries as forest and water ways. Cross sections of two villages could be well conceptualized into a distinguishable pattern. The different layers were in an order in terms of elevation. Accordingly, river flows at the bottom of the valley while paddy fields were located at the flood plain. Houses were located on next layer which slightly higher than paddy. Temple was the built structure established at the highest point of the village. High grounds of mountains were remaining as forests. Accordingly two settlements could be conceptualized as they were configured into a distinguishable pattern.



## Organization of Village Layout

In its most basic form, this model consists of a series of enclosed layers one contained within or adjoining and overlapping each other. The key component units of this layout are water body (Stream or tributary), paddy field, village housing, forest, and temples. Forest and water body could be considered as natural components which originally were there even before it evolved into a village. That has been reshaped with houses of the settlers who were searching lands for paddy at hilly country. Temple and paddy fields were two types of physical elements associated with the housing represent spiritual and economic needs of people respectively. The way in which these two elements configured into the natural and built setting of the area is briefly explained below.

### *Paddy Fields*

All paddy fields in the village were attached to each other which form continues surface. Paddy fields were created removing reverine vegetation in valley usually at the flood plain of river or tributary. Annual floods increase the ground water level, soil moisture, and bring more nutrients to paddy fields. Knowledge on management of water resources as well as technical knowhow on agriculture practices leads to continue the status of self sustaining village.

### *Temple*

With the introduction of Buddhism in 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, Buddhist temple became a major element in villages. The temple has a scenic value and it set up with a serene view. The site selection to establish a Buddhist temple at ancient Sri Lanka were based on certain norms as concept practiced in India called as '*Pabbatha Vihara*'. Accordingly the temple practiced to be located on a land which cannot be use for any productive purpose as agriculture, residential...etc. this land management concept has adapted because the temple do not provide any economic return to the settlement.

Further the temple usually locates on South or North to the settlement in direction because, the monk made daily trips to the village for foods. Hence, if the monk happened to walk facing East or West, he may exposure to direct solar radiations which his journey may disturb. Orientation of the temple called as "*Disamukaya*" means "direction to be faced".



Figure 9: Physical setting of Watura Temple



*Author constructed, based on field investigations*

Accordingly *Wathura* temple locate on a top of a rock at South of the village. Since the *Wanduradeniya* temple has not physically apparent at present on its original location, the available evidences prove that the temple were adapted into the same. The village based temples has located in proximity to the settlements and the maximum distance as accepted by the religion is about four miles. But when the population increases the housing area had been congested. When people demand further more lands for housing then settlements expands becoming closer to the temple. Spiritual life of the priest in the temple who demand the tranquility and fewer disturbances were please to shift the temple shifted on the opposite side of the settlement across the river at a higher elevation than the settlement. Intra shifting pattern and re-arrangement of the layout has been take place valuing the norms of the Buddhist temple locations. This development pattern has taken place according to the natural setting of the mountain range of the area. This feature can be seen all the settlements originated parallel to *Gurugoda Oya* at ancient period and even after that. The same phenomena do not happen at the settlements which were parallel to the tributaries of *Gurugoda Oya*. They were able to expand the boundaries in a linier pattern along the paddy fields and water way. Therefore the temple remain in the original location inter mingling with the settlement.

Accordingly, people have arranged the space to form their settlement while fulfilling economic and spiritual needs. While, they were confined to prevailing natural and built elements of the physical setting as well as the culture, norms, values, believes, attitudes, legacy, and technical knowhow the community behold.

Locational norms of the temple indicate that how they were arranging their space according to the socio-cultural norms and values they behold. The way in which they were arranged their houses into a cluster indicate the life styles and attitude they followed.



Nutrients enrich flood plains which consist of appropriate terrain and soil were selected by them to plant crops, usually paddy. There should be a preferable environment to cultivate plants in accordance to its bio-chemical requirements. Hence the technical-knowhow they had were applied is visible on space through their agricultural practices.

Location of *Wathuta* weir ('Amuna') is a classic example. The weir constructed at higher elevation of the valley to support water distribution to paddy fields by gravity flow. Further, the weir construct using two natural hills at the valley to reduce the length of weir. It has constructed on hard geological material (Granite) to strengthen the foundation. Furthermore Location has selected where there is a meander of the tributary to reduce the velocity of water. High velocity causes to create higher pressure on weir. Accordingly, the conceptual layout of settlements at Gurugoda oya valley explores the ancient practice of village settlements.

Although the community was compelled to make certain alterations to the natural physical setting, most of the practices were effort to continue the natural flow. In spite of replacing reverine vegetation to paddy fields, forest cover in high elevation was preserved to ensure the retention of ground water in the upper catchments ensuring water for paddy fields through perennial tributaries. Water management system of *Watura* village were arranged in such a manner which water out flow to paddy at the beginning of the village and inflow back to the same tributary at the end of the village.

