

**BRINGING THE BUDDHA CLOSER:
THE ROLE OF VENERATING THE BUDDHA IN THE MODERNIZATION OF
BUDDHISM IN SRI LANKA**

by

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The modernization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka since the late nineteenth century has been interpreted as imitating a Western model, particularly one similar to Protestant Christianity. This interpretation presents an incomplete narrative of Buddhist modernization because it ignores indigenous adaptive changes that served to modernize Buddhism. In particular, it marginalizes rituals and devotional practices as residuals of traditional Buddhism and fails to recognize the role of ritual practices in the modernization process.

This dissertation attempts to enrich our understanding of modern and contemporary Buddhism in Sri Lanka by showing how the indigenous devotional ritual of venerating the Buddha known as *Buddha-vandanā* has been utilized by Buddhist groups in innovative ways to modernize their religion. Based on archival research of printed materials of the British colonial era (1815–1948) and ethnographic research of *Buddha-vandanā* in various venues, the dissertation shows that this traditional ritual was simplified, formalized, and promoted among laypeople through printed liturgical booklets during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Then later it was promoted in homes, schools, workplaces, and public spaces moving it beyond its traditional context in temples. In these new contexts, the ritual was utilized to enhance lay religious engagement, to train children in Buddhist behavioral forms, to reassert Buddhist identity of local communities, and to deal with mental stress.

These novel utilizations of this ritual reveal that efforts of Sri Lankan Buddhists to modernize their religion were not limited to simply imitating or appropriating Western models. Moreover, these strategic uses of Buddha-vandanā show how rituals can be part of the process of modernization. By revealing unacknowledged methods for promoting Buddhism in modern times, this dissertation reveals that Sri Lankan Buddhists found their own distinctive ways of modernizing Buddhism that went beyond the Westernization paradigm.

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PREFACE

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Early one evening in November 2014, I was visiting a Sri Lankan family in their home in Yakvila village, Kurunegala district. While I was there the young daughter of the family went to pluck flowers from a small plot of land outside the house. She brought them in, and her younger brother sprinkled water on a plate to hold the flowers. Her grandmother reminded her to clean an altar that had a small white statue of the Buddha made from plaster of Paris. She took a piece of cloth and wiped the altar, then took a broom and swept in front of it. Her brother placed a mat over the floor she had just cleaned. The grandmother summoned the mother and older sister. They sat together on the mat that had been laid in front of the altar, placing their hands at their chests with fingertips and palms touching, and the grandmother began to chant. She chanted not in Sinhala, her native language, but in Pāli, the language of Theravāda Buddhism. The chanting included verses of commitment to five moral precepts,¹ verses of homage to the Buddha, the Dharma (the Buddha's teachings), and the Saṅgha (the community of monks and nuns), verses dedicating prepared items of offering to the Buddha, and other devotional recitations. In dedicating the oil lamp to the Buddha, they chanted in Pāli:

With lights brightly shining	<i>Ghanasārappadittena</i>
and dispelling the darkness,	<i>dīpena tamadaṃsinā</i>

¹ These five moral precepts are refraining from killing living beings, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and using intoxicants.

I revere the Buddha, *tilokadīpaṃ sambuddhaṃ*
the lamp that dispels the darkness of *pūjayāmi tamonudaṃ*
ignorance in the three worlds.

What I observed that evening was a domestic performance of the ritual, Buddha-vandanā, the indigenous devotional practice of venerating the Buddha. To the family, it seemed completely normal, a regular part of their daily routine. For many Sri Lankan Buddhists today, such a performance at home, the workplace or at a public shrine has become a routine religious practice. But what I observed was actually the end point of a purposeful strategy undertaken by Buddhist activists in the late colonial era as part of their efforts to modernize Buddhism in Sri Lanka during the period of the Buddhist revival, which occurred between the 1860s and 1970s.

This dissertation examines the use of this indigenous devotional ritual, Buddha-vandanā, as one of the significant adaptive changes made by Buddhist activists in Sri Lanka to revive Buddhism as a relevant and dynamic institution and, further, as a means to reassert Buddhist religious and cultural identity following a long period of colonial suppression. I argue that Buddha-vandanā has been developed in new, non-traditional ways as part of the modernization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. In doing so I challenge the prevailing scholarly characterization of the modernization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka by showing the limitation of the current dominant model of “Protestant Buddhism,” which has looked at modernization almost entirely through reforms that are characterized as imitative of Western and rationalist models and norms. Showing that Buddhist activists used indigenous rituals in non-traditional and strategic ways to modernize Buddhism in Sri Lanka enlarges the narrative of Buddhist modernization.

To a modern observer, the ritual I witnessed that evening would appear to be traditional. In its format, content, and language it followed traditional forms. What was not at all traditional,

however, was the context in which it was being performed, that is, by lay practitioners in a domestic setting. Before the Buddhist revival and efforts to modernize Buddhism, the traditional context for performance of this ritual was in temples and sacred spaces, where the ritual was most often led by Buddhist monks in front of consecrated statues made of costly and uncommon materials. In order to increase lay religious activism and engagement with Buddhism as part of activists' efforts to modernize Buddhism, Buddha-vandanā was simplified, formalized, and liturgical booklets were printed for distribution to lay practitioners, who were encouraged to begin the practice on their own at home. Unconsecrated statues made of inexpensive materials were produced to facilitate such practices. Domestic Buddha-vandanā was the first step in a strategy that saw the ritual being moved out of its traditional context in temples, and into homes, schools and workplaces, and finally into public spaces for, as one scholar put it, "the Buddha in the marketplace" (Obeyesekere 1972, 63). Through these strategic and non-traditional uses of the ritual, Buddha-vandanā became a primary marker of Buddhist religious and cultural identity and a significant part of activists' efforts to move Buddhism forward into the modern era.

The efforts of Sri Lankan Buddhists to restore and strengthen the vitality of their religious tradition, first under British colonial rule and subsequently in response to the forces of globalization and modernity, are commonly known as the Buddhist revival. Starting from the late nineteenth century, Buddhists in Sri Lanka have introduced reformations, new interpretations and new practices while also restoring some of Buddhism's traditional cultural forms and religious roles. However, it is the reformed or modernized aspects of this revival that have attracted the most scholarly attention. Current scholarship focuses largely, if not entirely, on efforts to reform Buddhism according to "rationalist" and Western norms, reforms that are interpreted as intended to neutralize colonial era criticisms of Buddhism as mere superstition and

idolatry. Included are doctrinal reforms that stripped away the ritual elements of Buddhism and reinterpreted Buddhism as an ethical and moral philosophy with practices that were frankly imitative of Christian norms, such as Sunday dharma school, Buddhist “carols” and an increased focus on social welfare activities. The phrase most commonly used by scholars as a referent for this dominant model of Buddhist modernization is “Protestant Buddhism,” reflecting the view of current scholarship that Buddhist modernization was imitative of Western and Christian norms (Obeyesekere 1972; Malalgoda 1976; Gombrich 2006 [1988]; Seneviratna 1999).

This dissertation challenges this characterization of modernized Buddhism by showing the incompleteness of the above scholarly narrative. The term, modernization, is treated in this dissertation to mean adaptive changes that a given society makes to its cultural system in response to changing economic, political and social conditions of the modern age. Though the term is usually associated with Westernization and secularization, following Samuel Huntington (1996), I use the term in this dissertation in the sense of a larger process by which people remold their cultural system into a new mode in the face of particular processes of modernity, mainly, industrialization, urbanization, increasing levels of literacy, wealth, and social mobilization. In the context of Sri Lanka, the term refers to the ways by which Sri Lankan Buddhists, under the influences of colonization, globalization, and other forces of modernity, have modified the practice of Buddhism in an effort to make their religion relevant and dynamic in the modern age. This broad sense of modernization enables us to capture the changes beyond following Western models.

While recognizing the significance of reforms included under the model of Protestant Buddhism, this dissertation contributes to existing scholarship by presenting a broader narrative of modernization efforts during and after the period of the Buddhist revival. By examining a

significant instrument of modernization that does not fit within the dominant model of Protestant Buddhism, that is, the use of an indigenous ritual in non-traditional ways to modernize Buddhism in Sri Lanka, the dissertation makes two key arguments: (1) that the efforts to modernize Buddhism in Sri Lanka were not limited to following Western models and (2) that the process of modernizing Buddhism as a whole in Sri Lanka did not reject or de-emphasize rituals.

1.1 MODELS FOR UNDERSTANDING BUDDHIST MODERNIZATION

The conformist and imitative characterization of Buddhist modernization that dominates current scholarship is encapsulated in two terms: “Protestant Buddhism” introduced by Gananath Obeyesekere (1972, 62) and “Buddhist Modernism” coined by Heinz Bechert (1973, 91). These terms became compelling models for other scholars to analyze different aspects of the Buddhist revival (e.g., Malalgoda 1976; Bond 1988; Gombrich & Obeyesekere 1988; Gombrich 2006 [1988], Manor 1989; Seneviratne 1999). These terms, and the more comprehensive models for which they have long been used as referents, have met criticism in recent scholarship for their overemphasis on changes, their insensitivity to historical details of the pre-colonial era, and their giving of too much weight to the West for whatever changes occurred in Buddhism (Blackburn 2001, 2010; Harris 2006).

These new studies reassessed the categories of Protestant Buddhism and Buddhist Modernism and brought greater clarity to the origins of Buddhist modernization, with significant attention paid to historical periods prior to the Buddhist revival and to the early part of the revival. This dissertation seeks to add to this growing new scholarship by expanding it in two ways. First, in addition to examining the evolution of the modernizing process in its earliest

phases, it investigates the revival in its later stages and up to the present. Second, while admitting that Buddhism was modernized within the larger project of the Buddhist revival, this study questions whether such efforts of modernizing Buddhism had only one direction – Westernization with a Protestant bias – as suggested in the above models, or whether modernization efforts were more multi-directional, including the use of indigenous forms in innovative and non-traditional ways.

Within the Obeyeskere and Bechert models, devotional practices and rituals are regarded as residuals of traditional Buddhism and unrelated to the process of modernization. Modernized Buddhism is portrayed by these models as anti-ritual. However, recent performative and practice-oriented ritual theories have led to a new understanding of rituals, not simply as static reflections of existing traditional social structures and cultural values, but as having a dynamic capacity and potential to construct desired dispositions and social identities (Bell 1992; Rudolph 2008). In light of these new ritual theories, and to understand the full breadth of modernization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, this study examines non-traditional uses of the devotional ritual of Buddha-vandanā that have become embedded in the modern lives of Buddhists in Sri Lanka.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This dissertation attempts to show how extant scholarship presents an incomplete account of the full breadth of Buddhist modernization in Sri Lanka. I attempt to fill some gaps in our knowledge by answering the following questions. How are we to understand the widespread and non-traditional uses of the indigenous ritual of Buddha-vandanā in contemporary Sri Lanka within the existing scholarly narrative of Buddhist modernization, which is interpreted as anti-

ritual and following rationalist trends and Western models? With the evidence we have on the promotion and novel utilizations of Buddha-vandanā during the period of revival and modernization, can we continue to hold that the modernization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka is to be understood exclusively, or even primarily, as an effort to appropriate Western models to bring Sri Lankan Buddhism into conformity with Western rationalist norms? For the same reasons, can we continue to hold that Buddhist modernization involved a rejection of ritual? More generally, can the scholarly categories of Protestant Buddhism and Buddhist Modernism stand up to the burden of representing the full spectrum of modernization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka? Focusing on these questions, this study aims to uncover what we can learn about the modernization of Buddhism in particular and the Buddhist revival in general by examining the the ritual of Buddha-vandanā in Sri Lanka in both the past and present.

1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

The Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka has been most extensively documented by Gananath Obeyesekere (1972; 1988); Heinz Bechert (1973), Kithsiri Malalgoda (1976), George Bond (1988), Richard Gombrich (1988, 2006 [1988]), and H.L. Seneviratne (1999). The stated objective of these scholarly accounts was to analyze how lay and monastic communities responded to Christian missionary activities, to the modernizing forces of science and Western political ideologies that came along with British colonial rule, and to the influences of globalization and secularism in the post-colonial era. These scholars and their writings focus almost exclusively on rationalist and Westernizing reforms during the period of revival and

modernization, giving no attention to the use of indigenous rituals or practices as modernizing elements. The above mentioned two terms that have come to encapsulate the conclusions of current scholarship regarding the modernization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka are defined as follows. According to Obeyesekere,

The term 'Protestant Buddhism' in my usage has two meanings. (a) As we have pointed out many of its norms and organizational forms are historical derivatives from Protestant Christianity. (b) More importantly, from the contemporary point of view, it is a protest against Christianity and its associated Western political dominance prior to independence. (1972, 62)

Bechert defines his term,

Buddhist modernism is characterized by the emphasis laid on rationalist elements in Buddhist teachings, by the belief that the teachings of Buddhism and those of modern science are not only in conformity but identical, by the tacit elimination of the traditional cosmology, and by a reinterpretation of the objective of the Buddhist religion in terms of social reforms and the building of a better world. (1973, 91)

Both terms characterize this new Buddhism as a response to Christian missionary activities, Western science and Western political dominance. "Buddhist modernism" was first used in the context of Sri Lanka and Southeast Asian countries and later extended to refer to transnational Buddhism that spread beyond Asia, particularly in Western countries. This term emphasized the rationalist bent of Buddhist reformations. "Protestant Buddhism" has been used specifically in the context of Sri Lanka to characterize reform efforts as an emulation of Protestant and Western forms.

One of the principal elements identified by these scholars as a hallmark of modernized Buddhism is “lay asceticism.” The phrase is used to refer to the shift that occurred when individual Buddhist lay followers began to assume greater responsibility for their own spiritual lives and also for the welfare of Buddhism more generally, a shift that diminished the central influence of monks in the society (Gombrich & Obeyesekere 1988, 7). Other salient features of Protestant Buddhism are identified as an increased focus on Buddhist canonical scriptures, increased emphasis on the rationalist and scientific elements of Buddhism, adaptation of English language concepts and Christian or Euro-American forms of religious practice and association, and rejection of ritual and “superstitious” practices (Gombrich & Obeyesekere 1988, 218–224).

Scholars who propagated these two models, Protestant Buddhism and Buddhist Modernism, relied heavily on the works of two reformers: Henry Steel Olcott (1832 – 1907) and Anagārika Dharmapala (1864 – 1933). These reformers’ reconstructions of Buddhism were seen as responding to criticisms of Buddhism as backward, nihilist, superstitious and idolatrous. These criticisms were leveled by Christian missionaries, colonial government officials, and some Western observers. The reinterpretations of Buddhism by these two reformers as a rational and ethical philosophy and their introduction of reformed Buddhist practices, such as textual study by lay Buddhists and new organizations such as the Young Men’s Buddhist Association, are viewed as the foundation on which new forms of Buddhism emerged in Sri Lanka (Bechert 1984, 275–276; Bond 1988, 48 ff; Gombrich 2006 [1988], 189 ff; McMahan 2012, 162). Adding another layer to this interpretation, H.L. Seneviratna argues that the redefined role of Buddhist monks in the twentieth century closely followed the Sri Lankan Buddhist reformist Dharmapāla’s monastic guidelines, which Seneviratna describes as having been derived from Christian missionaries (1999, 27). According to Seneviratna, “While Dharmapala considered this guide to be Buddhist,

many of its rules are in fact derived from his experience with missionaries and other representatives of Western culture” (1999, 37).

While this characterization of Buddhist modernization in Sri Lanka has long been the dominant model that guided subsequent scholarship, it has recently met with criticism. The main criticism is that the change in Buddhist practice suggested by this dominant model overstates the actual historical processes. Anne Blackburn (2010) cautions that Western discourses and modern forms of social identification did not always or entirely displace those which had existed in pre-colonial times. Her *Locations of Buddhism: Colonialism and Modernity in Sri Lanka* (2010) argues that pre-colonial educational practices and monastic roles remained steady even in central urban institutions and associations, where Westernized interpretations were most likely to be well received, and cites evidence that call into question the actual extent of lay authority in Buddhist affairs during the early stages of the Buddhist revival. Her work, which focused on the life and work of the prominent monk Hikkāḍuwe Sumaṅgala, argues that during this early revival period, the increased assumption of responsibility by individual Buddhists did not lead to a significant decline in monastic power and prestige, as suggested by the models of Protestant Buddhism and Buddhist Modernism, but rather represented a continued collaboration between laypeople and monastics (2010, 200).

The second criticism advanced by Blackburn is that some characteristics identified by these models as modernist or Protestant characteristics are in fact not new and are instead related to trends that existed in the pre-colonial period. In *Buddhist Learning and Textual Practice in Eighteenth Century Lankan Monastic Culture* (2000), Blackburn argues that the increased focus on Buddhist canonical scriptures, a key aspect of the new Buddhism, is not primarily an effect of “Orientalist textual predilections” or “bookish Protestantism” (2001, 200) but rather the

continuation of a trend to study Pāli canonical discourses begun in the eighteenth century by the Buddhist monk Vālivīṭa Saraṇaṅkara. Similarly, Elizabeth Harris reveals how early Western representations of Buddhism were influenced by English writers who elicited information from select monks with the use of surveys and questionnaires (2006, 171-80).

In the same vein, Charles Hallisey (1995) suggests that what scholars have labeled a European Orientalist tendency to emphasize Pāli canonical texts over vernacular Buddhist texts may instead reflect an “elective affinity” with the Theravādan textual tradition of privileging the authoritative texts of the Pāli canon (1995, 43). Adding more layers to these criticisms, John Holt (1991) contests the notion that Protestantism had a great influence on Sri Lankan Buddhism. While criticizing the term “Protestant Buddhism” as a misnomer, he asserts that if there is any such influence, it is more in the nature of a stimulant for the reappearance of some features of Buddhism, such as missionary spirit, that for long had remained latent (1991, 310).² In criticizing as disproportional weight attributed to Western influence, Mark Frost (2002) and Anne Blackburn (2010) also remind us that Buddhist responses during the colonial period were not only influenced by the presence of Christian missionaries and Western ideologies, but also by trans-local connections that Sri Lankan Buddhists maintained with Burmese, Siamese, Japanese, and Indian Buddhists.³

This dissertation continues the critical appraisal of the dominant models of modernization begun by these scholars by focusing on the role played by the indigenous devotional ritual of

² It is worth noting here Stephen Prothero’s argument that there was no one Protestant attitude toward non-Christian religions during the late nineteenth century. Protestant attitudes arrayed on a spectrum from inclusivism to exclusivism, from irenicism to polemicism (Prothero 1995, 298).

³ Richard Jaffe (2004) argues that the reconstruction of Japanese Buddhism after Meiji Restoration involved not only interchanges with Europe and the United States but frequent exchanges with other Buddhist countries in Asia. Through an examination of travel accounts and other writings of Meiji-era Japanese Buddhist travelers, Jaffe shows how interaction with other Buddhists in South and Southeast Asia influenced Japanese Buddhists to rethink the role of the historical Buddha in their tradition.

Buddha-vandanā in the modernization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. But rather than looking for the endurance of pre-colonial religious practices, as suggested by the Blackburn/Harris model, this dissertation will show how an indigenous traditional practice was utilized in novel and non-traditional ways as part of the very process of modernizing Buddhism.

The undue emphasis on the West in interpreting Buddhist modernization has also been probed by John Harding, Victor Sōgen Hori, and Alexander Soucy (2014) in a different context. They reveal that many interpretations of modern Buddhism in Western countries have been influenced by what they call a Westernization paradigm. This paradigm “assumes that the modernization of Buddhism is equivalent to the Westernization of Buddhism, that Asian culture is a relatively static repository of tradition incapable of innovation or renewal...” (Harding et al 2014, 4). Hence the modernization of Buddhism is seen as merely the imposition by the West of its cultural characteristics onto a passive Asian traditional Buddhism. Their critical reflections on this paradigm note that many modernist reformist ideas and practices were introduced by Asian Buddhists themselves and that even seemingly traditional temples were involved in promoting these reformist ideas and practices. Furthermore, they note the agency of Asian Buddhists in the modernization processes, with the collaboration of Western enthusiasts, well before Buddhism reached Western countries (Harding et al 2014, 7–10).

Although Harding and others emphasize the agency of Asian actors in modernizing Buddhism, in Sri Lanka they did not look beyond Olcott and Dharmapā la.

In Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in the 1880s, Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907) and Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933) reorganized Ceylonese Buddhism to protect it from Christian missionaries. The new Buddhism they created removed much “superstition” and ritual, rationalized Buddhist teachings so it could be easily taught...and opened up Buddhism to

a lay audience. Since their reorganization of Buddhism imitated many aspects of Christianity, some scholars have labelled their new product “Protestant Buddhism.” (Harding et al 2014, 9)

What is written above is not untrue, but it is limited to one element of modernization, i.e., reforms that followed rationalized and Westernized forms. This limited and partial interpretation of the modernization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka does not help us, in the end, to overcome the Westernization paradigm. As long as “Protestant Buddhism” is accepted as a comprehensive term, the Westernization paradigm will continue to limit and distort the actual narrative of Buddhist modernization in Sri Lanka.

This dissertation shows the limitations of “Protestant Buddhism” in explaining the breadth of Buddhist modernization in Sri Lanka. It further shows that Asian agency lies not only in initiating the modernization of Buddhism but also in utilizing indigenous cultural forms in strategic ways as part of the process of modernizing Buddhism without limiting the process to following Western models.

The other significant way that this dissertation contributes to critical appraisal of the above characterizations of contemporary Buddhism is by examining the assumption that the modernization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka involved a rejection of rituals. In describing salient features of Protestant Buddhism, Gombrich and Obeyesekere claim, “Religion is privatized and internalized: the truly significant is not what takes place at a public celebration or in ritual, but what happens inside one’s own mind or soul” (1988, 216). Similarly, Heinz Bechert defines Buddhist modernism as a movement that stressed reason, meditation, and rediscovery of canonical texts while also de-emphasizing “ritual, image worship, and ‘folk’ beliefs and practices...” (Bechert 1966, cited in McMahan 2008: 7). In distinguishing this modernized form

of Buddhism Donald Lopez also claims, “Modern Buddhism rejects many of the ritual and magical elements of previous forms of Buddhism” (2002: ix). David McMahan (2015) also identifies Buddhist modernism as characterized by “a deemphasis on ritual, dogma, clerical hierarchy, “superstition,” traditional cosmology, and icon worship” (2015, 1). Charles Hallisey also indicates that modernizing efforts of Buddhists in Theravāda countries during the nineteenth century involved an abandonment of rituals. While pointing out that these efforts could have been initiated by Buddhists themselves without much influence from the West, he still considers such reformations were done “at the expense of cosmology and ritual” (Hallisey 1995, 49). In these interpretations, rituals are categorized with hierarchy, priesthood, and superstitions, which were suppressed with modernist reformations (McMahan 2012, 160).