Accordingly that could be conceptualized the way in which the historic villages have configured into the prevailing system at reshaping their settlement.

## Conclusion

As stated at the beginning, many countries in the world have studied the spatial form of their indigenous human settlements. Nevertheless as common to many Asian countries, similar kind of studies are very limited in Sri Lanka. In this context, the study attempted to contribute on indigenous human settlement studies on Sri Lanka with reference to spatial configuration of river based village settlements at 'Gurugoda Oya' valley at Kegalle district. Since the spatial form is a vast subject area, this study limited its scope on physical arrangement of spatial layouts in the selected settlements.

Gurugoda Oya valley could be recognized as a human habitat over twenty five centuries from the hydraolic civilization upto present. To a large extent they



were self sustained, agro-based settlements. The distribution of settlements in Gurugoda Oya valley were recognized as organized into a distinguishable pattern. The settlements were located on lower elevations where there is sufficient space to grow and usually boarded by mountains in two or three directions. All of the settlements were merged into a surface water body either Gurugoda Oya or its tributary. The distance between two settlements varies from 1.5-2km each other. Further the vertical order of the settlements was arranged into different layers in terms of elevation. Accordingly, river flows at the bottom of the valley. Paddy fields were located at the flood plain of the river. Houses were located on next layer upper to paddy fields. Temple is the built element established at the highest point of the village. Grounds above the temple were remained as forests. Despite the minor difference, the spatial form of them could be conceptualized into a common configuration. In its most basic form, this model consists of a series of enclosed layers one contained within or adjoining and overlapping each other. The key component units of this layout are water body (Stream or tributary), paddy field, village housing, forest, and temples. That could be demonstrating by the layout, the way in which people have arranged the space to form their settlement while fulfilling purposive needs. While, they were confined to natural and built elements of prevailing physical setting as well as the culture, norms, values, believes, attitudes, legacy, and technical knowhow the community behold.

The study is a preliminary attempt which explores a brief from the indigenous human settlements in Sri Lanka. This has conceptualized the way in which the indigenous settlements have adapted to prevailing system while fulfilling their socio-economic and cultural needs. The knowledge developed through this study strengthens the understanding on Sri Lankan historic settlements while catering the needs of present human settlement planning of the country.

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## **Rabindranath Tagore and Buddhism : an analysis**

**K.Mitra**

### **Abstract**

*The world is faced with an array of problems and so is South Asia. The countries of South Asia are confronted with several problems such as terrorism, ethnic crisis, gender questions, caste and communal problems, cultural degradation and environmental problems. These countries are constantly trying to find out solutions for their problems at their level best. Rabindranath Tagore, the great Indian poet and the Asian Noble Laureate has expressed his opinions on the present day challenges to mankind in his thought provoking essay. The paper examines how Tagore's writings discuss the ways by which Buddhism could minimize those challenges on mental tranquility. Serious discussions on the philosophy of Buddhism, research on traditional India and the Buddhistic attitude towards all inequality were contained in those essays. The essays stand as pillars in the edifice of Indian Literature. The poet's intense love for peace and non violence led him to compose dramas on his desires and Tagore's interpretation may differ from traditional explanation of Buddhism. Tagore experienced most of these challenges against humanity in their embryonic form and discussed about future consequences. Tagore contributed at least eleven writings of different shades on the life and time of the Buddha.*

### **Introduction**

We live in a post-colonial world, endangered with terrorism, ethnic crisis, gender question, caste and communal problems, cultural degradation and environmental pollution. These problems are faced by most of the countries of South Asia and they are constantly trying to find out solutions at their level best. In this context I would argue that reinterpretation of the basic spiritual



and moral texts belonging to each nation may throw a ray of hope and show the way of better living.

Rabindranath Tagore, the great Indian poet as well as the first Asian Nobel Laureate, was a great thinker also. He experienced most of these challenges against humanity in their embryonic form and discussed about the future consequences in a number of thought provoking essays. In a nutshell it may be said that he made strong criticism against violence and all sorts of discriminations and had a firm faith on the victory of humanity.

Lord Buddha's messages of love and non-violence had a great influence on Tagore and he translated the philosophy into the language of culture so that it may touch the heart of the common people.

The objective of the paper is to examine how we, the people of South Asia can cope with the rising tide of various challenges that jeopardize our mental tranquility with the aid of the writings of Tagore especially centering on Buddhism. In another way it is an effort to highlight the role of a specific type of literature vis-à-vis major challenges confronting us.