It is true that many local ritual practices of peasant Buddhist communities were discouraged and abandoned in the process of modernizing Buddhism. However, what my dissertation aims to show is that a categorical rejection of ritual was not, in fact, a characteristic of Buddhist modernization in Sri Lanka. As the evidence presented in this dissertation shows, the foundational ritual of Buddha-vandanā was never discouraged or abandoned during the period of revival and modernization but, to the contrary, was utilized as an important part of modernizing efforts. Portraying the modernization of Buddhism as anti-ritual is in line with the early trend of seeing rituals as having primarily a conservative function. This reflects the functionalist understanding of rituals developed in the works of William Robertson Smith, Émile Durkheim, Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown, and Bronislaw Malinowski. Rituals were seen in this sense as serving to reproduce and transmit the values and structures of a society from one generation to the next and to maintain those values and structures over time. Based on these structuralist theories, Jürgen Habermas (1987) interprets rituals as an irrational and non-linguistic

form of communication that was predominant in premodern societies. Providing an evolutionary account of rituals, Habermas argues that with the rise of rationalization of social life and increased use of linguistic communication, rituals were destined to lose social significance (Habermas 1987, 195). These theories tie rituals to pre-modern societies and traditional social structures.

Scholars who analyzed the process of Buddhist modernization used a similar structuralist framework in looking at rituals. Lumping together all types of rituals as one class of traditional practices, they ignored both the inherent potential of ritual as a tool of modernization and also the actual use of ritual as part of the Buddhist modernization in Sri Lanka. Scholars observing the performance of rituals in contemporary Buddhist societies through Habermas' lens are quick to categorize such rituals simply as residuals of traditional Buddhism. This binding of ritual exclusively to traditional aspects of Buddhism can clearly be seen in the following categorization offered by Martin Baumann in the context of Buddhism in the West.

[T]raditionalist Buddhism, with its emphasis on devotion, ritual, and specific cosmological concepts stands in contrast to modernist Buddhism, with its emphasis on meditation, text reading and rationalist understanding. (Baumann 2002, 58)

However, more recent ritual theory regards rituals not simply as static reflections of an older tradition, but as having the active capacity for creative and strategic use in constructing social identities and desired dispositions. Ritual theorists Ronald Grimes (1995), Catherine Bell (1992) and Michael Rudolph (2008) stress this strategic use of rituals by cultural actors and note the creativity and innovation of such actors in using ritual to construct or adapt social structures. Bell claims that rituals are “situational” and “strategic” and hence people use them as a practical way of dealing with some specific circumstances (1992, 92). Bell further asserts,

Ritual is never simply or solely a matter of routine, habit, or “the dead weight of tradition.” Indeed, routinization and habitualization may be strategies in certain cultural situations, but so might the infrequent yet periodic reproduction of a complex ritual tradition. (Bell 1992, 92)

In this view, appealing to some sense of tradition becomes another way of ritualizing an act.

Ritual theory regarding the active capacity of ritual to shape social realities and structures informs this dissertation’s examination of the novel and strategic uses of Buddha-vandanā in responding to colonial conditions and to the forces of modernity and globalization.

Buddha-vandanā has not so far received focused attention in the scholarship on Sri Lankan Buddhism despite it being one of the most commonly and frequently practiced rituals by Buddhists in contemporary Sri Lanka. A few brief studies by Ames (1964), Obeyesekere (1966) and references to this practice by Gombrich (1991) and Southwold (1983) discussed the underlying structure and rationale for performing traditional Buddha-vandanā. Obeyesekere (1972) and Gombrich (1983) briefly referred to the new trends of venerating the Buddha, but they simply interpreted them as another aspect of the model of Protestant Buddhism. This dissertation will argue that the contemporary practice of Buddha-vandanā does not fit within this model. This general scholarly overlook of this widespread practice could be attributed to the very embeddedness of this ritual in the daily lives of Buddhists, its simplicity and quotidian nature. Unlike festive rituals and seasonal ceremonies, the regular practice of Buddha-vandanā lacks grandiosity and flamboyancy and hence can easily miss scholarly attention. This dissertation, however, demonstrates the significance of the contemporary practice of Buddha-vandanā and shows how it can provide us a window to see a significant unnoticed part of the modernization of Buddhism.

1.4 METHODS AND APPROACH

Building on scholarship that critiques the dominant model of Buddhist modernization in Sri Lanka, this dissertation focuses on the use of the devotional ritual, *Buddha-vandanā*, which it examines from the early period of the Buddhist revival through the post-colonial era and into the present day as part of modernizing efforts in Sri Lanka. While critiques of the dominant model have so far been based on historical studies, this dissertation takes an approach that is both historical and ethnographic. Since the dissertation aims to reevaluate the dominant characterization of modernization of Buddhism vis-à-vis how efforts to reform and modernize Buddhism continued to the contemporary period, this combined approach was used. In order to understand the full breadth of Buddhist modernization in Sri Lanka, the dissertation aims to examine various manifestations and utilizations of *Buddha-vandanā* through the twentieth century up to today, using one of the most commonly practiced, and yet least studied, rituals as a vantage point to look at the Buddhist revival and, in the process, to enhance our understanding of how Buddhism was modernized in Sri Lanka.

I rely on both literary sources and ethnographic data to examine the issue. In order to understand the colonial background and the origin of the current practice of this ritual, I examine printed materials of the early colonial period. The printed liturgical booklets on *Buddha-vandanā* that I discovered in the library of the National Museum in Sri Lanka, which represent the first generation of printed materials providing lay instruction in the ritual, comprise the primary source materials for understanding the early phase of the practice during the period of revival. I also rely on later liturgical booklets and written references to this ritual practice found in newspapers and bulletins. A main source of this study is the ethnographic data that I collected during my six-month long fieldwork between July and December 2014 and followup research

done in May and June of 2015. I selected four districts – Colombo, Gampaha, Kandy and Kurunegala – which provided urban, semi-urban and rural areas and diverse types of performance practice of this ritual. I visited four types of sites located within these districts, namely, homes, schools, public places (e.g., junctions and roadsides) and workplaces, including hospitals and prisons, where the practice of Buddha-vandanā is performed. I studied ritual performances at eighteen homes, fourteen schools, fourteen public shrines, six shops, four hospitals, three prisons, six offices and two garment factories (see Appendices A & B) in addition to my brief visitations to numerous other secular places where Buddha-vandanā is conducted. I also inspected three workshops of craftsmen who produced Buddha statues.

I gathered data at these sites through participant observations of the ritual performances and semi-structured and informal interviews with administrators, organizers, and ritual practitioners. I used the method of dimensional sampling to select people using significant analytic dimensions of gender, age group, and social class. Interviews were conducted in Sinhala and focused on how these Buddhists understood their ritual practices. Being a native Sinhala speaker, I had no problem in communicating with these ritual practitioners. I focused on both what they said and what they did in front of their altars and shrines.

Working in one's own country as a researcher has its advantages and disadvantages. My familiarity with Sri Lankan Buddhist society and Buddhist culture helped me to recognize and understand the new patterns of this ritual in modern practice. My knowledge of locality helped me select appropriate sites for this research. My language competence and familiarity with local culture helped me to ask the right questions and to be sensitive to nuances and inferences of verbal and non-verbal expressions of ritual practitioners. Too much familiarity can also bring challenges such as subjective biases and a tendency to have many taken-for-granted assumptions

regarding social behavior and a blindness to common, routine activities. I tried to be sensitive to these issues and made an effort to create enough distance to see what is familiar with fresh eyes.

My position as a Buddhist monk provided both opportunities and challenges. As a monk I was able to have easy access to many places such as prisons and schools. My identity as a Buddhist monk also helped to facilitate discussion of nationalist sentiments and concerns of Buddhist identity from those who promote and practice this ritual. However, my presence as a monk during performance of the ritual no doubt influenced lay practitioners' performance of the ritual and their responses to my questions. This was more of an issue when examining domestic performances than when studying performances in schools, workplaces, and public shrines where my presence was less influential. However, it is impossible to avoid the influence of the presence of a researcher in any observation or the presence of an interviewer as an influence on the responses that are given. Yet, I was sensitive to these issues in conducting my interviews and conversations. I reassured my informants that my questions stem from an interest to learn from them, that I was not seeking a "correct" answer to my questions, and that I had no desire to impose on them a particular understanding of the ritual. Whenever possible, I elicited responses by making a comment rather than asking direct questions.

1.5 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

The dissertation is organized into six chapters. The first chapter is the Introduction which clarifies the problem that this dissertation attempts to answer and the scholarly context to which this dissertation contributes. Chapter Two identifies the origin point in the late colonial period of

the use of Buddha-vandanā as part of activist efforts to modernize Buddhism in Sri Lanka, orienting the practice in its traditional context and then showing how the ritual was simplified, formalized, reinterpreted in expanded cultural and social contexts, and promoted among lay practitioners as a marker of Buddhist identity. This examination is grounded in a genre of printed religious materials discovered during my fieldwork and previously unknown to scholars, namely, the printed liturgical booklets providing, for the first time, lay instruction in performance of the ritual. This chapter further examines how, with the promotion of the ritual through these booklets and the expanded and non-traditional manner of its use, Buddha-vandanā was reinterpreted as a principal marker of Buddhist identity. This chapter lays foundational support for the dissertation's principal thesis that, from the earliest days of the Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka, efforts to respond to colonial conditions and to modernize Buddhism were not limited to following Western models but included creative and innovative use of indigenous forms.

The next four chapters deal with expansion of the spatial context of Buddha-vandanā. They collectively show the following: how the ritual was taken out of its traditional context in the temple and moved into homes, schools, workplaces and public spaces; how the practice was made more accessible and was positioned strategically as a principal marker of Buddhist identity in the face of globalization, secularization and other perceived threats; and, finally, how it has been used as a remedy to counter the stresses of modern life. Chapter Three examines the first step in this series of spatial shifts, taking Buddha-vandanā into the home and embedding the ritual in daily domestic life as a marker of religious and cultural identity for lay practitioners.

Buddha-vandanā was also then taken into public schools, which is the subject of Chapter Four. This chapter shows how the practice of Buddha-vandanā became an educational tool used to teach Buddhism to students and to instill Buddhist cultural and behavioral norms in them, as a

means of preparing them to withstand the secular trends of modern society. This chapter discusses the use of Buddha-vandanā in schools as an example of “learning by doing” and describes how the performative aspects of the ritual are used to instill Buddhist cultural and behavioral norms. The chapter also challenges the view that Buddhist public schools were cradles of Protestant Buddhism teaching only rationalist interpretations of Buddhism, showing that while rationalist texts were studied in classrooms twice a week, Buddha-vandanā was performed daily.

Chapter Five analyzes the appearance of Buddhist shrines in public places, such as road junctions and markets, with performances of Buddha-vandanā conducted by shop-keepers, taxi-drivers and residents of the respective areas. Arguing against the scholarly interpretation that this represents an emulation of Christian practice, this chapter shows that this is rather a local-level response to perceived threats to Buddhism from secularization and the growth of other religions in the country. In this spatial context, in particular, can be seen the non-traditional use of this ritual to assert Buddhist identity and hegemony in a local area or community.

Chapter Six focuses on the more recent and more mundane utilization of the ritual as an antidote to stress and to promote general psychological wellbeing. Examining how the ritual is performed in such secular places as workplaces, hospitals and prisons, the chapter shows how this ritual has been “psychologized” and used in a non-traditional way to meet the challenges of modern life in Sri Lanka. Contrary to the common scholarly view that the modernization of Buddhism meant the decline of rituals, this chapter provides final proof that the devotional ritual of Buddha-vandanā has been a significant part of the continual efforts of Buddhists in Sri Lanka to modernize and adapt their religion to meet the changing conditions of their lives.

These chapters provide primary, historical, and ethnographic evidence showing that, from the earliest days of the Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka, the indigenous ritual of Buddha-vandanā was moved beyond its traditional context and utilized by Buddhist activists in non-traditional ways to further recognize objectives of Buddhist modernization, namely, to bring Buddhism forward into modern times as a relevant and dynamic institution by providing the means for increased lay religious activism and by identifying and reasserting markers of Buddhist identity. From its origin in the early days of the revival until present times, the evidence further shows that the use of this ritual in modernizing Buddhism became so widespread that Buddha-vandanā, in the non-traditional forms introduced during the period of revival and modernization, has now become embedded in the daily lives of most Sri Lankan Buddhists.

The arguments in these chapters and the evidence given to support them shows that Buddhist modernization in Sri Lanka has moved in more than one direction. Specifically, evidence regarding the role played by the indigenous ritual of Buddha-vandanā in modernizing Buddhism in Sri Lanka shows the deficiencies of current models in representing the breadth of Buddhist modernization in Sri Lanka. The evidence presented in these chapters further challenge the assumption of existing models that Buddhist modernization in Sri Lanka rejected the use of ritual in modernized Buddhism, showing that modernization efforts were not limited to rationalist doctrines and Westernized practices, but included the creative use of rituals to advance the objectives of modernization in Sri Lanka.

2.0 REVIVING THE BUDDHA: PROMOTING THE RITUAL OF VENERATION IN COLONIAL SRI LANKA

After nearly a century of religious suppression during the British colonial era (1815–1948), Sri Lanka in the late nineteenth century began to reclaim and revive its Buddhist heritage, an effort that was led by Buddhist activists from both the lay and monastic communities. Two intersecting vectors strongly influenced the timing and success of the Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka. The first was the rise of a newly literate and relatively affluent Sri Lankan social class made possible by the improved economic conditions that came with British rule (De Silva 1981, 344). This emergent social class (*bourgeoisie*), with its enhanced resources and education, took on an active role in reviving Buddhism in the country. The second vector important to the revival was the colonial government's adoption of the principle of the state's neutrality in religion in 1881 (De Silva 1981, 344). The ending of active suppression of Buddhist institutions and the government's adoption of neutrality in religious matters opened the door for the Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka.

Although Michael Ames noted the diversity of the revival movement, stating that Buddhist activists during the early revival period “never presented a unified front nor a consistent ideology” (Ames 1963, 48), scholars studying the revival nonetheless focused their efforts on interpretations and reforms that followed Western models (Obeyesekere 1976; Malalgoda 1976; Bond 1988; Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988). Scholarship focused, in particular, on the work of two Buddhist reformers. Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907) was an

American Theosophist and the founder of the Buddhist Theosophical Society, an organization responsible for opening Buddhist public schools in Sri Lanka to compete with public schools started by Christian missionary societies. These Buddhist schools closely followed the model of missionary schools. Olcott also wrote a Buddhist catechism for use in Buddhist public schools. The second reformer on whom scholarship has largely focused was Anagārika Dharmapāla (1864–1933). He promoted rational interpretations of Buddhism and recast Buddhism as an ethical philosophy in harmony with modern scientific knowledge and Victorian social mores. Focusing only on these two reformers, scholars like Kithsiri Malalgoda (1976), George Bond (1988) and Richard Gombrich (1988) interpreted the early phase of the Buddhist revival in line with the model of Protestant Buddhism suggested by Obeyesekere (1972). Although Bond's analysis highlighted the diversity of Buddhist responses when it continued to the twentieth century, his treatment of the early phase of the Buddhist revival is limited to the activities of Olcott, Dharmapāla and their followers. These rationalist reforms are what current scholarship sees as the modernization of Buddhism.

It is true that both Olcott and Dharmapāla had significant influence on the Buddhist revival, and their rationalist interpretations of Buddhism and adoption of Western models were important parts of the way Buddhism was modernized during the colonial period. However, the extensive attention given to Olcott and Dharmapāla in previous studies has resulted in casting a somewhat monolithic picture of the Buddhist revival in colonial Sri Lanka. This too great an emphasis has kept us from seeing other trends important to the colonial and the post-colonial revival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, trends that did not follow Western models. Only in more recent years have some scholars, like Anne Blackburn (2010), begun to recognize the greater diversity of response to the crisis of colonialism. A broader look at the early phase of the

Buddhist revival is necessary to understand the diversity of responses to the challenges Buddhism faced in the colonial era, including significant revival efforts that did not follow Western norms and that instead drew on traditional practices and beliefs.

This chapter offers an understanding of a significant trend in the early phase of the Buddhist revival in which traditional practices were used as part of activist efforts to restore and modernize Buddhism. In particular, this chapter shows how *Buddha-vandanā*, the traditional devotional ritual of “Venerating the Buddha,” was reformed and used by activists during the early phase of the revival to promote increased religious engagement by lay Buddhist practitioners. This chapter is based on my discovery of early printed liturgical booklets on *Buddha-vandanā* during my archival research on printed materials of the colonial period. Newly acquired print technology enabled the printing and distribution of these booklets, which for the first time simplified and formalized the liturgy of *Buddha-vandana* and provided instructions for lay practitioners on how it should be performed. I will argue in this chapter that Buddhist activists in the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries used these booklets to promote this ritual practice in order to increase religious engagement by lay Buddhists and as a principal marker of Buddhist identity. This chapter further argues that the expansion of printing not only led to increases in textual study, but also facilitated the promotion of ritual practices during the Buddhist revival. These documented efforts reveal a broader foundation for Buddhist modernization and revival initiatives than has previously been recognized or examined by current scholarship.

2.1 BUDDHA-VANDANĀ AND ITS PROMOTION THROUGH PRINT MEDIA

2.1.1 Buddha-vandanā As a Traditional Devotional Ritual

Buddha-vandanā, also known as Buddha-pūjā, is a ritualized practice of honoring the Buddha by making prostrations, reciting verses in Pāli and offering items such as flowers, lamps and incense. It is one of the foundational practices of the Theravada Buddhist tradition, which is the religious tradition of Sri Lanka. Although the form of the ritual could vary considerably in monastic practice, its most fundamental and common requirements include recitations in Pāli of verses of commitment to the three refuges of the Buddha, Dhamma (his teaching), Dhamma and Saṅgha (the community of his disciples); verses of commitment to the five moral precepts; verses regarding the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha; formal dedication of offerings to the Buddha; and transference of merits to divine beings and departed relatives. We find references to this form of ritualized veneration of the Buddha in Pāli canonical texts, such as the *Apadāna* (a collection of biographical stories found in the Khuddaka Nikāya), in Pāli commentaries, and in Sinhala medieval texts. In these texts we find that this ritual typically performed by devout Buddhist practitioners in front of a stūpa, a Bodhi tree or an image of the Buddha. It is this ritual, Buddha-vandanā, that was promoted among lay Buddhists during the colonial period as a key part of the Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka.

Attention to such utilization of this ritual practice was first given by Mohoṭṭivatte Guṇānanda (1823–1890), a prominent monk who led the famous public debates with Christian missionary groups that began in 1865 and continued until 1873 (Malalgoda 1976, 225). While this monk is well-known for his oratory skills, he was also a prolific writer. His first writings were pamphlets that were composed as replies to criticisms of Buddhism leveled by Christian

missionary societies through widely distributed printed tracts. He was the second Buddhist activist to start a printing press in 1862 and used it for Buddhist publications. Other than publishing pamphlets, he published the Sinhala translation of the classical Pāli Buddhist text, *Miḷinda Pañha* (The Questions of King Milinda) in 1878 and started two short-lived Buddhist newspapers (more on his publications later) (Malalgoda 1976, 228). He was a mentor to both Olcott and Dharmapāla. Olcott was inspired to come to Ceylon after reading an English report of the debate at Panadura published by the British journalist John Capper in 1873. In his early years in Ceylon, Olcott received guidance and support from Guṇānanda (Wenzlhuemer 2008, 276). In 1887 Guṇānanda broke away from Olcott charging him with misappropriating funds collected from local Buddhists and criticizing his too rationalist interpretation of Buddhism (more on this later) (Malalgoda 1976, 251). Dharmapāla during his younger days frequented Guṇānanda's temple, *Dīpaduttarārāmaya* in Kotahena, Colombo and received instructions on Buddhism (Obeyesekere 1997, 372). It was this monk who first decided to compose and publish a printed book on *Buddha-vandanā* in 1887. Many other lesser-known monks and laypeople joined this effort in the following decades. They produced additional liturgical booklets on *Buddha-vandanā*, promoted it among lay Buddhists, particularly among children, and utilized it to assert Buddhist identity and revive Buddhism in the colonial context.

2.1.2 Liturgical Booklets

The primary means through which the ritual of *Buddha-vandanā* was promoted in the colonial era was the publication of printed booklets that provided the text of the liturgy in Pāli and basic instructions for performing it. Discovering these printed liturgical booklets on *Buddha-vandanā*

were an important finding of my archival research in Sri Lanka. When I examined printed materials published in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries in order to find some references to the practice of Buddha-vandanā in this period, I came across a number of early printed booklets in the collection of early printed materials housed in the library of Sri Lankan National Museum in Colombo that singularly focused on Buddha-vandanā. This genre of printed liturgical booklets was not known previously to scholars. During my archival research I discovered forty-eight of these liturgical booklets published between 1887 and 1930. They are the first written sources for the complete liturgy of this ritual and the first produced for lay Buddhists. Two monastic handbooks composed in the eighteenth century, the *Banadaham Pota* and the *Solasapūjā*, record parts of the ritual. But there is no classical text that records the complete liturgy, either for monks or for lay Buddhists. For lay Buddhists, the structure and content of the ritual seem to have passed down through oral tradition.

At the time of publication of these booklets, printing was a fairly new technology for Sri Lankans. The first Buddhist printing press was not established until 1862. Prior to that time, only Christian missionaries used printing presses for religious publications, and they exercised a monopoly over printing until the 1860s. In 1812 the Colombo Auxiliary Bible Society established the first missionary press with the acquisition of a printing press that had been brought to the island by the Dutch. Other Christian missionary presses, such as the Wesleyan Press, followed. (Dharmadasa 1995, 96 n. 27).

It was only in 1862 that the first Buddhist press was established in Galle (Wickramasinghe 2006, 78) and then a second one in Colombo in the same year by Mohoṭṭivatte Guṇānanda's Society for the Propagation of Buddhism (Malalgoda 1972, 221). The initial purpose of these printing presses was to produce pamphlets to reply to criticisms and charges

about Buddhism propagated by Christian missionaries through numerous printed tracts and books that had gone unanswered for a period of several decades. The use of printing technology then broadened to other purposes, such as publishing Buddhist newspapers, printing classical Buddhist texts, Sinhala translations of Buddhist treatises, Sinhala novels and, beginning in 1887, the publication of the liturgical booklets promoting Buddha-vandanā. With these booklets, Buddha-vandanā became the first liturgy to be published for lay Buddhists in Sri Lanka.