The discussion may be divided into several sections

### **Revival of Buddhist Studies**

Rabindranath Tagore contributed at least eleven writings of different shades on the life and time of the Buddha. Serious discussions on the philosophy were made in several essays. The background of his writings was the revival of the studies on Buddhism during the latter end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Anagarika Dharmapala founded the Mahabodhi Society in 1891. With this episode a new chapter was added to the history of Buddhism in India. Ven. Dharmapala dedicated himself to the propagation of the Dharma within India and abroad. The intellectuals of Kolkata were thrilled with the establishment of the Buddhist Text Society (1892). Sarat Kumar Roy, Mahamahopadhyay Haraprasad Sastri, Rajendralal Mitra, Satish Chandra Vidyabhusan were some who made serious researches on Buddhism. Apart from religious impulses the spirit of the reconstruction of the national culture encouraged them to publish *Sanskrit-Buddhist Literature of Nepal Avadana Kalpalata* of Ksemendra, *Suvannapravasa*, Kaccayan's Pali grammar, *Buddhastotra sangraha*, *Nyayabindu* etc. The President of the Society commented "It certainly does not redound much to our honour that Buddhist literature should be more explored in the West than in the East, but I trust that this Society will be the means of wiping off this standing reproach to us." The intensive researches



brought out valuable works like the translation of *Astasahasrika Prajnaparamita* by Haraprasad Sastri, Tibeto-English Dictionary. The Journal of the Society contained writings of Legendary Buddhist scholars like Santarakshita, Kamalasila, Dipankara Srijana Atisa and others. Besides the society organized the teaching of Buddhism, invited scholars from abroad and opened a new department of Buddhist Studies in India. Satish Chandra Vidyabhushan was the first to be awarded in the M.A. in Pali in India (1901). Later on he went to Sri Lanka and studied in the Vidyodaya College under Ven. High Priest Sumangala.

Tagore made arrangements for Buddhist studies in Visvabharati University. Pundit Bidhubhushan Sastri was entrusted with the charge of the department. Other experts were Dr. P.C. Bagchi. Research in Sanskrit and Chinese Studies were conducted at Cheenabhavan and Vidyabhavan. Valuable articles were published in Visvabharati Annals and Sino-Indian Studies. Later on the tradition was continued by B.C. Law, D.D. Kosambi, B.M. Barua, C.V. Rajwade, Rahul Sankrityayan and others.

Some editions of the *Dhammapada* were published at this juncture. The translations made by Charuchandra Basu, Srimat Hariharananda Swami, Brajagopal Niyogi earned great popularity. The Pitakas were translated into Bengali. The translations were made for the Buddhist milieu. Besides a nationalist instinct to restore the vast historical source-materials lying in the Buddhist literature also led them to venture in this ground.

### **Indian Nationhood**

Studies of ancient Indian history acquired a great significance in the colonial period. With the establishment of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (1784) studies in Indology was initiated. An Intense urge to build up an *Indian Nationhood* led the scholars to undertake research projects and this revealed the forgotten past. In the sphere of ideas cultural confrontation with the west led them to look back to the indigenous tradition. An idea of "traditional India" haunted them. They learnt Sanskrit and Pali and with the help of the original source-materials, they reconstructed a picture of ancient India unpolluted by foreign touch.

In order to coup with the 'oppressive present' and energize the disheartened people of India, the ancient heritage was to be revived through serious academic studies, literary creations and cultural performances. We note a flood of historical literature depicting the picture of the good old days which became



very popular. Therefore, revival of the Buddhist studies was a part of the growing trend of researches in history. Tagore was deeply influenced with these studies and tried to popularize the new theme by means of Literary creations.

### **Buddhism's appeal to the Masses**

The poet was living in a period when the society was torn by the rigid caste system, superstitious practices and communal problems. Despite reforms, legislations on social discriminations loomed large. Tagore observed the situation and tried to find the way out in the principles of the Buddha. In fact if we look back at the historical background of the rise of the Buddhism in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. we notice the same torn society infested with Brahmanical supremacy, priest craft, superstitious practices, animal sacrifices, caste system, seclusion of women etc. Mantram and black magic were popular practices. Due to the rigid caste system, the Sudras were condemned to live a "life of degradation and humiliation".

The Buddha protested against all of the social anomalies. It is well-known that he did not support the caste system. Everybody was welcome in his sangha. His famous instruction to his disciples was to preach the gospel to everybody. 'Tell them that the poor and the lowly, the rich and high are all one and that all castes unite in this religion as do the river to the sea.' He also repudiated animism and did not believe in heaven or hell. The simplicity of his teachings touched the heart of the people.' His philosophy of life was a simple code of conduct. Which did not require priest craft and extravaganza. In this way a popular religion emerged in India which cut across the limits of caste, creed and gender.