The earliest booklet with the liturgy of Buddha-vandanā, as noted earlier, is Mohoṭṭivatte Guṇānanda's *Buddha Ādahilla* (Worship of the Buddha), first published in 1887. It is also the longest. In it the liturgy for the performance of Buddha-vandanā, given in Pāli with translations in Sinhala, is the central part of a more comprehensive manual of instructions for lay Buddhists. Carol Anderson (2003) notes the significance of Guṇānanda's booklet for a reevaluation of the scholarly category of Protestant Buddhism. She highlights the fact that this booklet printed in the early period of the Buddhist revival was a handbook primarily on ritual behavior and not on Buddhist doctrines.

[F]rom the perspective of *Buddha Ādahilla*, the revival movement focused on proper ritual behavior instead of rational belief. I suggest that the feature of rational belief that is so closely intertwined with the concept of Protestant Buddhism requires closer and more nuanced analysis. (Anderson 2003, 184–185)

This chapter attempts to provide this nuanced analysis based on not only Guṇānanda's booklet but also other liturgical booklets that followed it.

These other liturgical booklets are more concise in comparison to the booklet authored by Guṇānanda; they do not contain expositions of meritorious deeds or commentaries on recitations. Instead, they focus almost exclusively on Buddha-vandanā, presenting recitations for each item

of Buddha-vandanā, and brief instructions. Hence, they are short in length. Many of the forty-eight booklets I discovered are publications of ten to thirty-two pages in eight by five-inch format. On the basis of similarity in content and format, liturgical booklets published until 1930 can be categorized as the first generation of this genre of publications. The contents of these booklets will be discussed later in this chapter.

2.1.3 Distribution of Liturgical Booklets

In order to promote Buddha-vandanā among lay Buddhists, the booklets were widely distributed and appeared to have been received especially well by the newly emerging literate population of Buddhists in and around urban areas. The publishing of liturgical booklets also coincided with the rise of vernacular literacy in the country. According to the Census of 1911, forty percent of males and ten percent of females were able to read and write. This was a significant increase of the literate population compared to thirty years before (Wickramasinghe 2006, 77). This increase was mainly due to the growth of vernacular schools. The British government changed its policy with regard to education in the 1880s, which resulted in promoting vernacular education on the island. Leaving English education almost entirely to missionaries, the government devoted its resources to building schools that taught in Sinhala and Tamil. By introducing the grants-in-aid system, the government supported private vernacular schools under certain conditions. Wealthy philanthropists of both urban and rural areas built schools and received government grants to run them (De Silva 1981, 330). These schools significantly increased the vernacular literacy rate. However, it is in the Western province that school attendance was highest. While the average school attendance for the whole island was one in thirty, it was one in twenty-one in the Western province, which includes Colombo and which is heavily populated mainly by Sinhalese (De

Silva 1981, 330). The growth of vernacular literacy subsequently gave rise to more Sinhala periodicals, novels and plays during the late nineteenth century (Dharmadasa 1995, 116). These liturgical booklets reflect the efforts of Buddhist actors to appropriate this growth of literacy for the purpose of transmitting religious knowledge. What is interesting in this case is a utilization of print media to popularize a ritual performance.

The extent of the distribution of these booklets can be glimpsed from information in four of the booklets regarding the number of reprints and copies that were produced. We also find an important reference to the broad distribution of Guṇānanda's *Buddha Ādahilla*, the first liturgical booklet, in the report of the Anglican Bishop of Colombo twenty years after the text's publication. In describing the recent development of Buddhism in Ceylon, Bishop Coplestone notes the following about *Buddha Ādahilla*:

It is largely used, at any rate in the low country. Most Buddhists who can read at least in or near Colombo, possess a copy; some of them who cannot read get it read to them.
(Coplestone 1908, 278)

Guṇānanda's *Buddha Ādahilla* was in its fourteenth edition by 1912 (Young and Somaratna 1996, 208).

Similarly, the *Buddha Ādahīme Kramaya* (Method of Worshipping the Buddha) authored by the Buddhist monk Koratota Sobhita was first published in 1888 and was in its fifth edition in 1892. The *Buddha Ādahīma hevath Vandanā Gāthā Pota* (Worship of the Buddha or the Book of Verses for Veneration) was reprinted for the third time in 1906, as referenced on its title page. The *Buddha Ādahīma* (1902) mentions in its preface that the current booklet was an improved version of previous printings, while the *Buddha Meheya* (Service for the Buddha; 1888, 1893) also had two editions; 1,500 copies were printed of its second edition (p. 43). The title page of

Buddhopastānaya (Attending to the Buddha) published in 1905 states that 8,000 copies were printed for sale.

While the majority of booklets were printed for sale, the keen interest that Buddhist activists had in promoting Buddha-vandanā can be clearly seen in their efforts to produce these booklets for free distribution. Two booklets, in particular, were printed in large quantities for free distribution with the help of sponsors. The first is *Śri Saddharma Mañjarī* (The Auspicious Bouquet of Good Teaching) printed in 1905. As is indicated on page ii, 10,000 copies were printed of its first edition. The second is *Buddha Ādahilla* (The Worship of the Buddha), published in 1917.⁴ According to its title page, 3,000 copies were printed for free distribution. The first booklet provides the liturgy of Buddha-vandanā with the Sinhala meaning of each recitation in a format of a catechism, while the second one simply provides the liturgy in Pāli.

The booklets that were printed for sale rather than free distribution were easily affordable. The majority were priced at 10 cents, which in 1905 was less than the price of a loaf of bread in Sri Lanka. For example, the cover pages of the *Buddhopasthānaya* (44 pages) published in 1905 and the *Bauddha Vandanā Gāthā Pota* (22 pages) published in 1923 display their prices as 10 cents. The price of *Vandanā Gāthā Pota* (20 pages) published in 1924 appears as 6 cents on its second page. By comparison, in 1905 a loaf of bread was 12 cents, 1 lb. of flour was 10 cents, and 1 lb. of sugar was 16 cents.⁵ According to the statistics of the British colonies presented to Houses of Parliament of Great Britain in 1907, the average wage of a domestic laborer in 1905 ranged from 30 cents to 50 cents per day. For a skilled worker such as carpenter

⁴ This is a different booklet from Guṇānanda's booklet although the title is the same. Guṇānanda's title, *Buddha Ādahilla*, was adopted as the title of several other booklets. *Buddha Ādahilla* was also the title that in 1955 Kiriālle Nāṇawimala adopted for his liturgical booklet that became the most popular one among lay Buddhists in the middle of the twentieth century (Anderson 2003).

⁵ Seasonal papers, Inventory control record 1, Vol, 95, p. 83 (Great Britain: Parliament House of Commons).

the average wage ranged from 37 cents to Rs 2.⁶ We can easily assume that wages for office workers, school teachers and other professionals were higher than the above wages. Under these economic conditions, the booklets that were offered for sale rather than free distribution were affordable by an average family.

Among the forty-eight booklets in the National Museum's archives, only the above four booklets mention the number of copies printed. Those four alone provide evidence that 22,500 copies of liturgical booklets on Buddha-vandanā were printed for distribution to lay Buddhists during the early Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka. That number does not take into account the number of copies of the forty-four other booklets in the National Museum's archives, or the number of copies printed in the fourteen editions of the Guṇānanda's booklet, or the five editions of *Buddha Ādahīme Kramaya*, or the multiple editions of *Buddha Ādahīma hevath Vandanā Gāthā Pota*, *Buddha Ādahīma*, and *Buddha Meheya*, all referenced above. It is reasonable to conclude from the evidence available that the actual number of liturgical booklets printed and distributed during this period was much higher.

To provide a demographic context, the total population of Buddhists in the country according to the census of 1901 was 2,141,404 (Wenzlhuemer 2008, 51). The majority of these booklets were published in Colombo and its suburbs, which had a higher literacy rate than most other areas. (Only two of the known booklets were published outside of Colombo, one in Galle and other in Kandy.) In 1901 the Buddhist population in the Western province around Colombo was 628,612 (Wenzlhuemer 2008, 51). The other province where the Buddhist revival was most vigorous during the late colonial period was the Southern province, which had 532,140 Buddhists (Wenzlhuemer 2008, 51). The above number of copies of just the four booklets is

⁶ Seasonal papers, Inventory control record 1, Vol, 95, p. 83 (Great Britain: Parliament House of Commons).

3.5% of the Buddhist population of the Western province. However, since the actual number of copies of liturgical booklets printed and distributed during this period is much higher, booklets should have reached a good portion of this Buddhist population. As noted above, Copleston, the Anglican Bishop of Colombo, remarked in 1908 that most Buddhists around Colombo possessed a copy of Guṇānanda's booklet. The arrival of other booklets should have increased the possibility of owning a copy of a liturgical booklet.

2.1.4 Concerted Effort

The promotion of Buddha-vandanā among lay Buddhists during the late colonial era was not simply the project of just one social class, but rather a concerted effort by Buddhist activists from different social backgrounds. It was a concerted effort of Buddhist monks, Buddhist aristocrats, Buddhist businessmen, and ordinary Buddhists.

Authors of the liturgical booklets included monks and lay Buddhists of different castes and social classes. Among the forty-eight booklets in the collection, fifteen were composed by monks, thirty-one by laypeople (all men), and two by unknown authors. Most of these authors, with the exception of Mohoṭṭivatte Guṇānanda, the author of the first liturgical book are not well-known to us. No detailed records or biographies can be found about them. However, based on glimpses of their general background apparent from the booklets themselves, we can say that they were influential personalities within their own local communities.

Buddha Ādahīme Kramaya, first published in 1888, was composed by a monk named Koratoṭa Sobhita (n.d.). The booklet identifies him as the head-monk of Koratoṭa Vihāra, an ancient temple located about ten miles away from the city of Colombo. This temple, which

belongs to the monastic fraternity of the Siyam Nikāya, is one of only a few temples in this area that predates the colonial period. Koratota Sobhita was also the manager of three schools in the Western province that were opened for Buddhist students in response to the growth of Christian missionary schools (Malalgoda 1976, 235). Similarly, Kodāgoda Paññāsekara, the author of the *Buddha Meheya* (1893), was the head-monk of Kataluwa Ranweli Vihāra, an important temple in Galle where the first Buddhist printing press was established in 1862 by the author's teacher, Bulathgama Sumana (1795–1891) with the help of local donors and a special grant received from King Rama IV of Siam (Blackburn 2010, 15).

The authorship of these booklets was not limited to monks. As noted, the majority of authors were lay Buddhists. They were also people from different social backgrounds, with surnames indicating a number of different castes. They were also from different areas. For example, as indicated in the booklets, Andiris Appuhamy was from Galle, Frederic Appuhamy was from Walgama and P.T.S.Dharmawardena was from Mulleriyava of the Western Province.

Buddhist aristocrats and businessmen joined in this effort of promoting Buddha-vandanā by sponsoring the cost of printing. As previously noted, two booklets were printed in large quantities for free distribution with the help of sponsors. The first, *Śrī Saddharma Mañjarī* printed in 1905 in a first edition of 10,000 copies, was a project of Pāulu Silva Appuhāmi, a manager of two Buddhist schools who invited the Buddhist monk, Wimaladhamma Tissa, to compose it and campaigned to raise funds for its printing. According to the budget sheet attached to the booklet, seven Buddhist organizations and twenty-nine individuals supported this project. Three of these donors were people who held the position of Muhandiram, a high position in the local administration of the low country and a title of honor given by the colonial government. Four donors were *vidānes*, village headmen. Three were doctors and two were public notaries.

The majority of these donors appeared to be elites from different areas of the country. A noteworthy donor in this list is E. R. Guṇaratna (1845–1914), the Mudaliyar of the Governor’s Gate (a high rank in the colonial administration and honorary title). He was from a well-known uppercaste aristocratic family in Galle. Guṇaratna sponsored the establishment of new Buddhist temples in Galle and renovation of the ancient cave temple in Dambulla. He also translated the first section of the Pāli canonical text, Aṅguttara Nikāya, into English and this translation was published by the Pāli Text Society, London in 1885 (Wright 1999 [1907], 755).

The other booklet printed for free distribution, in an edition of 3,000 copies, was *Buddha Ādahilla* composed by W. John Perera in 1917. The list of donors in this book represents a mix of people from different social backgrounds. According the budget sheet attached at the end of the booklet, in responding to a newspaper advertisement, a religious organization (Ubhayalokārtha Siddhi Samāgama) and two individuals made the highest contributions, Rs. 10 each. Smaller contributions, mostly Rs. 1, came from three trading companies and thirty-one individuals. Four of these donors were doctors and the majority in the list were traders. Here we also find a few people with the surname Appuhāmi, which indicates their decent from the high caste, *goyigama*. But many donors had Fernando, de Silva and Perera as their surnames, which are Portuguese names indicating descent from the low country or coastal areas. Again, another noteworthy personality on this list of donors is Dr. W.A. de Silva (1869–1942), who was a veterinary surgeon and pioneer in the Buddhist temperance movement in the early-twentieth century (Dharmadasa 1995, 133).

The details of these authors and sponsors show that many locally influential monks, elites, professionals, businessmen, religious organizations, and trade associations actively promoted Buddha-vandanā as a part of reviving Buddhism during the late colonial period.

One prominent organization that promoted Buddha-vandanā was Sarvajña Śāsanābhivṛddhi Dāyaka Dharma Samāgama (Religious Society for Giving Increase to Teaching of the Omniscient One), a lay organization formed in 1862 by the above-mentioned monk Migetṭiwatte Guṇānanda, the author of the first printed liturgical booklet. The name of this organization was translated to English as “Society for the Propagation of Buddhism.” Malalgoda argues that the English name was an imitation of “Society for the Propagation of Gospel,” which had been active in Ceylon since 1840 (1976, 220). He further points out, “This was the first clear sign of the shape of things to come: the attempt on the part of Buddhists to meet the missionaries on their own ground, with weapons deliberately modelled on those of their opponents” (Malalgoda 1976, 220). It is true that the first act of this society was to publish pamphlets replying to Christian publications that criticized Buddhism. The society also started monthly periodicals to counter what appeared in periodicals published by Christian missionary societies (Malalgoda 1976, 221). The society later moved to publish other Buddhist texts composed or edited by Migetṭiwatte Guṇānanda. None of these publications can reasonably be called imitative of Christian models, except to the extent that they used a print technology long employed by Christians but new to Sri Lankan Buddhists. The use of print may be viewed as turning a weapon of the opponent against itself, but this society utilized the print technology not only to attack Christians but importantly to educate Buddhists in their own religion as well. In 1862, for example, the society published an edition of classical Sinhala poetry, *Kāvyasekhara*, that was edited by Guṇānanda. This poetry was originally composed in the sixteenth century by the Buddhist monk Toṭagamuwe Rāhula based on the Sattubhattha Jātaka, a story of a previous life of the Buddha. In 1877 the society published a Sinhala translation of the Pāli classical text, *Miḷinda Pañha*. This text, believed to be composed around 100 BCE, records a dialogue between

the Buddhist monk, Nāgasena and the Indo-Greek king of northwest India, Menander (Pāli: Miṇḍa). Guṇānanda edited a prior eighteenth-century Sinhala translation of the text and got his society to publish it (Abhayasundara 1994, 302). Four years after the famous Panadura debate with Christian missionaries (held in 1873), Guṇānanda and his society decided to popularize a traditional Buddhist text that deals with paradoxes and conundrums in Buddhist teachings. A more important publication of this society was Jātaka Pota (Book of Jatakas) published in 1881 (Abhayasundara 1994, 342). This was an edition of a previous Sinhala translation of the Pāli collection of five hundred fifty stories on previous lives of the Buddha, published in four volumes (Abhayasundara 1994, 342). These stories present a very traditional conception of the Buddha, who prepared himself for many eons over many births to become the Buddha. The society's choice of this text and its interest in taking on the burden of publishing such a large text show its commitment to educate Buddhists about their own religious culture.

In 1887 this society sponsored the publication of the first liturgical booklet, *Buddha-Ādahilla*, which was composed by their founder. The society continued to publish editions of this booklet for the next few decades. In 1912, the society issued its fourteenth edition (Young and Somaratna 1996, 208). The society was most active when their founder was alive. After the demise of Guṇānanda in 1890, the society worked with the founder's disciple Mohoṭṭiwatte Janānanda and even published in 1894 what was called the second part (*deveni kāṇḍaya*) of the *Buddha-Ādahilla*. However, it was not a liturgical text but a guidebook on lay morality based on the Pāli Sigālovāda-sutta.⁷ Though the society was active in reprinting *Buddha-Ādahilla* for some time, it did not continue to be an influential organization as the twentieth century progressed.

⁷ *Buddha Ādahille 2 veni Kāṇḍaya hevath Gihi Vinaya Sangrahaya*. Access no 104 X 4, The Library of the National Museum of Sri Lanka

Neverthelless, the sentiment and the role of this society seemed to have been taken up by various authors and sponsors of the liturgical booklets mentioned above. Although we cannot find other organizations that specifically promoting Buddha-vandanā, a good number of Buddhist activists from diverse backgrounds viewed this ritual as a significant instrument to revitalize Buddhism and actively produced liturgical booklets during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries

2.2 FORMALIZATION OF THE LAY PRACTICE OF BUDDHA-VANDANĀ

2.2.1 Textual Sources for the Liturgical Booklets

As noted earlier, these printed liturgical booklets were the first written materials on the lay practice of Buddha-vandanā. The booklets not only popularized the liturgy of Buddha-vandanā, but also formalized the recitations and the order of the practice. We do not find any particular ecclesiastical body or other organization that was responsible for formalizing the liturgy of Buddha-vandanā. In formalizing a lay practice for the liturgical booklets, the authors selected recitations from a number of older sources, both oral and written, and simplified for the use of lay practitioners what had been a longer and more complicated liturgy of veneration.

In examining the possible sources from which these authors drew, I found three palm leaf manuscripts from the pre-print era in which specific recitations used in the liturgical booklets are found. They are the *Baṇadahaṃ pota* (Manual of Buddhist Doctrines and Practices”), *Soḷasa pūjā* (Sixteen Offerings), and *Catubhāṇavāra pāli* (Four Recitation Sections). These manuscripts are larger collections of recitations and instructions for the use of monks in their own practices

and for teaching laypeople. Out of these various types of recitations, the authors of the liturgical booklets selected certain parts to be included in a simpler lay practice of Buddha-vandanā.

The progressive formalization of the lay liturgy will be traced in more detail in the following section. But what became its enduring form in terms of recitations is as follows:

1. Observance of the three refuges and the five precepts/eight precepts
2. Homage to the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha
3. Veneration of the relics of the Buddha
4. Dedication of offerings: flowers, lamps, scents, incense, food
5. Homage to the 28 past Buddhas
6. Homage to the 16 famous stūpas on the island
7. Recitations for meditative reflections
8. Aspiration
9. Asking forgiveness from the Buddha
10. Paying respect to parents
11. Transference of merits to devas and departed relatives

The first two items, observance of the three refuges and five precepts and paying homage to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, appear repeatedly throughout Buddhist literature. Pāli recitals for these observances are even found in early canonical texts (Khuddaka-pāṭha 1; Dīgha-nikāya i 48; iii 4; Majjhima-nikāya i 355, iii 237; Samyutta-nikāya ii 68; Anguttara-nikāya iii 1). These recitations are not limited to Buddha-vandanā. Lay Buddhists are led by monks to chant these at the beginning of many Buddhist ceremonies.

Baṇadahaṃ pota, one of the ola leaf manuscripts, was the source for the recitals that appear in the booklets in the sections on “Homage to the 16 famous stūpas on the island” (#6)

and “meditative reflections” (#7). The recitals in the liturgical booklets are the exact recitals recorded in this manuscript and in the ola-leaf copy of this manuscript held in the Danish Collection of the Copenhagen Royal Library, and are found in sections no. 15.2 and 15.4, respectively. The broader contents of this text include such items as commentary on the standard phrase of salutation to the Buddha (*namo tassa bhagavato...*); Sinhalese translation and commentaries of the *parittas*, or protective chants; the set of rules for monastic etiquette (*sekhiyā*); the Buddha’s first discourse, together with its Sinhala commentary; and the Pāli discourse on the doctrine of dependent origination, with its Sinhala translation (Godakumbura 1980, 101 ff). Even in the contemporary period, the *Bañadaham pota* remains an important guidebook for novice monks.

Recitations for the dedication of offerings were taken from another monastic handbook, the *Soḷasa pūjā*. This text is also found as a part of the above-mentioned *Bañadaham pota* in some bound ola-leaf manuscripts. It provides guidelines for the performance of a sophisticated monastic ritual of honoring the Buddha through sixteen (*soḷasa*) acts of service and offering. What we find in the liturgical booklets is an abridged version of this longer service. Shortening a longer service into a few selected offerings can be seen as an effort to simplify this ritual for lay consumption. This abridged version also indicates a change that instead of following the specific pattern of treating a living royal dignitary, offerings are made as symbolic gesture of honor. *Buddha Ādahime Kramaya* (1891) includes only three offerings: flowers, perfumed smokes, and food. *Bauddha Ādahilla* (1899) has five offerings, adding lamps and medicine (betel). *Bauddha Vandanāva* (1905) also has five offerings, with the offering of scent instead of medicine. *Bauddha Vandanāgāthā Sannaya* (Verses for Buddhist Veneration with Translation, 1925) has six offerings, adding water to the list. Eight offerings are included in the

Rathnathrayābivādanaya (Veneration of the Three Refuges), published in 1929. When the authors of these texts increased the number of items of offering, they took the items and the related passages from the *Soḷasa pūjā*. None of the liturgical booklets includes all sixteen offerings from the original text. In particular, offerings of service, such as fanning and pouring water, were not included in the liturgical booklets. What was included represented a simplified version of the monastic ritual of the *Soḷasa pūjā*.

The textual source for the section on “Homage to the 28 past Buddhas” (#5) and also the section on *paritta* found in some of the liturgical booklets was the *Catubhāṇavāra Pāli* (or *Piruvānā pothvahanse* in Sinhala), the most popular chanting book in Sri Lanka, which was first composed around the fifth century CE and was used in chanting ceremonies performed by monks. This text contains a vast number of protective chants. The authors of the liturgical booklets selected a few of the most popular chants, such as *Ratana sutta*, *Mangala sutta*, *Metta sutta* (Buddha Ādahilla 1917), *Sīvali paritta* (Buddha Ādahilla, 1908), and *Jinapañjara* (Buddha Ādahīma, 1906), to include in the booklets as part of the lay practice of Buddha-vandanā.

Written sources cannot be found for other recitations that comprise parts of Buddha-vandanā. The verses chanted for paying respect to parents (#10) and transference of merits to devas (#11) do not appear to have a textual basis. It is possible that these recitations derive instead from an oral tradition known to the authors. Noteworthy here are the recitations for paying respects to parents. It makes clear that this form of Buddha-vandanā is a lay practice. In the Theravāda Buddhist tradition only laypeople, not monks, pay respect to parents. Two Pāli verses found in these booklets for this purpose are purely for the use of lay Buddhists.

The written sources that do exist, such as the ola-leaf manuscripts for monastic practice referenced above, were kept in the libraries of temples and would not have been freely accessible

to laypeople. That is not to say that these recitations were altogether unfamiliar to lay Buddhists prior to the publication of the liturgical booklets. At least some of them were likely to have been known to lay Buddhists through oral tradition or training received from monks. However, the liturgical booklets were the first printed materials through which the recitations were formalized and widely distributed among lay Buddhists in Sri Lanka.

2.2.2 Formalization of the Liturgy

The formalization of the liturgy of Buddha-vandanā can largely be attributed to print culture itself. We do not find any particular ecclesiastical body or other organization responsible for formalizing the liturgy of the lay practice of Buddha-vandanā. Moreover, during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, there was not one single authoritative religious body. A few different Buddhist groups were active and each was trying to assume the lead of the Buddhist revival. George Bond's classification of these groups is helpful here. According to Bond (1988), three different groups of Buddhists were active in Sri Lanka in the early part of the twentieth century:

1. The Kandyan elites who sought to regain their traditional position
2. The militant reformists who followed Dharmapāla completely in his attempt to revive both Buddhism and nationalism
3. The neotraditionalists who while admiring Dharmapāla's high ideals, sought more political and less radical ways of restoring Buddhism in the modern context. (Bond 1988, 62)

Authors and sponsors of liturgical booklets seem to fit within the third category. They were attempting to rely on indigenous cultural forms to modernize Buddhism. However, these authors and sponsors did not simply aim to restore a traditional practice but to utilize Buddhavandanā in a novel way within the colonial context to enhance Buddhists' self-consciousness of their religious identity. In the absence of a strong authoritative body, each Buddhist group was able to promote their own agenda and interpretations.

The leadership among Buddhist monks was also unclear. After the fall of the Kandyan kingdom to the British power in 1815, the traditional authority of monastic leaders of the Siyam Nikāya (monastic fraternity established in 1753) in Kandy weakened (Malalgoda 1976, 82). New reformist fraternities of monks were established in the Southern Province during the early nineteenth century, importing the line of ordination from Burma as a reaction to the caste-exclusiveness of the Siyam Nikāya. Monks of these new fraternities did not accept the leadership of the Kandyan establishment of the Siyam Nikāya (Malalgoda 1976, 138). Monks who established temples around Colombo, with their access to new technology such as print and their direct dealings with British colonial administration, eventually appeared as influential authorities. Chief among them was Hikkaḍuwe Sumaṅgala (1827–1911) of the Siyam Nikāya, who in 1873 became the principal of Vidyodaya Pirivena, a premier Buddhist monastic college in Colombo. Being an erudite monk, his assistance and approval were sought by monks and laypeople when clarification on doctrinal matters and disciplinary issues were needed (Blackburn 2010, 14). Even Mohoṭṭiwatte Guṇānanda sought his assistance in preparing for debates with Christian missionaries and in editing classical Buddhist texts (Blackburn 2010, 37). Henry Steel Olcott was also very keen to get Hikkaḍuwe's recommendation for his Buddhist Catechism. He even hesitantly changed his interpretation of Nirvāṇa upon Hikkaḍuwe's request in order to get

Hikkaḍuwe's imprimatur on his catechism (Blackburn 2010, 135). Within the forty-eight liturgical booklets I found, one booklet, *Sri Saddharma Mañjarī* (1905) states on its cover page that the booklet was refined and approved by Hikkaḍuwe Sumaṅgala. There is no evidence that authors of any other booklets sought such approval from any authoritative person or organization.

Once booklets had been written and published, print technology allowed authors to interact with each other's booklets. The authors of many of these booklets refer to the existence of other booklet and state that their booklets were refined by removing "errors" found in previous booklets. For example, A.M. Perera, the author of *Pratipatti Saṅgrahaya* (1892) states in his preface that his booklet is free from errors found in other booklets. P. Andirisi Appuhamy, the author of *Buddha Ādahīma* (1902) states in an afterword that his booklet was improved by removing faults found in his previous edition. This possibility that the print technology created for checking on each other's work and improving one's own text through editing and reprinting has facilitated the formalization of the liturgy of Buddha-vandanā.

Examining the liturgical booklets in chronological order of their date of publication reveals the gradual formalization of the recitations and their order of appearance in the lay practice of Buddha-vandanā. The booklets published until the early 1890s were short and included both Pāli recitations and Sinhala poems. One of the earliest booklets in the collection of the National Museum is *Buddha Ādahīme Kramaya*, authored by the Buddhist monk Koratoṭa Sobhita in 1888. It contains sixteen pages in three-inch by five-inch format. Buddha-vandanā in this booklet includes seven sections of recitation:

1. Observance of the three refuges and the five precepts
2. Homage to the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha

3. Homage to 28 past Buddhas
4. Veneration of the relics of the Buddha
5. Aspiration and blessings
6. Transference of merits
7. Dedication of offerings

Each section is comprised of very short recitals. Sections 1, 2, 4 and 7 are in Pāli. Sections 3, 5 and 6 are in Sinhala. The Sinhala parts are poetic compositions that enable rhythmic chanting.

Over the next decade, the liturgy presented in the booklets increased in length and included more recitations. There were longer verses for each section and the appearance of more Pāli recitations, supplementing and sometimes replacing Sinhala poems. For example, in *Buddha Ādahilla* published in 1899 by S.A. Dharmadasa, there are no longer any Sinhala poems, only Pāli ones. We also find the inclusion of an additional Pāli recitation on paying homage to the Buddha. In the section on venerating relics, more recitals are added to pay homage to specific stūpas such as the Kalyāni stūpa.⁸ On the other hand, this booklet lacks recitations for two items found in the earlier booklet: paying homage to 28 past Buddhas and transference of merits.

Such differences were gradually harmonized in subsequently published booklets and by the early twentieth century had largely disappeared. What became the enduring structure of the liturgy first appeared in *Buddha Ādahima* (Worshipping the Buddha), published in 1902. Here Buddha-vandanā included the following recitations:

1. Observance of the three refuges and the five precepts/eight precepts

⁸ This is the stūpa located in the Western province, seven miles away from Colombo. Buddhists believe that the Buddha visited this place eight years after his enlightenment. This stūpa is believed to enshrine a gem-studded seat on which Buddha sat and preached during his visit.

2. Homage to the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha
3. Veneration of the relics of the Buddha
4. Dedication of offerings: flowers, lamps, scents, incense, food
5. Homage to the 28 past Buddhas
6. Homage to the 16 famous stūpas in the island
7. Recitations for meditative reflections
8. Aspiration
9. Asking forgiveness from the Buddha
10. Paying respect to parents
11. Transference of merits to devas and departed relatives

With the exception of two Sinhala recitals added in the sections of aspiration and transference of merits, all of the recitations are in Pali.

The substance of the liturgy set out in this booklet remained consistent in later booklets, though the order in which the recitations appear is sometimes different. For example, in *Buddha Ādahilla hevath Saraṇāgamana Vistaraya* (Worship of the Buddha or Enumeration of Going for Refuge, 1908), the substance of the liturgy is the same, but the order is different. In this booklet the dedication of offerings (no. 4) comes after paying homage to 28 Buddha and 16 stūpas (nos. 5 and 6).

One substantive variation that remained was the inclusion in some of the booklets of a section on *paritta*. *Paritta* is a collection of protective recitations in Pāli that were traditionally chanted by monks to evade the influences of malicious forces and physical diseases. Certain portions of these *paritta* were selected and inserted as a part of Buddha-vandanā in some of the

liturgical booklets. For example, we find Jayamangala gāthā in *Buddhopastānaya* (1905) and Ratana sutta in *Buddha Ādahilla* (1917).

However, the specific Pāli chants for each section largely remain the same in the booklets published after 1902. For example, the words to recite in the *Buddha Ādahīma* (1902) for the transference of merits to devas are

Ākāsaṭṭhā ca bhummaṭṭhā – devā nāgā mahiddhikā

puññaṃ taṃ anumoditvā – ciraṃ rakkhantu loka sāsanaṃ

(May the powerful devas and nāgas living in the sky as well as on earth rejoice and gain this merit and protect the world and the Buddhist religion for a long time.)

All of the booklets that appeared after 1902 carry this Pāli verse for the transference of merits to devas (e.g. *Bauddha Vandanāva*, 1905, 32; *Buddha Ādahilla hevath Saraṇāgamana Vistaraya*, 1908, 15; *Buddha Ādahilla* 1917, 32; *Bauddha Vandanā Gāthā Pota*, 1923, 22; *Gāthā Cintāmaṇiya*, 1930, 30). The only differences among these booklets are the inclusion of additional recitations in certain sections and the provision of Sinhala translations for the Pāli. For example, *Gāthā Cintāmaṇiya* (The Jewel of Verses, 1930) has additional recitations for venerating relics; *Buddhopastānaya* (1905) and *Bauddha Vandanā Gāthā Sannaya* (Verses for Buddhist Worship with Translation, 1925) provide the Sinhala meaning of Pāli verses.

These booklets collectively and progressively provided the structure of the lay practice of Buddha-vandanā, starting with the observance of the three refuges and five precepts; moving to recitations on paying homage to the triple gem, relics and shrines; continuing with dedication of various items of offering and meditative reflections; and ending with transference of merits. Taking these verses from different sources, the authors of the booklets brought them into one text, organized them in a particular order, and formalized them as standard passages to recite for

Buddha-vandanā. It is perhaps possible that the way in which these verses were organized followed some older oral tradition, but there is no written or otherwise surviving precedent for the structure and content of the lay liturgy that was promoted by these booklets. The liturgical booklets gave laypeople a clearly defined Buddhist practice and instructions on how to perform it, with the purpose and effect of reviving and strengthening Buddhist identity. The concerted effort behind the publication and wide distribution of these booklets thus gave them a notable place in Buddhist revival efforts during the colonial era.

The influence of these liturgical booklets in shaping the Buddhist practice of Buddha-vandanā continued in subsequent decades. For example, liturgical booklets published in the 1950s, while adding commentaries on the practice, retained the basic structure and the specific recitations found in the early booklets (e.g., *Bauddha Vandanā Gāthā* by G. Wajirawarṇasa published in 1956). Liturgical booklets published in the twenty-first century continue to follow the pattern and recitations formalized by the early booklets (e.g., *Buddha-vandanāva* by Digoda Kumara published in 2005). Though a number of variations have been introduced to the contemporary practice, such as singing new Sinhala poems, what the early printed liturgical booklets popularized still serves as the basis of the lay practice of Buddha-vandanā in contemporary Sri Lanka.

2.3 BUDDHA-VANDANĀ AS A SIGNIFIER OF BUDDHIST IDENTITY IN THE COLONIAL ERA

The promotion and formalization of Buddha-vandanā as a lay practice in the colonial period added a new layer of purpose to those traditionally ascribed to this ritual of veneration. Although

the substance of the liturgical booklets promoting the ritual was traditional, the method and manner of their use contributed to the modernization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. The booklets presented, for the first time, a simplified liturgy for the use of laypeople. New technology was used to print the booklets and make them available for distribution. And a new purpose was added to the performance of the ritual. Traditionally, according to Pāli sources and medieval classical Sinhala literature, the ritual of venerating the Buddha in the pre-colonial era was primarily performed for two purposes: to gather merit and to express one's gratitude to the Buddha. The promotion of the ritual through these liturgical booklets added the new purpose of making the liturgy a signifier of Buddhist identity in the colonial era.

Traditionally, Pāli canonical texts, such as the *Vimānavatthu* and *Apadāna* and their commentaries, refer to the performance of Buddha-vandanā as a great source of merit. Sinhala medieval literature, such as the *Pūjāvaliya* and *Thūpawamsa*, presents the ritual as a means to express devotional gratitude. The Pāli texts and commentaries use stories to illustrate the merit and spiritual reward to be gained from the performance of Buddha-vandanā. There is, for example, the story of Elephant Vimana in the *Vimānavatthu* telling of the potency of Buddha-vandanā in producing great merit (Vv 55–56). In this story the monk Mahāmoggallāna, who upon seeing a divine being with an all-white heavenly elephant as his vehicle, asks, “What meritorious deed did you do when you were human? Due to what are you in such shining majesty?” The divine being answers that with his own hands he offered eight flowers to a stūpa of the Buddha Kassapa and that the merit gained by this offering, made with a gladdened mind, resulted in his great and divine majesty (Vv 56). Similarly, the *Apadāna* carries many stories about simple offerings to the Buddha, such as sandal paste, flowers and even a small flag made from the upper garment of a poor laborer, that generated merits powerful enough to lead to many

joys and glories in the divine realm, including the attainment of psychic powers and enlightenment (Ap I, 70–73). As stated more directly in the *Vimānavatthu*,

The Buddhas arise, indeed, for the good of the many. By making offerings [to the Buddhas], donors go to heaven (Vv 44).⁹

Sinhala medieval texts such as the *Pūjāvaliya* and *Thūpawamsa* portray the ritual of venerating the Buddha as a devotional expression of gratitude. According to these texts, acts of ritualized veneration and making offerings to the Buddha are done in gratitude for what the Buddha accomplished in his life and for help received from the Buddha. Stephen Berkwitz, who highlights this function of Buddha-vandanā in Sinhala medieval literature, argues that offerings made to the Buddha serve to express appreciation for the religious attainments and divine prosperity available to those who cultivate a proper mental attitude towards the Buddha (Berkwitz 2012, 201). Charles Hallisey similarly notes that instances of *pūjā* found in Sinhala medieval literature constitute acts of gratitude springing from an awareness of how one was benefited by the Buddha (Hallisey 1988, 278 ff). In Hallisey’s analysis of the diverse forms of honoring the Buddha in medieval Sinhala literature, material offerings made out of gratitude are classified as higher forms of honoring.

At this level in the scale, *pūjā* is performed not because of some vague and impersonal idea that certain actions are good or because they are profitable, but out of a discernment of one’s own personal indebtedness to the Buddha. (Hallisey 1988, 295)

These traditional elements of accumulating merit and expressing gratitude were retained in the lay practice of Buddha-vandanā promoted by liturgical booklets. While keeping these traditional attitudes, the authors of the booklets added a new meaning to the ritual in the colonial

⁹ *Vimānavatthu* 44: *Bahunnaṃ vata atthāya – uppajjanti tathāgatā; Yattha kāraṃ karithvāna - saggaṃ gacchanti dāyakā.*

context, promoting it as an affirmative assertion of Buddhist identity within the colonial context. As a part of the larger project of reviving Buddhism, authors and sponsors of these booklets aimed to address the need to educate Buddhists about their Buddhist tradition for the purpose of reconstructing and strengthening a sense of religious and cultural identity. While reformist Buddhist activists attempted to do the same by spreading knowledge of Buddhist doctrines and positive representations of Buddhism, conservative-minded authors of these booklets were interested in educating Buddhist followers on specific Buddhist practices and on how to behave as Buddhists in ritual contexts. These authors in their efforts to enhance the self-consciousness of Buddhists have attempted to define who is a Buddhist and recast the practice of *Buddha-vandanā* as a mark of a good Buddhist.

Reasserting collective identities, particularly religious identities, was a common trend among colonized subjects of South Asia in response to British colonial rule in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. With regard to revivalist movements against British colonial powers in both Sri Lanka and India, B. G. Gokhale remarks, “The search for modernization and a reaffirmation of religious identity were two powerful forces in the making of twentieth century South Asia” (Gokhale 1999, 33). Similarly, George Bonds (1988) characterizes the Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka as a struggle between responding to modern conditions and maintaining Buddhist identity. As Bond explains, changes brought about by the British colonial rule in political, social, educational and religious spheres in Sri Lanka resulted in the collapse of traditional village-based social structures, of royal patronage for Buddhist institutions, and of the role of Buddhist monks as educators, all of which had functioned to maintain the cohesiveness of traditional communities (Bond 1988, 14).

While those traditional structures were collapsing, local elites in Christian missionary schools were being exposed to education based on a thoroughly Western curriculum, to Western fashions of dress and to Western styles of living (Bond 1988, 16–18). The collapsing of traditional structures and simultaneous arising of these Western influences disrupted traditional notions of social and religious identity, creating the need for indigenous people to rethink and redefine these questions of identity. Bond goes on to describe the eventual disillusionment of the educated elite with the British system, resulting from the realization that the British would never allow them to become full partners in British society, even though they were trained in a Western worldview. As Bond writes, “Cast adrift and feeling rootless, these educated Ceylonese began to search for their identity and self-respect....[They], although estranged from their Buddhist heritage, began to recognize it as the key to their identity” (Bond 1988, 22). This sense of lost identity was not limited to the educated elites. The collapse of traditional social structures and leadership was experienced by all classes of the population. The response to this sense of lost cultural identity, facilitated by the government’s adoption of a policy of neutrality towards religion, was a reaching out again towards Buddhism as the key to identity. Thus we see the arising of activist groups and their efforts to begin reconstructing a native sense of religious identity.

We should also note the continuous efforts of Christian missionary groups during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to convert the local population while denouncing traditional religions of the country. Claims and criticisms popularized by Christian missionary groups through print media and public talks also made local people reflect on their own traditional beliefs and practices. People who did not convert started to look at their own religious tradition seriously. While many ethnic Sinhalese were constructing a renewed Buddhist identity,

Tamils in Jaffna reasserted their Saiva Hindu identity against Christian missionary activities. For example, in the mid-nineteenth century Arumugala Navalar (1822–1879) pioneered a movement to reassert Saiva identity among the Tamil population in Jaffna (Hudson 1992).

Buddhist activists like Dharmapāla defined Buddhist identity by presenting a glorious history of Sinhala Buddhists based on ethnic myths of the chronicle *Mahāwamsa* and archaeological ruins of the country (Bond 1988, 55). These efforts connected Buddhist identity to ethnic Sinhala identity and set the stage for Buddhist nationalism. Noteworthy projects for reasserting Buddhist identity included calls for changing the Christian names adopted by many urban Buddhists during the colonial period to Buddhist names and a campaign to promote a traditional dress code among Sinhala Buddhists (Ivan 2007, 143). Various Buddhist practices such as *Perahāra* (religious processions) and the celebration of the Vesak festival were promoted not only as religious pursuits but also as ways of expressing Buddhist identity (Ivan 2007, 131). In 1885 the Colombo Committee, comprised of prominent lay and monastic Buddhist activists, designed a Buddhist flag to exhibit Buddhist identity in public spaces (Deegalle 2011).

In this context, authors of the above liturgical booklets presented the devotional ritual *Buddha-vandanā* as a signifier of Buddhist identity and learning to perform this ritual as a central part of training to be Buddhists. Knowledge of how to perform *Buddha-vandanā* came to be viewed as an essential characteristic of a Buddhist. People who did not have knowledge of *Buddha-vandanā* and related practices, such as observing the three refuges and five precepts, were regarded as Buddhists in name only. Concern about the lack of this knowledge among Sri Lankan Buddhists was a motivating factor for the authors of the liturgical booklets. Andiris Appuhamy, the lay author of *Buddha Ādahīma*, wrote the following in his 1902 preface:

There are female and male followers among Buddhist religionists [*Buddhagamkara*] who even now practice religion and engage in worshiping and making offerings while not knowing the proper way to do such practices. They do not know even how to observe the three refuges and five precepts. Because of this, I wrote this book so they could learn these practices quickly. (14)

Some thirty years later, the monk-author of the liturgical booklet, *Buddhāgama Ādahīma* (Practice of Buddhist Religion, 1933) expressed the same concern in his preface:

It is often seen that Buddhists currently living on the island of Sri Lanka follow their religion (*āgama*) wrongly due to their own ignorance. On account of this, they cannot receive the expected benefits [of their religious practice] as they wish. Therefore, I present this proper way of following the religion [Buddhism] in brief as a gift of Dhamma to educate those people. (1)

In educating Buddhists, these conservatively minded Buddhist activists regarded the knowledge of Buddhist practices like Buddha-vandanā as more fundamental than the knowledge of Buddhist doctrines. For them, Buddhists should be educated in those simple Buddhist practices before teaching them Buddhist doctrines. In a pamphlet titled *Saddharmovada Dipanī* (Exposition of Instructions on Good Doctrines, 1932) a Buddhist monk expressed this attitude:

How pure the religious knowledge should be among Buddhists living in a Buddhist country like Lanka! But how many Buddhist men and women are there who properly know how to behave when visiting a temple?! ... The number of people who are Buddhists only in name is immense. They do not know even simple practices, not to speak of subtle teachings. The reason for this is that Buddhists do not learn their native religion, that is, Buddhism. (1)

In some booklets, we also begin to see encouragement to perform Buddha-vandanā on a daily basis as a marker of Buddhist identity. These books particularly emphasize the regular observation of the three refuges, which is the first part of Buddha-vandanā. The author of the liturgical booklet, *Buddha Ādahīme Kramaya* (1892) states:

A complete Buddhist (*Buddhāgamkārayā*) is a one who recites, “I go to the Buddha for refuge, the Dhamma for refuge, and the Sangha for refuge” and takes refuge in the triple gem in the morning and evening. Others are not Buddhists simply because they say that they are Buddhists or visit Kelaniya temple or other shrines once a year to offer flowers and lamps. Even if one performs all kinds of wholesome activities, he is not a Buddhist [without doing the above practice daily]. (1–2)

Similarly, the monk-author of the *Rathnathrayābi vādanaya* (Veneration of the Triple Gem, 1929) also encourages Buddhists to perform Buddha-vandanā daily.

Having read this booklet from beginning to end and having memorized what needs to be familiarized, one should venerate the triple gem at least twice a day as a faithful devotee. (10)

We also find in these booklets the introduction of two new terms to refer to Buddhism and Buddhists beginning from 1888. Buddhism is referred to as “Buddhāgama” and Buddhists as “Buddhāgamkārayo” (Cover page of *Buddha Ādahīme Kramaya* by Korathota Sobhita). Here we find one of the earliest appearances of the word “*āgama*,” the Sinhala translation of the English word “religion.” “*Āgama*” in the sense of religion is new to Sinhala usage. In pre-colonial times the term “*sāsana*” was used to refer to Buddhism as a socio-temporal phenomenon. The term “*āgama*” originally meant “sacred texts” or “sacred tradition.” It was Christian missionaries who arrived on the island in the early-nineteenth century who chose the term, “*āgama*,” as the Sri

Lankan equivalent of the word “religion,” and then used it to refer to both Christianity (“Kristiāni āgama”) and Buddhism (“Buddhāgama”) (Malalgoda 1997, 72–73). The liturgical booklets are the first instances where the word “Buddhāgama” and its variants were used by Buddhists as self-referential terms. The ritual of Buddha-vandanā is presented in these booklets as a practice that all “Buddhāgamkārayo” [Buddhist religionists] should do.