In an expert's view 'Buddhism tried to appeal to the masses and succeeded in doing so on account of its simplicity, emotional elements, easy ethical code, the use of vernacular; language in its scriptures, the method of teaching by means of parables and worship in congregation'. The motto of *Ahimsa paramo dharmo* appealed to the common people who were tired with indiscriminate animal sacrifices. Tagore realized the implications of the message of the Buddha. He considered him as the greatest human-being. His messages were applicable in colonial India also.

### **Tagore's poems on the Lord and his disciples**

Tagore discovered a Saint-social reformer within the Buddha. He discarded all sorts of discrimination among man. Tagore expressed this aspect of Buddhism



in a collection of poems entitled *Katha O Kahini* (1896-97). The poems revolved around some episodes in the Buddha's life. The poet acquired the source materials from *Abadaanshatak*. Each of the poems depicted a glorious image of the lord and his disciples. They were projected as epitomes of compassion, non-violence and humanity. Later on he composed a dance drama entitled *Chandalika* (1926) which centered on the question of social discrimination. The story line was woven around the life of *Prakriti* an untouchable girl and *Anando* the closest disciple of the Buddha. The girl was abhorred by her age mates. However once *Anando* wanted water from her. That incident had a magical influence on the girl. She felt that the *vikshu* honoured her as a human being. She wanted to get him back. It was not possible. Therefore her mother, an expert in black magic tried to bring him back by use of the *mantras*. At last the Buddha's blessings saved *Anando* and *Prakriti* embraced Buddhism.

Religious diversities, communalism and process of 'otherization' created a complex situation in colonial India. Tagore's perception of Dharma was repeatedly challenged by these elements. To him the implication of Dharma was the ultimate truth. In this context, one of his essays may be referred to. In *Dharmer Saral Adarsha* (1901) he criticized the complexities created by self-interested persons leading to the rise of microscopic religious divisions contending with each other for prominence. They make the religions complex by nature.

His queries on religion found expression in his drama *Malini* (1940). He selected Kashi, the abode of Brahmanic Hinduism as the venue of the episode. *Malini*, the princess discovered the true religion in the tenets of Buddhism. This created a commotion among the subjects who demanded her banishment. However, after some dramatic episodes *Malini* had to stand the test of her sincerity in her belief when she showed mercy towards the murderer of her beloved. The tragic end of the drama ultimately established the greatness of non-violence and compassion.

These basic principles were the theme of another creation of the poet. *Natir Puja* (1926) was an early composition. Bitter experience of Kolkata riots disillusioned which he poet who even preferred atheism than blind adherence towards one's own religion. In that drama he projected the sacrifice of a royal dancer *Sreemati* for the cause of non-violence and true religion.

The Buddha's famous message '*akodhen jinet kodhang*' had a special appeal to the poet, especially at a time when India as a colony was dragged into the



turmoil of the world wars. Tagore was perplexed. His reaction was expressed in a famous essay entitled *Sabhayatar Sankat*, the crisis of civilization (1941). He was deeply shocked at the imperialist practices of the Western powers. He felt the futility of the wars since one war prepared the ground for the other. He prayed for the emergence of a messiah who would save the world and usher to a new age.

The poet's intense love for peace and non-violence led him to compose *Rajarshii* (1940), another drama with a strong note of non-violence. The story depicted how a Hindu ruler stopped the inhuman practice of animal sacrifice in the name of religion.

Tagore's interpretations may differ from traditional explanations of Buddhism. In this context we may refer to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan's observations. He commented "in the life of the Buddha there are two sides, individual and social". While the former was absorbed in meditation the latter is "concerned with the sorrows of men, eager to enter their lives, heal their troubles and spread his message for the good of the many *Bahujano hitaya*. The poet was attracted towards this aspect of the Buddha.

His use of the language of culture to popularize the messages of the Buddha to the people is an accepted method. 'Culture comprises the act of cultivation' and art is a form of *Bhavana* or mental cultivation. It purifies the consciousness and it is intimately related to higher ideologies. It may be asserted that Tagore's literary creations discussed above have withstood test of time and still now win popular appreciation. His prayer *Karunaghano dharanitalo karo kalankosunyo* still has relevance in India.

In conclusion it may be said without any prejudice that "the whole spirit of the Buddha's teaching is one of pacification, patience, tolerance and in the calm and placid atmosphere.

Of this teaching there is every chance of reaching the destruction of violence within men. The great master exercised remarkable influence on Indian statesmen like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and others. Satyagraha, Ahimsa and Pancha-sila are the core-words of Indian politics which have placed India on an exclusive platform.



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