Hence, we can see that Buddha-vandanā, especially as promoted in these liturgical booklets, was a key part of reconstructing and reasserting Buddhist identity within the colonial context. Another good example is the liturgical booklet, *Sri Saddharma Mañjari* (1905), which provides instructions and liturgy in a form of a catechism. The booklet starts with this set of questions and answers.

Q: What religionist (*āgamkārayek*) are you?

A: I am a Buddhist (*Buddhāgamkārayeki*)

Q: Who is a Buddhist?

A: One who believes in Tipiṭaka [Pāli Canon], takes refuge in the triple gem and practices accordingly. (1)

From there the text goes on to provide the recitations for Buddha-vandanā. Practicing Buddha-vandanā accordingly allows one to answer, “I am a Buddhist.”

This adoption of new self-referent terms and redefinition of Buddhist identity in colonial Sri Lanka can be compared with similar processes occurring in other colonized Buddhist countries, particularly in Burma. Alexey Kirichenko (2009) offers an illuminating account on how the category of “religion” was indigenized in Burma during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. He particularly shows how the new term “*botdabada*” (“religion of the Buddha”), originally introduced by Christian missionaries, came to be used as an overarching

self-referent term for all Buddhist adherents replacing the precolonial term “*thathanadaw*,” which resembled a hierarchy of observances by semiautonomous communities differing in pursuits rather than a strictly homogenous community (Kirichenko 2009, 36). He argues that the indigenization of this overarching term “*botdabada*” enabled the creation of a new identity for a community of corereligionists that was much broader than other terms developed by the precolonial indigenous thinking (Kirichenko 2009, 38). In the context of Sri Lanka, the indigenization of the term, “*āgama*” has played a similar role. Authors of these liturgical booklets have started this process of indigenization making the practice of Buddha-vandanā as a central marker of this new identity.

Buddha-vandanā was promoted not only as a signifier of Buddhist identity but also as an important component for training people to be Buddhists. This is quite clear in the efforts of these Buddhist activists to teach Buddha-vandanā to children. Liturgical booklets were produced for and widely distributed among children. For example, Andiris Appuhamy, the author of the *Buddha Ādahima* (1902), explained in his afterword of the booklet the appropriateness of his work for teaching children the practice of Buddha-vandanā. Addressing parents, he wrote, “This booklet will be very beneficial for those who like to teach their children the way of practicing religion from childhood” (p.14). He further recommended his booklet to Buddhist schools for teaching this practice to students. He finally suggested that his liturgical booklet would be a good gift to be given to children.

The interest to teach Buddha-vandanā to children is most clearly visible in the production of liturgical booklets just for them. In 1905 the Buddhist Theosophical Society produced a liturgical booklet with the title *Buddhopastānaya* (Attending to the Buddha) for students in

schools run by Buddhist organizations. The title page states that the booklet, “was compiled by D.S.S. Wickramaratna for the use of students in Buddhist schools.”

The Buddhist Theosophical Society, established by Henry Steel Olcott, played a very important role in starting Buddhist schools for children, breaking the monopoly that Christian missionary groups exercised over public education until the 1880s. These Buddhist schools were modeled after Christian missionary schools and replaced Christianity with Buddhism in the curriculum. It was Buddhist doctrine, not practice, that Olcott himself was interested in teaching students. Hence, he composed his Buddhist Catechism in 1885 to be used as a textbook in these schools. However, twenty years later some members of the Buddhist Theosophical Society, such as the author of the *Buddhopastānaya*, decided to teach not only Buddhist doctrines, but also Buddhist devotional practices to students of their schools. The practice they selected to teach was Buddha-vandanā.

Another liturgical booklet produced just for children is the *Vandanā Gāthā Pota* (Book of Verses for Veneration), which was published in 1920 for the use of students in Sunday schools in Horana. The booklet is only six pages long, the shortest text I found among the liturgical booklets published in the same period. The structure of *Buddha-vandanā* is significantly shortened in this book. It contains short recitations for only five items: (1) paying homage to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha; (2) offering flowers to the Buddha; (3) venerating the Bodhi tree; (4) transferring merits to devas and departed relatives; and (5) aspiration (to have good associations until the attainment of enlightenment). This short booklet appears to have been produced for the use in a shortened performance of Buddha-vandanā performed in Sunday schools before classes began.

In promoting Buddha-vandanā among children, Buddhist activists made efforts to widely distribute liturgical booklets, making sure that children had access to them. To ensure wide access, liturgical booklets were published for free distribution to children. As indicated on its title page, *Vandanā Gāthā Pota* was such a publication. The previously mentioned *Sri Saddharma Mañjarī*, in a first edition of 10,000 copies, was also printed for free distribution among students at Buddhist schools. The announcement of the booklet publication states:

This book called *Sri Saddharma Mañjarī* is given free of charge to *upāsakās* and to students in Buddhist schools and government schools who have completed reading the *Bauddha Prashna Mañjariya*. (iv)

The announcement further explained the way these booklets could be obtained. Students were to send a letter from the manager of their school and stamps for postage. The booklets would then be delivered to them (*Sri Saddharma Mañjari* 1905, iv). These efforts of the authors and sponsors of the liturgical booklets indicate that they considered knowledge of Buddha-vandanā as an essential part of Buddhist education and for training children to be Buddhists.

2.4 PROMOTING DEVOTIONAL BUDDHISM

Efforts to popularize Buddha-vandanā during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries began as an attempt to promote devotional Buddhism within the larger collective project of reviving Buddhism in the colonial context. Such a promotion of devotional Buddhism can be seen as a response to some rationalist reforms and interpretations of Buddhism that were surfacing during this period. Reformist Buddhist activists led by Henry Steel Olcott and Anagārika Dharmapāla were promoting a rationalized form of Buddhism through new Buddhist

institutions and organizations that emphasized the doctrinal study of Buddhism and Buddhist practices modelled after Western forms. They were interested in promoting positive representations of Buddhism by making it appear rationalist, scientific, and appropriate to the modern age. In those efforts, the devotional aspects of Buddhism were downplayed. The authors and sponsors of these liturgical booklets did not think that neglecting Buddhist devotional practices was helpful to revive or modernize Buddhism. They saw devotional practices like Buddha-vandanā as a very significant part of the process of reviving and modernizing Buddhism in the colonial context. In fact, they postulated that the way to revive Buddhism was to make so-called Buddhists authentic Buddhist followers by teaching them the practice of devotional veneration of the Buddha.

The pioneer in the promotion of devotional Buddhism in the colonial period was the conservative monk Migeṭṭuwatte Guṇānanda, the author of the first printed liturgical booklet, the *Buddha Ādahilla* (1887). This booklet, in the words of Richard Young and Somaratna, was “an expression of devotional Buddhism in terms of a cult based on worship at temples, the most ordinary setting in which the Sinhalese enacted their identity as Buddhists” (1996, 208). They argue that Guṇānanda promoted Buddha-vandanā as a part of his response opposing Olcott’s definition of the Buddha and the seeming disregard for devotional practices of reformist Buddhists in general. In his *Buddhist Catechism*, Olcott referred to the Buddha as the “Kapilavastu Sage” (Olcott 1881, ii). In answering the question, “Was he a man?,” Olcott further states: “Yes; but the wisest, noblest and the most holy being...” (Olcott 1908 [1881], 2). This was not the traditional conception of the Buddha in Sri Lanka. To counteract Olcott’s definition, Guṇānanda composed his own catechism in the Sinhala language in 1887 (the same year he produced the *Buddha Ādahilla*) called *Bauddha Praśnaya* (Questions Relating to

Buddhism). In contrast to Olcott's emphasis on doctrine Guṇānanda highlighted the importance of all three refuges:

Q: Do Buddhists take refuge only in the Dhamma [doctrines of the Buddha]?

A: No. They take refuge in the Triple Gem

Q: Why do Buddhists take refuge in the Triple Gem?

A: Because Buddha is above all other beings; because the Dhamma is higher than all other truths; and because the Saṅgha has attained enlightenment.

Q: Why is the Buddha above all other beings?

A: Because he fulfilled the Ten Perfections (*daśapāramitā*)

(Translated and quoted in Young and Somaratna (1996, 207))

Here we find an attempt to bring the Buddha to the forefront and to present the Buddha as an embodiment of superlative virtues and a great personage worthy of veneration by all beings. Guṇānanda wanted to promote a devotional concept of the Buddha showing that the Buddha was more than a wise human sage. Young and Somaratna comment on the above quote: “[T]he emphasis of Guṇānanda's is on the Buddha as an object of veneration or even worship, as if he existed at the apex of a pantheon or a cosmic hierarchy because of his virtues” (1996, 207). While his *Bauddha Praśnaya* asserts the greatness of the Buddha, his *Buddha Ādahilla* provides the guidelines for devotional veneration of the Buddha.

Young and Somaratna claim that Guṇānanda's ideas had been “swept away as society responded creatively to Ceylon's modernization.” The full quote is as follows:

While by no means obsolete in the devotional posture toward Buddhism that they inculcated, *Bauddha Praśnaya* and *Buddha Ādahilla* were simply traditionalist and reactionary in inspiration. They were therefore swept away as society responded

creatively to Ceylon's modernization and employed new strategies for finding meaning in Buddhism to cope with these upheavals. (1996, 209)

However, the series of liturgical booklets preserved in the library of the National Museum demonstrates that the traditionalist sentiments and devotional attitudes expressed in the *Bauddha Praśnaya* and *Buddha Ādahilla* were not entirely swept away. To the contrary, such devotional attitudes were carried forward in the liturgical booklets and in the ritual practice they prescribed, Buddha-vandanā. Many of the booklets published in subsequent decades were inspired by Guṇānanda's *Buddha Ādahilla* and even adopted the same title.

These liturgical booklets communicated a strong devotional attitude towards the Buddha through various items of the liturgy. The conception of the Buddha portrayed in the verse of these liturgical booklets is typically traditional and in accord with what Guṇānanda attempted to promote. A stanza that appears in a number of liturgical booklets to pay homage to the Buddha reads:

One who is like a wish granting tree to all beings

One who has the foot, which was attended by devas and brahmas

One who defeated Māra the greedy and foolish one

I worship the Buddha who is the lord to the three worlds¹⁰

It is clear that the Buddha who appears in this stanza is very different from Olcott's idea of the "Kapilavastu Sage" and other humanistic interpretations of the Buddha. This is Guṇānanda's Buddha, who was not swept away by Sri Lanka's modernizing tides but remained embedded in Buddha-vandanā, the singular ritual practice promoted by conservative activists. As we have

¹⁰ *Sabbaloka sattakāya kapparukkha sannibhaṃ - deva brahma chappadāhi sevitappadaṃbujam; Lola bāla mattakuñjarāri kesariṃ jitaṃ - taṃ namāmi buddhamuttamaṃ tiloka nāyakaṃ*. See *Buddha Ādahīme Kramaya* 1891, 15; *Bauddha Vandanāva* 1905, 13; *Buddha Ādahilla hevath Saranāgamaṇa Vistaraya* 1908, 13.

seen in the case of the Buddhist Theosophical Society, this practice, moreover, was adopted even by rationalist reformers as a means of reviving Buddhist identity. Through the booklets and the practice they prescribed, this devotional attitude towards the Buddha was more deeply embedded in the revival of Buddhist identity than the rationalist or humanist view.

Related to the devotional conception of the Buddha is the veneration of the Buddha's relics. Within the Theravāda tradition, such relics were believed to represent the continued presence of the Buddha even after his passing away (Trainor 1997, 152). The booklets published by conservative activists gave a prominence to the veneration of relics. We find verses to recite for the veneration of relics in all liturgical booklets. For example, *Bauddha Vandanāva* (1905) by B.D. James Appuhamy provides eight stanzas to venerate bodily relics and relics of objects closely associated with the Buddha (e.g., his bowl and Bodhi tree), sixteen stanzas to venerate specific stūpas, three stanzas to venerate the tooth relic, and two stanzas to venerate Sripāda (the Buddha's foot print on Adam's peak).

Authors of these booklets continued to educate Buddhists on these traditional and devotional practices, popularizing specific recitations for those practices. They appeared to have aimed at Buddhists who were moving away from such devotional practices. We find references to Buddhists who lacked interest in performing such practices due to the influence of rationalist interpretations of Buddhism promoted during this period. In a monthly periodical titled *Satyadharmodaya* (Dawn of the True Doctrine), the Buddhist monk Karadana Jinaratana identifies three groups of Sinhala people living in the colonial era. The first are those who have given up Buddhist customs completely and converted to Christianity. The second group consists of people who have adopted new Buddhist customs while rejecting traditional ones; and the third group is made up of those who follow Buddhism according to ancient customs

(*Satyadharmodaya* 5: 5 November 1920, 35). The author is most critical of the second group who have adopted new Buddhist customs. He comments as follows about them:

They hold wrong views, such that it is wrong to venerate stūpas with offerings of flowers and lamps. They say such practices are the activities of foolish old ladies, that it is not necessary to go to temple to listen to sermons, and that reading a Buddhist book at home is sufficient. They see religion as something that should be secretly kept in the mind.

(*Satyadharmodaya* 5: 5 November 1920, 37)¹¹

We see here how this monk is critical of reformist ideas that internalize religious practices, emphasize individual textual study and disregard devotional practices. The monk encourages readers to remove such wrong views, follow traditional customs and engage in devotional practices such as faithfully visiting temples. The above comments by this monk reflect the attitudes of the authors and sponsors of the liturgical booklets on Buddha-vandanā. They were attempting to promote devotional practices in response to rationalist tendencies of reformist Buddhist activists such as Henry Steel Olcott and members of Buddhist Theosophical Society. However, it should be stressed that they were not trying to simply restore the traditional practice of Buddha-vandanā. They simplified it to make it suitable for laypeople and they reinterpreted it as a principal marker of Buddhist identity. They aimed to use Buddha-vandanā to address the concern in the colonial period that many Sri Lankans did not know how to be Buddhist.

¹¹ “*Chaithyasthānayanhi malpahan pidīm vandanamānādī sirith itukirīm ādiya vāradiya, evā nokatayutu mōda ammanḍilāge vādaya, baṇa āsīmata pansal nogiyāta gedara baṇapota beluwāma āta. Āgama hite pamaṇak ātiviya yutu rahasakya...*”

2.5 CONCLUSION

The history of printed liturgical booklets on Buddha-vandanā is the beginning of a story different than the one generally found in contemporary scholarship about the Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka. The liturgical booklets show that it was not just Western-inflected rationalism and practices that were used in the colonial era to revive Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Traditional Buddhist practices also played a significant role in the Buddhist revival during the colonial era and beyond, principally the indigenous devotional ritual of Buddha-vandanā, which during the late colonial era was standardized, simplified, and recast as a practice to assert one's adherence to Buddhism and to communicate Buddhist identity to the younger generation.

This account of promoting Buddha-vandanā during the late colonial period helps us to understand the diversity of efforts to revive Buddhism in Sri Lanka. It particularly enables us to appreciate the agency of Buddhist actors involved in the Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka. The idea of Protestant Buddhism implies the lack of agency of Buddhist actors, since it implies a wholesale imitation of Western models or adaptation of Buddhism to Western standards in an effort to revive and modernize Buddhism in Sri Lanka. As we have seen above, however, the efforts of Buddhist activists were not limited to such imitation or passive adaptation. They responded to their circumstances creatively, making use of traditional and indigenous practices – primarily among them Buddha-vandanā.

The promotion of this ritual, Buddha-vandanā, had a lasting impact on the way that Buddhism subsequently evolved in Sri Lanka. Formalization and popularization of this practice during the colonial era set the stage for further manifestations and utilizations of this ritual in the following decades. Strategic spatial shifts in performance of the practice, and production of unconsecrated icons to facilitate its performance in non-religious contexts, gave Buddha-vandanā

an important role in modernizing Buddhism not according to rationalist norms, but through the innovative and non-traditional use of indigenous forms.

By the late-twentieth century, Buddha-vandanā had become the most frequently performed Buddhist practice in Sri Lanka, spreading to many venues, including not only temples, but also homes, public schools, hospitals, workplaces, prisons, and roadside shrines. My field research, upon which the next chapters are based, reveals the proliferation of this ritual in contemporary Buddhist society in Sri Lanka and how it has been strategically positioned by activists to address modern concerns arising from such contemporary trends as globalization, secularization and the active propagation of other religions.

3.0 LAY RELIGIOUS ACTIVISM AND DOMESTIC BUDDHA-VANDANĀ

As the result of the formalization and promotion of Buddha-vandanā in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, this ritual practice has over succeeding decades become an integral part of the lives of lay Buddhists. The spread of this ritual to non-religious contexts giving more opportunities for lay Buddhists to practice it has been a prominent feature of modern Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Beginning in the twentieth century, with the rise of literacy and the availability of liturgical booklets to provide instruction in the ritual, Buddha-vandanā moved into non-religious contexts, including homes, the subject of this chapter, and schools, which will be discussed in the following chapter. The expansion of this practice to different contexts changed the way Buddhism is practiced in Sri Lanka. Bringing this ritual into the domestic sphere was particularly significant. It gave lay Buddhists the freedom to organize and perform this ritual as part of a daily domestic routine and more opportunities to ritually encounter the Buddha. This enhanced religious engagement by lay Buddhists reveals an important aspect of lay religious activism that scholars have recognized as a hallmark of Buddhist modernism in Sri Lanka.

Current scholarship on lay religious activism in Sri Lanka, however, has focused on increased lay participation in textual studies, meditation and social services. In analyzing the increased religious engagement of lay Buddhists in Sri Lanka, many scholars have focused almost entirely on the impact of Anagārika Dharmapāla's writings and life example in shaping lay Buddhist practice. They termed the religious activism attributed to Dharmapāla's example as

“this worldly asceticism,” which meant striving for nirvana while remaining in this world, without renouncing the obligations of lay life. Textual study, meditation and social welfare activities were recognized as important aspects of this asceticism.

With their focus on these practices that were seen as inspired by Western or Protestant models, scholars failed to note the phenomenon of increased lay participation in the devotional practice of Buddha-vandanā during the same period. What this phenomenon had in common with “this worldly asceticism”, – in particular, its aspects of textual study, meditation and social service – was that it similarly loosened the ties to traditional religious instruction, structure and hierarchy and gave lay practitioners both greater freedom and greater responsibility.

This chapter argues that the spread of Buddha-vandanā to homes during the twentieth century was an important aspect of lay religious activism that has not been recognized in previous scholarship. It will show that the appearance of altars in homes and the rise of the domestic practice of Buddha-vandanā represented significant changes in the way Buddhism was practiced in Sri Lanka. It will further show how the practice of Buddha-vandanā was promoted by Buddhist activists throughout the twentieth century as a way of bringing Buddhism closer to laypeople. It reveals how print technology, changes in material culture in the twentieth century and the improvement of housing conditions facilitated the spread of domestic veneration of the Buddha. The chapter argues that bringing the practice of Buddha-vandanā into the home significantly advanced the revival and modernization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, giving laypeople a way to have more frequent experiential engagements with Buddhism and the freedom to organize their religious practice in personal ways that best suited their increasingly modern lives.

3.1 LAY RELIGIOUS ACTIVISM: REVIEW OF EXTANT SCHOLARSHIP

All scholarly accounts of Buddhist modernism in Sri Lanka recognize the active participation of laypeople in pursuing religious goals as an important element of modernization (e.g., Ames 1973; Berchert 1966; Berkwitz 2010; Bond 1988; Gombrich 2006 [1988]; Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988; Malalgoda 1976; Swearer 1970). Traditionally the role of the laity was simply to support monks and monasteries. Beginning in the twentieth century, as part of the revival and modernization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, lay Buddhists began to assume roles that had previously been reserved for monks, such as studying Buddhist texts and practicing meditation. Lay practitioners were encouraged to take individual responsibility for their own religious pursuits and for the welfare of Buddhism in general. Consistent with the lens through which they viewed most aspects of the Buddhist revival, Gombrich and Obeyesekere see this as Protestant Buddhism, stating,

The hallmark of Protestant Buddhism... is its view that the layman should permeate his life with his religion; that he should strive to make Buddhism permeate his whole society; and that he can and should try to reach nirvāṇa. (Gombrich & Obeyesekere 1988, 216)

This sense of responsibility was also coupled with a form of independence from traditional authorities. Lay Buddhists became less reliant on monks to choose and direct their religious practices. Stephen Berkwitz makes this point in his analysis of Buddhist modernism in Sri Lanka.

Its salient feature is said to revolve around the efforts of laypeople to permeate their lives with Buddhism, while not depending upon the monkhood or traditional rituals but instead internalizing and universalizing the teachings of the Buddha to emphasize individual striving towards nirvana. (Berkwitz 2012, 34)

In analyzing this new ethos, scholars have relied principally on the influence of Anagārika Dharmapāla, the most prominent Buddhist reformer of the early twentieth century. Both Richard Gombrich (1988) and Gananath Obeyesekere (1970; 1972) use the figure of Dharmapala to explain the kind of lay religious activism that developed in modern Sri Lanka. His interpretations and admonitions are taken as the basis for modern lay practice of Buddhism, and his status as *anagārika* (“homeless”) is viewed as a model that shaped lay religious life. Dharmapāla was born Don David Hewavitarana in 1864. In 1881, at the age of seventeen, he changed his name and adopted the lifestyle of *anagārika* (Harvey 2013, 379). *Anagārika* is a status between a monk and a layman. It is a form of renunciation that follows the eight precepts.¹² But it is not a formal ordination, which involves shaving the head, taking monastic vows and wearing saffron robes. Dharmapāla wore a special vestment, a white robe that was different from monks’ robes. The status of *anagārika* claimed by Dharmapala was an innovation in Theravada Buddhism, representing both a serious religious commitment and a continuing engagement with mundane activities in the political and social spheres.

Obeyesekere preferred to see this as a Protestant model. He comments, “[T]he *anagārika* symbol is the Sinhala Buddhist analogue of an early Calvinist type of reformism with its increasing this worldly asceticism” (Obeyesekere 1972, 70). While the status of *anagārika* was not adopted by many lay Buddhists, Obeyesekere argues that Dharmapala’s example left an irreversible impact on the lay Buddhist practice in Sri Lanka.

His significance for contemporary Buddhists is however not as a person but as a symbol of (a) a Sinhalese Buddhist rejuvenated Ceylon (b) an asceticism directed towards this-

¹² Three more precepts are added to the usual five precepts: refraining from eating in the afternoon, refraining from entertainments and beautification of the body, and refraining from using luxurious high seats and beds. Furthermore, the third precept of the five precepts is changed from refraining from sexual misconduct to refraining from any form of sexual activities.

worldly activity. His transformation is much like the transformation of Lincoln, the individual, into the symbolic Lincoln. (Obeyesekere 1972, 70)

Lay religious activism based on Dharmapāla's example is described by Obeyesekere as "this-worldly asceticism" or "inner worldly asceticism." As elements of this asceticism Obeyesekere identifies a greater commitment to doctrine, adherence to a rigid moral code, the practice of meditation and involvement in social and political activities (1972, 73). Gombrich (1988) and George Bond (1988) explain the various manifestations of these elements in the lives of lay Buddhists in Sri Lanka.

3.1.1 Textual Study

Bond recognizes "an accent on scripturalism" as a basic theme common to all groups of Buddhist activists who were involved in the Buddhist revival (1988, 34). When new interpretations of Buddhism were presented, these lay activists turned to Buddhist texts to find authoritative foundations for their interpretations. The growing engagement of these lay practitioners with Buddhist doctrine was a result of the availability of print copies of Buddhist texts and the rise of literacy among lay Buddhists. In the pre-modern era Buddhist texts were in the form of palm leaf manuscripts, and they were kept in monastic libraries under the care of monks. Laypeople were only able to study them with the permission and guidance of monks. Usually these texts were read in a communal setting, and laypeople learned them mainly through listening rather than reading. With the arrival of print technology many of these texts were reproduced in large numbers. Around the turn of the twentieth century educated laypeople got the unprecedented opportunity to begin reading Buddhist texts on their own.

Gombrich also points to the appearance of English translations of Pāli canonical texts beginning in the early-twentieth century through Rhys David's Pāli Text Society, which gave English-educated laypeople direct access to Buddhist scriptures (1988, 193). With these advances textual study became a lay Buddhist practice in modern Sri Lanka. Educated laypeople had access to Buddhist texts and the freedom to interpret them. With this opportunity, Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988) note that lay Buddhists not only started reading Buddhist texts and studying Buddhist doctrine, they also began to teach and write books on Buddhist doctrines. These scholars particularly refer to laypeople who became teachers of Buddhism and even teachers of *Abhidhamma*, the system of philosophical analysis of Buddhist doctrines (Gombrich & Obeyesekere 1988, 235). The emergence of prominent lay Buddhist intellectuals such as Professor G.P. Malalasekera (1899–1973) and Professor K.N. Jayatilleke (1920–1970) in 1960s, both of whom produced doctrinal treatises, marked the highpoint of this trend (Gombrich & Obeyesekere 1988, 222).

3.1.2 Moral Code

Adherence to a moral code has also been recognized by scholars as a significant part of rationalist revival efforts to elevate a lay life into a more religious life. Obeyesekere points out that Buddhism does not have a systematic moral code for lay followers, as it has for monks and nuns. For lay practitioners, what Buddhism offers are general guidelines for an ethical life through the texts like the *Sigālovāda sutta* (1972, 70). In 1898 Dharmapāla laid out a systematic code of lay ethics through his pamphlet published in Sinhala with the title *Gihi Dina Chariyāwa* (The Daily Code for the Laity). The lay life is minutely regulated in this pamphlet, with a total of

two hundred rules covering areas such as dressing, eating, behavior in public gatherings, and visiting temples. Obeyesekere notes that Dharmapāla addressed the literate Sinhala intelligentsia through this pamphlet and formulated a code based both on traditional norms and on norms prevalent in wealthy society at that time (1972, 71–72). Gombrich emphasized the Protestant influence on this pamphlet: “It can be said to apply Protestant values to the details of daily life, very much on the model of any late Victorian manual of etiquette” (2006 [1988], 191).

Donald Swearer (1970) also notes moralism as an important element of the Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka. In his view, however, this moralism was a reaction against the materialistic values of Western society (1970, 263). Its effect was to replace allegedly immoral practices with moralistic ones that were believed to typify Buddhism. This trend of displacing Western and materialistic practices can already be seen in the emergence of the temperance movement in the early-twentieth century. The sale and use of liquor in the country was seen as a mark of the proliferation of Western values. Swearer points out that this moralism can be seen in the report issued by the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress in 1956 to press the government to support Buddhism. In its section on “Contemporary Social Conditions,” a number of recommendations were made to the government in order to remove Western influences and to promote a moral lifestyle. Among these recommendations were the prohibition of the publication, importation and distribution of obscene books, magazines and film; the prohibition of the production and sale of intoxicants (alcohol); and the banning of horse-raising (*The Betrayal of Buddhism*, 99, quoted in Swearer 1970, 261). Whether affirmative, in aspiring to a higher life, or reactive, in rejecting Western materialism, moralism was a recognized element of rationalist reforms.

3.1.3 Practice of Meditation

The practice of meditation by laypeople has been noted by scholars as one of the reformist elements that came into the Buddhist revival through Dharmapāla, and it is regarded as one of the most significant. According to Gombrich and Obeyesekere: “The widespread practice of meditation by laity is the greatest single change to have come over Buddhism in Sri Lanka ...since the Second World War” (1988, 237). George Bond (1988) saw this trend as a result of the optimism that developed with regard to the possibility of achieving nirvana in this very life. For reformist Buddhists starting from Dharmapala, nirvana represents a realistic, attainable goal for all people, laypeople as well as monks (Bond 1988, 137).

Gombrich and Obeyesekere note the emergence in the latter half of the twentieth century of new religious places known as “meditation centers” (*bhāvana madhyasthāna*) where laypeople learn and practice meditation.

These meditation centers may give weekly classes...and they may run short residential meditation courses. The meditators then go home and practice meditation by themselves, unsupervised. A surprising number of middle-class Buddhists – and most meditators are middle class – have rooms set aside in their own homes for meditation, to which they retire daily. (Gombrich & Obeyesekere 1988, 237)

Bond explains the increase of the popularity of meditation practice among laypeople in the 1950s and onwards. He particularly shows how the meditation methods taught by the Burmese monk Mahasi Sayadaw were popularized in Sri Lanka after Sayadaw’s visit to the island in 1959 (1988, 130 ff). Bond further explains that before this meditation movement, the practice of meditation by laypeople was a very rare occurrence. Even when laypeople spent the

whole day in temples on full moon days, meditation occupied only a small part of the routine of the day (1988, 153). But the situation changed with the emergence of meditation centers.

The meditation centers promote meditation for laity in a way that traditional Buddhist laity of the past could scarcely have imagined. Unlike the traditional temples where the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* has functioned primarily as a chant on *poya* [full moon] days, these centers teach the laity to practice the techniques of mindfulness (*sati*) given in that *sutta*. (Bond 1988, 162)

Bond also refers to the formation of lay meditation societies and the emergence of lay meditation teachers such as D.C.P. Ratnakara, Anagārika Narada and Anagārika Tibboṭuvāve (1988, 198 ff). Based on these significant changes to the religious scene in Sri Lanka, scholars take the view that meditation has become an important part of the religious life of lay Buddhists in modern Sri Lanka, both for achieving immediate benefits as well as the ultimate goal of salvation.

3.1.4 Social Service

As previously noted, scholars have also identified social service as an important element of lay religious activism during the Buddhist revival. Early reformers of Buddhism, including Dharmapala, promoted social service partly in response to the Christian critique of Buddhism as lacking social concern (Bond 1988, 66). Bond points out the efforts of the Young Men's Buddhist Association to address social welfare concerns in order to establish social service to the community as an integral part of Buddhism, including the establishment of a relief fund for natural disasters, orphanages, homes for the aged and nurseries (Bond 1988, 67). The All Ceylon Buddhist Council set up its own National Council for Social Services to administer twenty-seven

social service institutions, including homes for the handicapped and retirement homes (Bond 1988, 117). The All Ceylon Women Buddhist Congress also runs their own welfare programs, such as a hospice and a vocational training center for less-privileged women.

These developments in social service have been seen by scholars as an integral part of lay Buddhists' efforts to be religiously active, with social service seen as a fulfillment of the practice of Buddhism. This incorporation of social service as part of religious practice has been interpreted as a result of the rationalization of the religious symbol system at the social level (Bond 1988, 39). In all scholarly accounts of this aspect of lay religious activism, the Sarvodaya Shramadāna Movement has been recognized as the most successful organization combining social service with Buddhist ideals in response to socio-economical changes in the country. Started in 1958 by A. T. Ariyaratne (1931-), a school teacher, as a group that provided service camps to under-privileged villages, this organization grew in subsequent decades to be an influential social force that uplifted the conditions of many villages. Bond argues that it was the Sarvodaya movement that formed the Buddhist rationale for social service, reinterpreting Buddhist ideals of *dāna* (generosity) and *karunā* (compassion). The movement encouraged the donation of labor (*shramadāna*) to alleviate practical problems and sufferings that villagers face (Bond 1988, 289). Bond emphasizes its effort to combine individual liberation and social liberation.

Sarvodaya appears as a reformist movement, with a world-affirming interpretation of Buddhist teachings, when it advocates throughout its philosophy that this awakening must be a twofold process involving both the individual and the world. (Bond 1988, 263)

Its village-based services have now expanded to a wide range of projects such as health clinics, children's camps, village banks and biodiversity programs (Berkwitz 2010, 196). After the

tsunami caused by the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake, Sarvodaya became the largest indigenous organization working in reconstruction.

Donald Swearer mentions other smaller Buddhist organization such as the Sāsana Sevaka Society and Saukyadāna Society, which aim to assist backward villages and provide free medical care for pilgrims respectively. Stephen Berkwitz also refers to more recent Buddhist organizations dedicated to social welfare, such as the Janavijaya Foundation founded by Gangodawila Soma (1948–2003) and the Damrivi Foundation founded by a group of lay Buddhist academics (2010, 198). These scholars point out that the above organizations and other countless local Buddhist organizations indicate an important change in the way that laypeople practice Buddhism in modern Sri Lanka. Organized social service has become a part of their religious lives.

3.1.5 An Incomplete Account

The above scholarly analyses identify a number of ways in which lay Buddhists in Sri Lanka became religiously active during the revivalist movement in the twentieth century. Notably absent from the scholarship is any mention of the devotional practices and rituals that were also important means by which lay Buddhists became religiously active during the period of revival and modernization. This lack of attention to devotional practices is common in many scholarly accounts of the modernization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, which tend to view only Westernized practices as part of Buddhist modernism. Devotional or ritual practices are regarded as simply a residual of traditional Buddhism and not part of the modernization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. However, as we see below, it is not always the case in Buddhism in modern Sri Lanka.

Veneration of the Buddha within the household has been promoted in Sri Lanka as a part of modernizing Buddhism. The propagation of this domestic practice was facilitated by a change in the material culture of Buddhist icons and the improvement of housing conditions. What is modern in these accounts is the decentralization of Buddhism, i.e., the means by which lay Buddhists were enabled and encouraged to take personal responsibility for their own spiritual development, and also the intention to have Buddhism permeate the daily lives of lay Buddhists. Both are forms of religious activism. Promoting and providing the means for lay Buddhists to perform the devotional practice of Buddha-vandanā significantly advanced these purposes, no less than the promotion of textual study or meditation. This popularized domestic ritual enhanced laypeople's religious engagement and changed the way Buddhism is practiced in Sri Lanka.

3.2 VENERATING BUDDHA AT HOME: AN OLD PRACTICE IN A NEW PLACE

Just as doctrinal study, meditation and various forms of social service became new ways for lay Buddhists to actively engage in Buddhism, beginning in the early-twentieth century the domestic veneration of the Buddha became another new form of practice that enabled lay Buddhists to permeate their daily lives with Buddhism. My fieldwork indicates that the domestic practice of Buddha-vandanā was established in urban areas by the 1950's and spread to more rural areas thereafter. In Sri Lanka today, venerating the Buddha at home is the most common Buddhist practice among lay Buddhists.

In villages and cities where I conducted my field work in 2014, I observed that all Buddhist households I visited had altars with small Buddha statues. Some poor houses had pictures of the Buddha instead of statues. The altars were installed with a small wooden slab

where items of offerings could be placed. The quality of the altar roughly depended on the economic condition of the family. Some families built a small shrine room outside of the house and some dedicated one single room within the house for this worship. However, in the majority of houses I visited, these altars can be found in a corner of the living room (*sālāya*). What I learned during my interviews is that the actual veneration of the Buddha through making offerings and chanting is very common in Buddhist households, though not universal.¹³ Actual performance of the ritual depends on the religious inclination of the family and the availability of time within the household's daily routine. However, erecting an altar with an image of the Buddha has become almost universal among Buddhist homes in Sri Lanka. The domestic performance of Buddha-vandanā in front of these home altars has become so well established that Buddhists of the present generation regard it as traditional. However, my research shows that the practice of this domestic ritual was a part of reviving and modernizing Buddhism in Sri Lanka in the twentieth century.

Buddha-vandanā, the ritual of venerating the Buddha, has been one of the most basic religious practices within the Theravāda Buddhist tradition. However, such veneration has traditionally been performed in front of a stūpa, a Bodhi tree or an image of the Buddha housed in a temple. When Pāli texts and medieval Sinhala texts mention the performance of this ritual, it is always a reference to rituals of veneration done in temples. These old texts further state that veneration to the Buddha is most fruitful when the veneration is done in the presence of an authentic or legitimate sacred object. Medieval Buddhist texts go to some length to show the legitimacy of sacred items used to represent the Buddha. When the sacred item is a relic, its history is traced all the way back to the funeral of the Buddha, as exemplified in Pāli texts of

¹³ I visited eighteen homes in Colombo, Kandy, Gampaha and Kurunegala districts covering poor, rich, urban and rural categories.

Thūpawaṃso, Dhāṭhāwaṃso, Lalāṭadhātuwaṃso and medieval Sinhala texts of Dhātuwaṃsaya, Kesadhātuwaṃsaya, Sinhala Thūpawaṃsaya. Regarding Buddha statues, iconographic principles and the consecration ceremony were emphasized. Medieval texts such as Rūpāvaliya (11th century), Śāriputraya (12th century), and Mañjiśrībhāshita Vāsthuvīdyā Śāsthra (14th century) describe the importance of following the proper measurements and the proper conduct of the consecration ceremony in order for a Buddha statue to become a legitimate object of veneration. Such sacred objects were not easy to obtain or to produce. They were usually kept in monasteries under the care of monks or local rulers.

There is a notable reference to the existence of domestic shrines for the Buddha in the memoir of an English sea captain, Robert Knox, published in 1681. Knox spent 19 years – between 1660 and 1679 – as a captive in the villages of NorthWestern Province and Central Province in Sri Lanka. After his escape and return to London he published *An Historical Relation of the Island Ceylon* describing people, places and customs of the island based on his experiences during his captivity (Goonetilleke 1975).¹⁴ Describing the religion of the island, Knox wrote:

Besides these Publick Temples, many people do build in their yards private Chappels, which are little houses, like to Closets, sometimes so small, that they are not above two foot in bigness, but built upon a Pillar three or four foot from the ground wherein they do place certain Image of the *Buddou*, that they may have him near them, and to testifie their

¹⁴ Robert Knox served in the British India Company with his father Robert Knox Sr. Their ship suffered a loss of the mast in a storm and drifted ashore on the Northeast coast of Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) on November 19, 1659. The crew of nineteen people was taken captive by the troops of the Kandyan king, Rajasinha II due to tensions between the king and European powers during that time. Though they were forbidden to leave the kingdom, they were free to work and earn money and even to marry local women. Robert Knox with his one companion managed to escape the Kandyan kingdom and reached the Dutch controlled north-west coast of the island. With the help of the Dutch, he returned to London in September 1680 (Goonetilleke 1975).

love and service to him. Which they do by lighting up candles and lamps in his house, and laying flowers every morning before him. And at sometimes they boyl victuals and lay it before him. And the more they perform such ceremonious service to him here, the more shall be their ward hereafter. (Knox 2003 [1681], 73)

What Knox observed were images of the Buddha placed in outdoor domestic shrines. It is not clear how widespread this practice was. Given the traditional technology of producing statues from materials such as gold, silver, bronze and ivory and the resultant scarcity of those small statues in pre-modern era, such statues would not have been easily accessible to ordinary Buddhists.

Apparently unaware of Knox's account, Gananath Obeyesekere asserts that traditionally shrines with Buddha statues were built in isolated places such as in monasteries, caves or mountains, not in households. He argues, "The Buddha was never a domestic deity ... he was never propitiated or represented in the household shrines" (1972, 65). Obeyesekere found no domestic shrines to the Buddha in two peasant villages where he did fieldwork in the 1960s, Madagama in the Southern Province and Laggala in the Central Province. What he did find in these two villages were shrines for devas (local deities) erected in the yards of households where villagers lighted coconut oil lamps on Wednesdays and Saturdays, known as *kemmura* days, to seek protection for the inhabitants of the household (Obeyesekere 1972, 65). Obeyesekere did, however, observe a domestic shrine to the Buddha when he got to the capital city of Colombo, where he saw a Buddha statute enshrined in a special part of a middle-class house, called a "*Budu ge*" (shrine room). He called this practice of enshrining Buddha statues in household *Budu ge* an important innovation (1972, 65).

Between Robert Knox's observation of outdoor domestic shrines in the late-seventeenth century and Obeyesekere writing of the important innovation of indoor shrine rooms in the mid-twentieth century, I found no other scholarly reference to domestic shrines to the Buddha. What I did find in my research was anecdotal evidence from lay Buddhists in Sri Lanka that domestic shrines did not exist in their colonial childhoods, but that by the mid-twentieth century the practice of installing pictures and statutes of the Buddha inside houses had become widespread. The shrines that Knox refers to were not built inside houses but in the yards of households. Bringing pictures and statues of the Buddha to the interior of homes appeared to be an innovation of the twentieth century. While some affluent families built separate shrines, most average Buddhists installed Buddha images in the living room or another room within the home.

Though Obeyesekere was the first to bring scholarly attention to the placing of Buddha statues in secular spaces in post-colonial Sri Lanka, including both public spaces and homes, he did not connect the practice to lay religious activism. His focus was on the symbolic significance of the spatial shift, arguing that bringing Buddha statues to these secular places was a symbolic expression of the transition of political power from the colonial government that was deemed Christian to Sinhala Buddhists. He saw the building of altars with Buddha statues at home as a signifier of an emergent political and social self-consciousness (Obeyesekere 1972, 65–66).

My interviews with older people in Sri Lanka confirmed Obeyesekere's claim that domestic veneration of the Buddha was a twentieth century innovation. There are senior citizens in Sri Lanka who can still remember that there were no shrines for the Buddha at home when they were children. Elderly people from Kandy and rural parts of the country told me that houses in those areas did not have altars with Buddha statues until recently. Many of these older people started doing Buddha-vandanā when they left their old family homes and moved into their own

newly built houses to start their own families. For example, a 70 year old housewife from Kandy said,

During the 1940s and 50s, there was no place at my home [in Kandy] to venerate the Buddha. My mother did not venerate the Buddha at home. There was a place outside (*pahan pelak*) to light a lamp. It was only a small wooden box to place the lamp and there no any picture there. This outside shrine was for the local deity.

A similar situation was reported by an 84 year old retired school teacher from Kuliyaipitiya in Kurunegala district.

When we were small, we did not have a place at our home in Dambadeniya to venerate the Buddha. We went to temple for such practice. Some houses in our village had a small shrine (*pahan pelak*) for local deities. Not all houses had this. Our home had this shrine. It was empty. We lighted lamps on this shrine on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Though her parents did not venerate the Buddha at home, she started to do it when she moved to her own house with her husband.

When I got married in 1955, I learned that my husband's mother had a habit of worshipping the Buddha at home. She is from Chilaw (a coastal city in the NorthWestern Province).

Following it, we also started to worship the Buddha at home when we build our own new home in Kuliyaipitiya. We used the small room adjoining the veranda (*sāle*), which we call “poth kāmaraya” (book room) to worship the Buddha. We had a framed picture of the Buddha for many years. Around 1984 we brought a small Buddha statue made from plaster of Paris.

A 77 year old retired clerk from Tissawa village in Kurunegala district said that his parental house also did not have a shrine for the Buddha and that when he was a young adult, villagers visited the village temple most evenings to venerate the Buddha. “We used to bring flowers, oil, and beetle most evening to the temple in those days. We offered them to the Buddha at the main shrine in the temple together with monks.” Another 72 year old retired school teacher from Kandy said, “Since people visited temples very often, there was no need for us to venerate the Buddha at home during my childhood.”

It seems that this practice of venerating the Buddha at home started in Colombo and other urban areas first and then gradually spread to other parts of the country over several decades. As Obeyesekere shows above, it was first an urban middle-class phenomenon before spreading to more rural parts of the country. My interviews with seniors of a similar age to those quoted above and who live around Colombo reveal that veneration of the Buddha at home was already an established practice in Colombo by the 1950s. A 72 year old housewife from Maharagama, a suburb of Colombo, said,

When I was a child, our home had an altar with a framed picture of the Buddha installed in the front room adjoining the veranda (*istoppu kāmaraya*). That room was reserved for veneration of the Buddha. My father used to chant there every evening. When I started going to school, I remember bowing in front of this altar before leaving home.

The reference to *istoppu kāmaraya* is common in a few other interviews I had with people of the similar age. This room was a common part of many middle-class houses in urban and suburban areas. This room was connected to the veranda but not to the interior of the house. This separation from the interior of the house seems to have made this room best suited for installing altars for the Buddha and conducting the ritual of venerating.

Similarly, a 72 year old well-known novelist and scriptwriter from Boralesgamuwa, another suburb of Colombo, said that his parental home in Boralesgamuwa had a shrine room.

My father was an Ayurvedic doctor. He had a separate room adjoining to the veranda to treat patients who came to see him. In that room, there was a foot-high Buddha-statue installed on a higher place on the wall. My father venerated the Buddha every morning before he started his treatments and then in the evening. When I was about ten years old (1955), I remember joining my father for this practice.

He further revealed that the houses of his relatives in Avissawella, 37 miles east of Colombo, also had altars with framed pictures of the Buddha during the same period.

A 66 years old retired government officer told me that he first encountered the domestic practice of Buddha-vandanā when he moved from his rural village in Kandy to Colombo for his first job in 1969, and that he had found it strange at first. He said that when he was a child there was no icon of the Buddha in his home or other houses in his village, Hanguranketa. He said that today altars with Buddha statues are common in his native village.

Comparing the interviews of these two groups of seniors from Colombo and rural parts of the island shows that the domestic practice of Buddha-vandanā began in and around Colombo and gradually spread from there into more rural areas. This is fully consistent with the fact that Colombo was the center of the Buddhist revival through the twentieth century and also the area of greatest affluence and literacy. The promotion of domestic Buddha-vandanā as well as the mass production of icons of the Buddha for domestic shrines both first appeared in Colombo.

3.3 PROMOTING DOMESTIC BUDDHA-VANDANĀ

The liturgical booklets published in the late-nineteenth century and early-twentieth centuries promoted the veneration of the Buddha among the population generally by formalizing the ritual and providing instruction in its practice for lay Buddhists. There are passages even in the early booklets that appear to focus particularly on promoting the performance of this practice daily in the home, both the morning and evening (*ude havasa*). For example, the *Buddha Meheya* (1893) composed by Kodagoda Paññāsekhara states,

Everyone should stop other activities and take a few minutes every day both in the morning and evening to reflect on the Buddha and observe the five precepts together with the three refuges and become virtuous people. (43)

While it is not explicit whether this refers to domestic practice, that would be the most logical conclusion, since it would not be practical for lay Buddhists to stop their activities and go to a temple twice a day for a short devotional practice.

Further evidence for the promotion of this practice in the home is found in Anagārika Dharmapala's well-known *Gihī Dīna Cariyāwa* (The Daily Code for the Laity), first published in 1898 and widely circulated among the Buddhist public. Its nineteenth edition was published in 1958 and by that time 49,500 copies had been sold (Guruge 1991, 26). It is this pamphlet, with its 200 rules of conduct to govern various aspects of lay life, that scholars have analyzed to explain Dharmapāla's formulation of lay Buddhist ethics (Obeyesekere 1972, 70–72; Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988, 212–215). Though these scholars paid significant attention to the list of rules, they have given no apparent attention to the section of the pamphlet that prescribes paying devotional homage to the Buddha as part of a daily morning routine. In a prefatory section before

beginning to list of the 200 rules, Dharmapāla writes about how to start the day. Veneration of the Buddha at home is central to this morning practice.

One should wake up early, brush one's teeth, take a shower and don clean clothes. Then he should get some scents such as sandal paste and some flowers and should place them, without inhaling their smell, on an altar (*vandanīya sthānayaka*) or a clean table while thinking "may these items be offered to the Buddha." Sitting in squat position one should recite the phrases of salutation to the Buddha (*namaskāra pāṭhaya*), observe of three refuges and the five precepts and recollect the nine virtues of the Buddha. Then one should sit cross-legged in a comfortable seat keeping the body erect and establish one's mind on the breath. After doing this meditation on breathing, one should transfer merits to all beings and radiate loving-kindness to oneself, one's parents, teachers, relatives, friends, devas, brahmas, ghosts and all beings. One should then recite the Metta sutta and stand up. (Guruge 1991, 26)

In the section on instructions for women, Dharmapāla advises them to perform Buddha-vandanā in the morning after they have helped with needs of their husbands.

While recollecting the virtues of the Buddha, one should recite the verse, "Itipiso..." and the verses, "Svākkhāto..." and "Supaṭipanno..." to pay homage to the triple gem. One should also observe the five precepts and promise to stay away from unwholesomeness.

Then merits should be transferred to devas and all other beings. (Guruge 1991, 31)

Then Dharmapāla specifically instructs, "If she is a mother, she should perform the veneration of the Buddha (*budun vāndīma*) with her children" (Guruge 1991, 31). Similarly, in the section of instructions for children, he admonishes children, "One should observe the five precepts daily. One should offer at least one flower a day to the Buddha" (Guruge 1991, 33).

In this pamphlet veneration of the Buddha is promoted as a domestic routine that is to be followed by all members of the family. What is noteworthy in Dharmapāla's description of this practice is the diminished importance of an object of veneration. In the above-quoted passage there is no requirement of a relic or statue for the practice. An empty clean table was good enough to hold flowers as an offering to the Buddha. As we will see later, this simplification of the object of veneration was very helpful in popularizing the practice of domestic veneration. Traditional objects of veneration such as relics and consecrated statues were hard to obtain and difficult to handle within the domestic sphere. Simplified and less sacred icons of the Buddha that started to appear in the twentieth century facilitated the spread of this practice to homes of ordinary lay Buddhists.

Further evidence for promotion of the domestic practice of veneration is found in the liturgical booklet *Bauddha Pratipatti Vistaraya* (Description of Buddhist Practices), composed by a local chieftain (*Muhandiram*) named D.B. Rathnasekara and published in 1902. As the title page states, 3,000 copies were printed for free distribution. Since there is no organization mentioned in the booklet, it appears that the author himself sponsored the publication. After describing the Buddhist precepts and customs, the author at the end of this 12-page booklet provides the following instructions.

Those who wish to maintain long life, good health, physical comfort and physical strength should prepare appropriate altars (*pūjāsana*) in one's own household (*gruha dvāra vala*) in order to offer flowers, lamps, camphor and incense to the lord Buddha and to observe the precepts. Then they should perform veneration and make offerings with the intention that the lord Buddha is alive as stated in the following two verses

(Rathnasekara 1902, 11; my translation)

The advice to arrange altars (*pūjāsana*) is significant here. It specifically refers to building altars inside the home (*gruha dvāra vala*). What came to be a characteristic of lay Buddhism in contemporary Sri Lanka is the presence of Buddha statues in homes and related domestic practices. This early literary reference to home altars indicates this shift of veneration of the Buddha that was happening in the early-twentieth century.

Promoting domestic veneration of the Buddha continued through various publications. In 1933, a booklet was published with the title *Bauddhaya* (The Buddhist) by a Buddhist organization named Dharmadāna Samitiya (Association for Giving of Dharma) of Matara. Authored by the Buddhist monk Tudawe Ariyawamsa, the booklet on page 5 of the preface states that 2,000 copies were published for free distribution. Towards the end of the booklet, the author prescribes the daily routine of a Buddhist.

A Buddhist should recollect on the Buddha first as he wakes up early in the morning every day. Both in the morning and in the evening one should observe the three refuges and the precepts and then should venerate the Buddha by offering flowers and lamps. Before the sun moves to the west [before noon], one should reserve at least a handful of cooked rice from the food prepared for oneself and offer it to the Buddha with respect. One should also recollect the virtues of the Buddha while traveling and working. (35)

In addition to what is found in earlier publications, this booklet encourages a mid-day offering. Although my fieldwork indicates that this mid-day offering became a common practice only recently, this booklet shows that such a practice was promoted much earlier.

Another important publication related to the domestic veneration of the Buddha is a liturgical booklet published in 1955 with the same title as the very first printed liturgical booklet, the *Buddha Ādahilla*. That first booklet was authored by Mohottiwatte Guṇānanda. This later

Buddha Ādahilla was composed by the Buddhist monk, Kiriālle Ñāṇawimala (1908–1984), and it has become the most well-known liturgical booklet even in contemporary times.¹⁵ This booklet provides the liturgy for Buddha-vandanā and guidelines for such other Buddhist devotional practices as full moon day practice in temples and the recitation of *paritta* (protective chants). With regard to domestic practice, the booklet states,

One should wake up before the morning sun rises and clean oneself by washing the face. Then he should go to an altar (*pūjanīya sthānaya*) and offer flowers and lamps. If not, he should simply venerate the Buddha together with the other gems [Dhamma and Saṅgha] with the three doors of body, speech and mind and then should observe the three refuges and the five precepts. One should then recite the phrase, “Itipi so bhagavā...” while reflecting on the meaning and should practice the meditation on the recollection of the Buddha. Afterwards, one should engage in one’s profession. (Ñāṇawimala 2011 [1955], 15–16; my translation)

Again, in describing the evening routine of a household, the booklet states,

In the evening one should venerate the Buddha and offer flowers and lamps before eating food. When it is time to sleep, one should again observe the three refuges as done in the morning and then should practice the meditation on the recollection of the Buddha or any other form of meditation explained in this booklet and then go to sleep. (Ñāṇawimala 2011 [1955], 16; my translation)

In all of these textual references we can see the efforts of the authors to encourage lay Buddhists to make domestic Buddha-vandanā an integral part of their daily lives.

¹⁵ Carol Anderson says that the booklet was in its sixteenth printing in 1998 and approximately 28000 copies were sold since 1955 by the original publisher alone (Anderson 2003, 280). I found that it is still being reprinted in 2011.

These efforts to promote domestic Buddha-vandanā continued throughout the twentieth century, as evidenced by the writings of Madihe Paññāsīha in the 1990s. Paññāsīha (1913–2003) was an influential monk who lived in Colombo and led the temperance movement and also such lay Buddhist organizations as the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress. He promoted a lifestyle based on Buddhist values among the general public in his sermons and writings, and domestic veneration of the Buddha was a part of the lifestyle he promoted (Ranatunga 2015). In his book, *Bauddhayā hā Bauddha Cāritra* (The Buddhist and Buddhist Customs), first published in 1994, he admonishes the Buddhist laity,

All Buddhist homes should have a separate place to venerate the Buddha. It will be better if one whole room can be reserved for this. In those houses where such an accommodation is not possible, a Buddha statue or a picture of the Buddha should be kept in an appropriate place. Everyone at home should venerate the Buddha both in the morning and evening as a habit (*siritak*). It is much better to arrange that one of these veneration be performed by all family members together. In the communal practice of veneration, it is appropriate to distribute such duties as removing old flowers from the altar, preparing new flowers, and lighting sticks of incense among the children. (Paññāsīha 2010 [1994], 29; my translation)

The monk portrays a place for veneration of the Buddha as a necessary item in a Buddhist household. With his suggestion of options to reserve a whole room or a corner of the house, he encourages both rich and poor Buddhist families to adopt this practice. He also stresses the participation of children in the practice and encourages parents to teach their children a Buddhist story after performing Buddha-vandanā (Paññāsīha 2010 [1994], 29).

Paññāsīha's second booklet promoting domestic Buddha-vandanā appeared in 1997 with the title *Dasa Budunu Guṇa hā Āgamika Velāva* (The Ten Buddhist Qualities and the Religious Time). Here he provides further instructions for Buddhist families who are already practicing domestic Buddha-vandanā. He comments, "These days a small shrine room or a separate place for Buddha-vandanā has been made in some houses. It is very good. Some Buddhists venerate the Buddha in the morning and evening; they offer flowers, lamps, drinks and food. It is a good practice" (Paññāsīha 1997, 3). Then he goes on to advise parents and provides specific guidelines to improve this practice.

Parents should teach children by example. Therefore, both parents must participate [in this practice]. If any unavoidable circumstance occurs, at least one parent should participate. If visitors come to the home during the assigned time for this practice, one should get them also to participate in this practice when their need is not urgent. Doing so will bring two benefits; a) visitors will also start this practice at their homes and b) they will not come [to your home] at this time again. (Paññāsīha 1997, 3; my translation)

He further instructs what should be included in a domestic Buddha-vandanā, listing as necessary items for the practice: (1) the observance of the five precepts, (2) veneration of the Buddha [with formal recitations] and offering of flowers and lamps, (3) recitation of the *Metta-sutta*, (4) short meditation appropriated for children, (5) reading two pages from a Buddhist text, (6) giving advice to children, (7) transference of merits to departed relatives and devas and (8) paying respect to parents by children (Paññāsīha 1997, 3). The emphasis on children is again found here. As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, my fieldwork revealed that getting children involved in this domestic practice has been a prime interest for many parents in contemporary Sri Lanka.

More recent examples of promoting domestic Buddha-vandanā include the efforts of the outspoken monk Gangodawila Soma (1948–2003),¹⁶ who criticized the Western-influenced lifestyle of Buddhists and their negligence in following Buddhist values in their daily lives. He was also critical of some traditional Buddhist practices that he viewed as having Hindu influences. His public sermons attracted thousands of people. As a part of his reformed Buddhism, he promoted the domestic practice of Buddha-vandanā, interpreting domestic veneration as a sign of one's commitment to Buddhism. In an interview with *Lakbima*, a national Sunday newspaper, in 2000, he said,

One's Buddhistness (*Bauddhakama*) is not something to be assumed from time to time as one wishes. It is something to be maintained throughout one's life....As a Buddhist one should observe the five precepts and follow them at home and then should visit temples to observe higher forms of morality. Due to the complexity of modern society, it may be difficult for some people to observe the higher precepts at temples. But venerating the triple gem at home and following the five precepts is not difficult. For that, there should be a Buddhist symbol like a small shrine for the Buddha (*budu māndurak*) in every Buddhist household. (Soma 2001, 95–96; my translation)

The point he emphasized in the above statement is that domestic Buddha-vandanā is the way, under modern social conditions, for laypeople to maintain a Buddhist identity. Notable in his promotion of the practice were his efforts to overcome the hesitation of some lay Buddhists of keeping statues of the Buddha in their homes. This hesitation was based on certain beliefs or opinions, for example, about the appropriateness of keeping a statue of the Buddha in a household where sexual activities and other forms of sensual enjoyment occur. To overcome this

¹⁶ Gangodawila Soma, ordained in 1974, was also a disciple of the above-mentioned prominent monk Madihe Paññāsīha.

hesitation, Soma taught that the Buddha was not against laypeople's enjoyment of sensual pleasure so long as they do not transgress the five precepts in their conduct and, therefore, that it is appropriate to keep a Buddha statue and venerate it within the household (Soma 2001, 96). He also advised lay Buddhists not to worry about the specific direction that the Buddha statue should face or specific auspicious time one should light the lamp for the Buddha. He argued that these ideas came into Buddhism through Hindu beliefs and were not mandatory and that Buddhists should feel free to install a statue at any place that is respectful to the Buddha, and to conduct the practice at any time that is convenient (Soma 2001, 99).

Soma's promotion of domestic Buddha-vandanā was also related to his severe criticism of the propitiation of devas (local and Hindu deities) by Buddhist laypeople. In agreement with reformist Buddhist activists like Anagārika Dharmapāla, he argued that the propitiation of devas by offering fruits and flowers was actually a Hindu practice and was un-Buddhist (Munasingha 2000, 62). He questioned, "Can a Buddhist who takes refuge in the triple gem go after a deva or a Brahma?" (Soma 2001, 29). Answering his own question, he said that propitiating devas for mundane favors is a way to increase one's greed and hatred and that such a practice is an insult to Buddhism (Soma 2001, 25). Seeming to acknowledge, however, a place for devas within Buddhism, he said that the proper way to deal with devas is to venerate the Buddha and then transfer the accrued merits to devas and not to propitiate them in Hindu style (Soma 2001, 27–28).

The above evidence shows that from the beginning of the twentieth century, there has been a continuous effort to encourage lay Buddhists to perform Buddha-vandanā at home. Promotion of this domestic practice was part of the larger project of Buddhist activists to adapt Buddhism to the changing society of modernizing Sri Lanka. In the context of changing social

and economic conditions, efforts were made to create a religious space within households and to bring more Buddhist markers to household living. The domestic performance of Buddha-vandanā has been, for many Buddhist activists, important to the objectives of encouraging lay Buddhists to be more religiously active and of maintaining a Buddhist identity in modern times. As we will see later, the popularization of this domestic practice has significantly enhanced lay Buddhists' active participation in Buddhism in contemporary Sri Lanka.

3.4 NEW ICONS OF THE BUDDHA

The project of promoting Buddha-vandanā at home was facilitated by a change in the material culture of producing icons of the Buddha. Although Dharmapāla did not prescribe statues or icons as requisites for performing the practice, most domestic altars or shrines do include such icons. In order that lay Buddhists to have such icons for home shrines and altars, they had to become more easily available and affordable. What we see in the early-twentieth century is the arrival of new types of icons of the Buddha: printed images of the Buddha and unconsecrated Buddha statues made from inexpensive materials.

Modern print technology facilitated domestic performance of Buddha-vandanā not only through printed booklets but also through printed images. Framed pictures of the Buddha printed on thick, shiny paper were kept on the altars of many Buddhist households in the earlier stages of the revival period. Although many of those printed images have now been replaced by small statues, in my fieldwork I observed that in some houses the old framed pictures are still kept (Figure 1 & 2).



Figure 1: Altar of the Kudabanda family, Thalawa



Figure 2: Buddha Image on the altar of the Publis family, Tissawa

These litho printed pictures of the Buddha seemed to appear in the 1930s (Mendis 1991, ii). Before printing images of the Buddha for home altars, other types of printed Buddhist images

were popular in Sri Lanka. The first of its kind is the printed image of Arahant Sīvalī, a disciple of the Buddha known as the foremost in receiving donations. Then came the printed pictures of different events in the life of the Buddha. These were first painted by local artists in Sri Lanka and then sent to Germany to be printed on paper in color. These images were popularized as an anti-colonial gesture. As Gamini Jayantha Mendis observes, it was the custom of middle-class families to hang a picture of the British royal family, which may have served as a mark of allegiance or a sign of good luck. It was also common for these families to decorate the walls of their houses with colorful pictures of European landscapes, European ladies and animals (Mendis 1991, iii). Printed images of the Buddha's life and related events were produced to replace the pictures imported from Great Britain. As Peter Canute Perera explained in *Silumina*, the Sunday national newspaper on May 11, 2014, a businessman named William Pedris who had a business selling ingredients for paints in Colombo got a young muralist by the name of M. Sarlis to produce Buddhist paintings for print. Pedris then had the paintings printed in Germany with the highest printing technology available at that time. The first picture printed was of Arahant Sivali. It was a great success, and thousands of copies were sold. Pedris then got M Sarlis to paint a series of Buddhist paintings focusing on events of the Buddha's life (*Silumina*, 11 May 2014 F2). William Pedris Company published a booklet with the title *Bauddha Situwaṃ Varṇanā Kāyva* in 1923 to popularize this series of Buddhist pictures. This booklet contained poems composed by Piaydāsa Sirisena (a famous writer who produced the first Sinhala novel), which explain the values of having these pictures at home (Mendis 1991, 23).

It is the images of the Buddha painted by the above-mentioned artist M. Sarlis that first came to be used in altars of Buddhist households. We find a newspaper advertisement that promoted his printed images of the Buddha to be used on domestic altars. M. Sarlis himself

placed the following advertisement in *Swadesha Mithraya*, a weekly newspaper where he worked as the main artist, on January 8, 1930.

Pratipatti Pūjāva (Offering by Practice)

It is a great ancient custom to venerate the triple gem at one's own home in morning and evening. Now that great custom of offering by practice is gradually decreasing probably because the marble Buddha statues from Burma, which have Burmese faces, are not preferred [by Buddhists in Sri Lanka]. Such a decrease is a very bad sign for our younger generation.

We announce to devotees with the love of Sāsana that very beautiful pictures of the Buddha (*Buddha-rūpa*) made in accordance with *śāstra* [traditional iconography] in different sizes can easily be obtained from us.

M. Sarlis, Bauddha Mandiraya, Colombo

(quoted in Mendis 1991, 65, my translation)

The advertisement states that the domestic veneration of the triple gem is an “ancient custom”. We do not find evidence to support this claim. This characterization indicates rather the way this practice was perceived by that time or the way it was promoted. The advertisement also reveals that small marble Buddha statues were in use at least on some domestic altars before the popularization of these printed pictures. The travel and trade between Sri Lanka and Burma increased after all territories of Burma fell under British rule in 1885. Even before Burma became a British colony, Sri Lankan Buddhist monks travelled to Burma through the nineteenth century to receive higher ordinations in order to establish different monastic fraternities in Sri Lanka. It is entirely possible that Buddha statues were important items that were brought to Sri

Lanka during these travels and trading ventures. Although such statues were available, it is doubtful how many ordinary Buddhists were able to afford to have marble statues.

The printed pictures of the Buddha fulfilled three important requirements for the popularization of domestic veneration of the Buddha. First was the availability of icons of the Buddha in large numbers to be used as objects of veneration at homes. The second is the affordability of these icons for ordinary Buddhists. Traditionally Buddha statues were made of valuable materials and produced by professional craftsmen. Significant resources were needed to commission production of a statue. The memoir of Robert Knox from 1681 describes how difficult it was for an ordinary Buddhist to own a statue in pre-modern time.

Some being devoutly disposed, will make the Image of this God [Buddha] at their own charge. For the making whereof they must bountifully reward the Founder....Sometimes a man will order the Smith to make this Idol, and then after it is made will go about with it to well-disposed People to contribute toward the Wages the Smith is to have for making it. And men will freely give towards the charge. And this is looked upon in the man that appointed the Image to be made, as a notable piece of Devotion (Knox 2003 [1681], 81–82).

Ordinary lay Buddhists of the twentieth century do not need to go through such difficulty to have an icon of the Buddha. With the advent of printed pictures of the Buddha, it was possible to mass-produce them and to make them available at an affordable price.

The third requirement fulfilled by these printed images was the emergence of a suitable icon of the Buddha for the domestic sphere. Traditional representations of the Buddha – relics and consecrated statues – were kept in ritually sanctified places that were separated from secular or profane space. The domestic sphere, particularly with the presence of sexual activities, was

not seen as a suitable place for such sacred icons. The appropriateness of keeping an icon of the Buddha within a household has been a concern for Buddhists in Sri Lanka even through the end of the twentieth century. As noted above, this was one of the qualms that Gangodawila Soma felt a need to clarify. The question that a reporter of the *Rājina* newspaper asked him reveals this concern well.

Can't there be a contradiction in keeping and venerating a statue of the defilement-free Buddha inside a household where sensual pleasures are enjoyed? (Soma 2001, 96)

The significance of printed images of the Buddha was their less sacred nature. These printed pictures were not produced from sacred materials and had not gone through a ritual process of consecration. Although they represent the Buddha, they are devoid of the sacred nature of other traditional icons of the Buddha. This lack of sacredness made printed images suitable icons to be kept at homes.

Towards the middle of the twentieth century we see the appearance of another icon of the Buddha on domestic altars. They are unconsecrated small statues of the Buddha, which gradually replaced earlier framed printed images of the Buddha. My interviews with older people revealed that around the 1950s, statues made from ceramic started to appear in Colombo and other urban areas. However, the broader use of small statues on domestic altars started after the introduction of statues made of more inexpensive materials such as clay plaster and cement.

As Ananda Kannangara notes in the *Sunday Observer* on June 24, 2012 (F 11), plaster of Paris (calcined gypsum) was introduced to Sri Lanka in the early 1970s. This form of plaster gave artists the ability to produce artifacts using a mold. The liquid form of this plaster can be poured into a designed mold and will harden into the shape of the mold. Initially, this plaster was used in Sri Lanka to produce decorative artworks. Later this method was used to produce Buddha

statues. Cement was also used in moulds to produce statues. The use of the mold made it possible to reproduce the same statue in large numbers.

Statues produced by these methods were not consecrated. That is a significant deviation from the traditional way of producing such small statues, in which consecration rituals and ritual preparations as well as the use of valuable materials such as gold, silver or copper were important. Central to the consecration ritual of Buddha statues is the marking or opening of the eyes. In fact, this ritual is known as the “ceremony of establishing eyes” (*netrā pratishṭhāpana*). When small statues were produced of plaster of Paris, they were later painted with colors, and the eyes were marked casually. In more recent times the observed preference of lay Buddhists in Sri Lanka is to have white Buddha statues with no marked eyes. The majority of houses I observed had such statues (Figure no. 3). Many said that they like white since it is a peaceful color and reminds them the purity of the Buddha. However, white statues enable statues to be produced without painting or marking the eyes, which make them less sacred and more appropriate for use in secular spaces. What we see in both printed images and unconsecrated statues is a process of de-sanctification of icons of the Buddha. This process of de-sanctification facilitated the popularization of domestic altars with Buddha statues.



Figure 3: Altar of the Senanayaka family, Boralesgamuwa

These unconsecrated statues are now mass-produced mainly for commercial purposes. With the arrival of mold technology, the industry of producing Buddha statues became open to non-traditional craftsmen. I interviewed two craftsmen – Dayarathna Adhikari from Kurunegala and Nishanta Ganewatta from Rathmalana – who do not descend from traditional craftsmen families. Both use molds to produce Buddha statues from cement and plaster of Paris. Such statues are widely available for sale in different sizes in souvenir shops and Buddhist artifact shops in many cities in Sri Lanka. The size of the statue seen most often on domestic altars is either 8-inch-tall or 1-foot-tall. Following is the price list of Buddha statues of these sizes in Sesanda Religious Artifacts shop in Kelaniya (outskirts of Colombo) according to its website.¹⁷

8-inch white Buddha statue made from plaster of Paris: Rs.250 (US \$1.70)

8-inch orange Buddha statue made from plaster of Paris: Rs.280 (US \$1.90)

¹⁷ <https://www.sesanda.com/product-category/buddha-statue>. Accessed on November 20, 2016.

8-inch white ceramic Buddha statue: Rs.1200 (US \$8)

8-inch white dolomite Buddha statue Rs.1550 (US \$10)

New Laksiri Stores located at no. 9, Sri Sumaṅgala road, Maradana, Colombo sells cement Buddha statues. According to their price list, an 8-inch statue costs Rs.500 (US \$3.40) and 1-foot statue costs Rs.700 (US \$4.60). These price lists show the statues to be affordable for average Buddhist families. For comparison, in the same year of the published statue prices, 2016, 2kg of sugar costs Rs. 200 and 4kg of white raw rice costs Rs.264.

A further factor that facilitated domestic veneration of the Buddha was improved housing in the post-colonial era. As it is clear from a report by Lakshman and Tisdell (2000) that prior to the mid-twentieth century, many houses of ordinary people in rural areas had been built of wattle and daub and covered with roofs made of coconut leaves. They were very simple houses having only a few rooms. Incorporating a space for the performance of Buddha-vandanā in these houses would not have been practicable. Beginning in the middle of the twentieth century, however, housing conditions in Sri Lanka had begun to improve significantly. Lakshman and Tisdell report,

The quality of the housing stock, in rural as well as estate sectors, has improved substantially. About 76 percent of rural (including estates) households were in houses with walls built of ‘temporary’ material (e.g. wattle and daub, wood and cadjan leaves) in 1946. For the whole country, including rural, estate and urban sectors, this percentage had gone down to 24 percent by 1996/97. Houses with thatched roofs formed 68 percent of the housing stock of the rural sector in 1946. At 11 percent in 1996/97, for all sectors of the country, this percentage is substantially lower fifty years later. (Lakshman & Tisdell 2000, 4)

Various subsidized house building projects started by the government of Sri Lanka in the 1980s in conjunction with United Nation's International Year of Shelter for the Homeless (1983) also enhanced housing conditions in Sri Lanka. This increase of houses with permanent structure and relatively larger space enabled lay Buddhists to install an altar. A 56 year old electrician from Kuliyaipitiya said in an interview,

I had a goal to erect a shrine for the Buddha in my home when I was able to build a house [of my own] with a tiled roof. Five years after getting my job, I started to build my house. In my new home, I installed a shrine for the Buddha in my living room.

A 77 year old retired clerk from Tissava village said,

Our parent's home was not well built in those days. It was a very simple building with only three sections. So, there was no place to venerate the Buddha there. When I built my own home after I married, I built a house with bricks and roof tiles. In this home, I reserved a place to venerate the Buddha (*budun vandinnna*).

The installing of domestic altars appeared to be parallel with the improvement of housing conditions.

3.5 ENHANCING LAY RELIGIOUS ACTIVISM

Of all of the aspects of modernization, it was the practice of Buddha-vandanā at home that enabled the most widespread lay religious activism in modern Sri Lanka. Other practices referenced in scholarly studies as elements of lay religious activism were limited to particular classes of Buddhists. For example, studying Buddhist texts and meditation were done mostly by educated lay Buddhists. Social services were carried out mainly by more affluent Buddhist

families. These practices required a certain level of education and economic resources. Hence, all Buddhists could not participate in these practices. However, the practice of Buddha-vandanā at home was not limited a particular group of Buddhists. Irrespective of social background, many Buddhists were able to follow it due to its relative simplicity. This simple devotional ritual appeared to have been more attractive to average Buddhists than textual studies and meditation. Hence a large number of Buddhists adopted this practice by installing altars in their homes and using the altar as the focus of domestic religious practices. While the size and the quality of the domestic altar can be different depending on the economic background of each family, installing such an altar with a Buddha statue has become very common in contemporary Sri Lanka.

Scholars have pointed out two aspects of lay religious activism: the permeation of lay life with Buddhist symbols and practices and independence from religious authorities to practice religion (Gombrich 2006 [1988], 190; Berkwitz 2012, 34). The domestic performance of Buddha-vandanā has significantly enhanced both aspects in the lives of lay Buddhists in Sri Lanka. This domestic practice allowed laypeople to infuse their daily lives with Buddhism. For a large number of Buddhists, this practice has become a part of the daily routine. Moreover, it has become a family-oriented religious practice allowing each member to play a role. In terms of religious independence, this practice provided ample opportunities for lay Buddhists to follow their own personal religious preferences within the domestic sphere. Although they listen to instructions given by monks and other experts, they freely make their own choices in deciding where to install the altar, what kind of Buddha statue to install, what else to place on the altar, and what to add to the formal structure of liturgy.

3.5.1 Buddha-vandanā as a Part of Daily Routine

More than any other Buddhist practice, the domestic Buddha-vandanā has been embedded within the rhythm of the daily lives of practicing lay Buddhists in Sri Lanka. While they engage in other customary Buddhist practices such as visiting temples, offering *dāna* to monks, and attending Buddhist preaching (*baṇa*) and sometimes meditation sessions, these practices occur in their lives on special occasions such as full moon days. Given the commitments of lay life, many average Buddhists do not have time or resources to perform them frequently. Lay Buddhists also customarily organize Buddhist ceremonies at home prior to a marriage, during pregnancy, on a child's first birthday and on the death anniversary of a family member. On such occasions, they invite monks to chant *paritta* or to offer them lunch *dāna* at home. Those practices require some preparations, special arrangements and break of the ordinary schedule of the day. The domestic performance of Buddha-vandanā in contrast has been incorporated by many Buddhists in Sri Lanka into their daily schedule. My observations, interviews and conversations with lay Buddhists of different social backgrounds reveal that this practice has become a part of the ordinary rhythm of the day and it has enhanced the religious engagement of lay Buddhists within the domestic sphere.

The way that Buddha-vandanā has been embedded in the daily routine of lay Buddhists can be understood by focusing on two families that I observed and interviewed. The Liyanage family from Peradeniya, Kandy consists of husband, wife and two daughters. Mr. Liyanage is a lab technician working at the University of Peradeniya while Mrs. Liyanage is a pre-school teacher. Both are in their early 40s. Their daughters are 15 and 10 years old. They live in a rented house with two bedrooms. The other family is the Jayasinha from Kuliyapitiya

(Kurunegala district). Mr. Jayasinha was a superintendent of tea estates and wife was a school teacher. Both are retired. They have two children. The daughter is married and has moved out of the house. Their unmarried son works as a librarian. The three of them live in their own home built on their 20-acre coconut estate.

The Liyanage family has installed an altar with a small Buddha statue in a corner of the living room of their rented house (Figure no. 4). During my interview, in explaining their morning routine, Mrs. Liyanage said,

Since both of us are working, every morning we need to get ready to leave for work and prepare lunches to bring. Morning hours are busy for us. My husband and I take turns to cook in the morning. When one is cooking, the other one cleans the house, helps get our daughters ready for school and prepares items of offering to the Buddha. That person plucks flowers from our garden, put them on a small plate, and then places the plate on our altar with a cup of water. After lighting the oil lamp and a stick of incense, the non-cooking person chants while standing in front of the altar. Others do not make noise when chanting is going on. Once the cooking and the preparing of lunch boxes are over, we take our breakfast together. Then we leave home. Before leaving home we all go to the altar, touch the lamp and bow. Our daughters bow down to both of us.

For this family, a short performance of Buddha-vandanā is an integral part of the process of getting ready for the day. I learned in my interview with the family that the morning performance is shorter than their evening performance. The husband explained that in the morning their performance takes about seven minutes, and their chanting included Pāli recitals for observance of the three refuges and the five precepts, homage to the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha, dedication of offerings, sharing of merits with devas and aspiration. He said,

This practice of “placing the lamp for the Buddha” (*Budu pahana t b ma*) helps me to start the day anew. It gives me the opportunity to make good wishes for the day. When I venerate the Buddha before I leave home, I develop a sense of strength in my mind (*hithata hayyak*) and I feel that I am ready for the day.

For Mr. Liyanage, Buddha-vandan  at home sets the momentum for the day. Although only one member of the family (husband or wife) performs it given the busy schedule in the morning, others passively participate by being quiet during chanting and later touching the lamp and bowing in front the altar just before leaving home. It is very much a part of how they begin their day.¹⁸

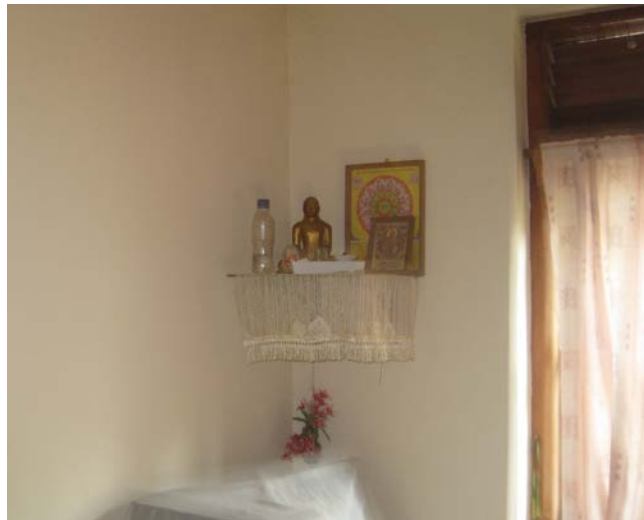


Figure 4: Altar of the Liyanage family, Peradeniya

The Jayasinha family is not as busy as the Liyanages in the morning since only their son goes to work. Their morning schedule also includes a number of activities performed around the domestic altar, which was installed in an open space on the upper level of the house (Figure no. 5). Mrs. Jayasinha explained her morning routine, “The first thing I do is to prepare tea for

¹⁸ For the two daughters and Mrs. Liyanage, this is not the only time in the morning that they venerate the Buddha. The two daughters will do a more formal Buddha-vandan  in school. Mrs. Liyanage will also do the same with her pre-school children.

everybody. I first place a cup of tea for the Buddha on the altar and then bring tea cups to my husband and son.”

This practice of offering tea to the Buddha in the morning is not done by the Liyanage family. But during my fieldwork I learned of other families who also make this offering. This is not fully fledged Buddha-vandanā, but simply placing a cup of milk tea in front of the Buddha statue, prior to formal Buddha-vandanā. It is becoming an additional practice for devoted lay Buddhists who can afford the time and resources. For example, a novelist from the suburbs of Colombo, an army officer from Katunayaka, a businessman from Kuliyaipitiya and a retired nurse from Negombo reported that they do it. The novelist said, “I do not drink my bed-tea without offering the same to the Buddha. I perform Buddha-vandanā at about 6:00 am. But before that I simply place a portion of the milk tea we prepare for us on the altar.”



Figure 5: Altar of the Jayasinga family, Kuliyaipitiya

Mrs. Jayasinha continued,

I, with my domestic helper, cook early in the morning because my son brings lunch from home. I reserve a portion of that meal and keep it to be offered to the Buddha at mid-day. When cooking is over, the domestic helper plucks flowers from our garden. I clean our altar and prepare the oil lamp and incense. Around 6:30 am I venerate the Buddha (*budun*

vandinava). After placing flowers on the altar and lighting the oil lamp and incense, I chant Pāli verses.

When I asked about the time of this performance, she said that she wants to light the lamp for the Buddha before her son leaves for work. As she explained, the son leaves for work at about 7:00 am. Before he leaves, he goes to this altar and silently chants for a short while. She also explained that her husband does not join her to perform Buddha-vandanā. But later, just before breakfast, the husband also goes to the altar. When I asked from the husband what he does there, he said, “I silently observe the five precepts and make good wishes (*seth patanava*) to my family and all.” As it is for the Liyanage family, Buddha-vandanā is a part of the morning schedule of the Jayasinha family. It has blended with other household activities of cleaning, cooking, drinking tea, eating breakfast and going to work.

For the Jayasinha family, Buddha-vandanā again become a part of their mid-day activities. Mrs. Jayasinha explained that at around 11:30 am, she offers a bowl of food to the Buddha just before their lunch. This is the portion of food that she reserved in the morning before she prepared the lunch-box for her son. During this mid-day offering, she does not chant long. She said,

I place a cup of water and a bowl of food on the altar. I recite only two Pāli verses for offering these two items as I place them and then quietly say “May this food be offered to the Buddha in honor of the great perfection of his generosity (*dāna pāramitāva*).”

She started to make this mid-day food offering about a year ago. Previously, she performed Buddha-vandanā only in the morning and evening. She was encouraged to offer food at mid-day by friends she meets in the temple on full moon days.

On full moon days, I observe the 8 precepts and spend the day at the temple. During those days, devotees gather there and talk about their religious practices at home. My friends there told me that it is better to make offerings to the Buddha at all three points of the day - morning, mid-day and evening. That is when I started this mid-day offering.

The mid-day Buddha-vandanā indicates the arrival of lunch time for the Jayasinha family. Such a mid-day Buddha-vandanā does not occur in the home of the Liyanage family since no one is at home during that time. I have observed in my fieldwork that this mid-day offering is not as common as morning and evening Buddha-vandanā in many households. This practice occurs mostly at homes where retired or older people live.

The Buddha-vandanā again becomes a part of the evening activities of both families. Mrs. Liyanage and her two daughters return home at about 3:00 pm while the husband arrives at home at about 5:00 pm. Their evening chores start around 5:30 pm. The two daughters play active roles in the evening chores, which include preparation for the evening performance of Buddha-vandanā. Mrs. Liyanage said,

I remind my two daughters to clean the house and take a shower. When they clean the house, one of them cleans the altar. The same person also plucks flowers and arranges them into a plate. These days, my elder daughter prefers to do it because she is getting ready for a national exam (G.C.E. Ordinary Level). I start cooking dinner. Before I begin cooking, I prepare an herbal tea to offer to the Buddha.

As I learned from the interview, it is the two daughters who perform evening Buddha-vandanā. After their shower, they bring items of offering to both parents to touch and place them on the altar. They sit down on a mat laid out next to the raised altar and chant together while their mother cooks dinner. Occasionally, the father joins them. Mr. Liyanage said,

Whenever I am free, I sit with my daughters to perform Buddha-vandanā in the evening. We chant Pāli recitals for observance of the three refuges and the five precepts, honoring the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha. We dedicate the offerings to the Buddha, venerate the relics and sacred stūpas and dedicate merits for deities and our departed relatives. At the end, we chant a selected section of *paritta*. We usually chant the Karaniya Metta sutta or Ratana sutta.

Mr. Liyanage further explained that after Buddha-vandanā, they watch TV until the wife calls them to dinner.

The evening routine of the Jayasinha family also has Buddha-vandanā as an important item. Close to 6:00 pm Mrs Jayasinha prepares items of offering. She explained that after having her evening shower and putting on clean clothes, she plucks flowers from jasmine plants in her garden, which she has purposely grown to have flowers for Buddha-vandanā. In this preparation, she is assisted by her female domestic helper. Just before Buddha-vandanā, Mrs. Jayasinha also performs a smoke ritual. She uses a utensil known as a *dum kabala* (a plate with a handle) to hold burning charcoal and pour scented herbal powder that she buys from the market. When this powder is burned, smoke with a pleasant aroma is produced. She carries this utensil throughout the house, pervading it with smoke. She said that this smoke purifies the house and brings good luck. I observed this ritual prior to Buddha-vandanā in three other houses in Kandy. I did not observe this ritual in other areas.

The following is what I observed at the home of Jayasinhas on 16th August 2014 at 5:50 pm.

Mrs. Jayasinha brought the *dum kabala* near to the altar on the upper level and started to pervade the smoke. Starting from the altar, she travels to different part of the house

waving the *dum kabala*. The domestic helper took the *dum kabala* and went to the lower level of the house. Then Mrs. Jayasinha started to light the oil lamp and incense and placed them on the altar. A cup of water and a plate of jasmine flowers were on a nearby stool. Before she placed them on the altar, she calls her son. The son came, touch the items of offering and made a bow with his palms together. She started to place the items of offering on the altar while chanting relevant Pāli verses for formally offering them. After the items were placed on the altar, the son went back to his room. Then she sat down on a mat and put her palms together. The domestic helper also came and sat behind her. With palms together, both of them started to chant Pāli verses for the observation of the three refuges and the five precepts, honoring the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha, venerating stūpas and Bodhi trees. Then they put their palms down and chanted Pāli verses for dedicating merits to departed relatives and devas. Again, keeping palms together, they chanted verses that expressed aspirations to have good association and that sought forgiveness from the Buddha. At the end of chanting, they prostrated to the altar and stood up. The whole session lasted about twelve minutes. The domestic helper went to the kitchen. Mrs. Jayasinha turned on the house lights and watch the Buddhist Channel on TV. Chanting of *paritta* was broadcast on the channel at that time. After listening to this chanting for five minutes, Mrs. Jayasinha instructed the domestic helper to complete the mixing of coconut salad for dinner and came to talk with me.

Mr. Jayasinha was away during this performance. She told me that her husband also touches the items of offering before she places them on the altar but does not chant with her. Both her husband and her son also support this practice by buying scented powder, incense and coconut oil.

For both families, Buddha-vandanā is one of the activities that mark the transition of the day into night. Its time of performance is in between other evening routines of cleaning the house, having showers and taking dinner. For Mrs. Liyanage, preparing herbal tea to offer to the Buddha is the first activity in her routine of cooking dinner. For the two daughters, performing Buddha-vandanā is what they do after cleaning the house and before eating dinner. For Mrs. Jayasinha, Buddha-vandanā is what she does after her evening shower while wearing her evening gown. For the Jayasinha family too Buddha-vandanā is what precedes dinner. When I asked about the time of evening for the performance of Buddha-vandanā, Mrs. Jayasinha said that she performs it just before it is getting dark because she wants to light the lamp of the Buddha before turning on the lights of the house. My interviews with other families also revealed that they aimed to light the lamp for the Buddha before switch on the lights in the evening.

Although some astrologists encourage lay Buddhists to light the lamp of the Buddha at specific times, many people decide the time for it depending on their other routines. For example, an article by Kithsara Sathsara Kīrthi published in the national newspaper *Divaina* on 7th July 2013, recommends specific times to light the lamp for the Buddha for each day. The astrologist states that a good time to light the lamp for the Buddha on Sundays, Tuesdays, Thursday and Saturdays is from 6:05 to 6:20 in the morning and from 6:30 to 6:50 in the evening (*Divaina*, 7 July 2013, N9). Manjula Pallebādda, another astrologist makes a slightly different suggestion in the same newspaper on the 25th October 2015. She says, “The best time to light the lamp for the Buddha is between 5:00 and 5:48 pm which is known as the *gomman* period. (*Divaina*, 25 Oct. 2015, P 1). However, I did not find a family or a person during my fieldwork who pays attention to these or other specific time slots. Their practice seems to be more in line with the advice given by the Buddhist monk Mādagama Dhammānanda in the same newspaper

on the 4th February 2013. He writes, “Regarding the time of Buddha-vandanā, what is important is to choose a time that is convenient. It is best to find a time that all members of the family can gather” (*Divaina*, 4 Feb. 2013, P 1). What I observed is that lighting the lamp for the Buddha and the performance of Buddha-vandanā are simply carried out in a sequence with other routines of the day. In most households, this practice takes place around 6:00 pm. This is not because they are following any auspicious time, but that is the time Buddha-vandanā can fit into other evening routines.

That the evening Buddha-vandanā is regarded as a marker of the end of the day was evident in a number of interviews. A clerk from Tissava village (Kurunegala), for example, said,

I conclude my day with the veneration of the Buddha (*budun vāndīma*). After I come home from work, I first take a shower and then I venerate the Buddha. When I light the lamp for the Buddha, offer flowers and incense, chant Pāli verses, I feel relaxed. My tiredness is gone.

A businessman from Maharagama, a suburb of Colombo, also said that Buddha-vandanā is one of his routines after returning home from his place of business.

When I plan anything in the evening, we remember Buddha-vandanā. When I arrange a visitation or when I receive an invitation to attend an event, I remember my ritual (*cārithraya*). I arrange other things before or after this ritual. Doing this ritual is a way to conclude my day. After working hard throughout the day, performing this ritual allows me to release all burden (*siyalu bara*) and tiredness (*vehesa*).

This embeddedness of Buddha-vandanā in the daily routines of lay Buddhists in Sri Lanka is well captured in a famous Sinhala song. Composed by Bandula Nanayakkarawasam,

the song is a duet sung by Dipika Priyadarshani and Lelum Rathnayaka. The lyrics tell of two children who get on a train to beg for money from passengers. The first line of the song goes,

After lighting the lamp for the lord Buddha early in the morning

We both leave the home every day.

Leaving our blind mother behind at home,

we come here to sing songs on the train.¹⁹

These lines explain the predicament of these two children and how they start their day. The lyricist highlights the veneration of the Buddha as the first routine of these children.

Similarly, Indurāgāre Dhammaratana, a Buddhist monk and professor of Sanskrit at the University of Kelaniya, in an article published in the weekly Buddhist magazine *Budusarana* elaborates on what he calls “a beautiful evening” (*sondurubara sāndeva*) in a household. There he clearly states, “It is simply to venerate the Buddha that evening comes to a home.” He identifies three routines – venerating the Buddha as a family, having dinner together and engaging in studies and readings – as the main activities of a beautiful evening (*Budusarana* 15 Oct. 2014, 18). He laments that such good practices are declining in contemporary society due to the influence of modern media and secular trends. Then he encourages parents to engage in Buddha-vandanā in the evening with their children. It is true that increasingly busy lifestyles and the habit of watching television have brought challenges to maintaining the practice of evening Buddha-vandanā. However, what he refers to as past is the previous few decades. The decline is concurrent with the arrival of new technological devices. He uses the very rhetoric of decline to encourage laypeople to commit to this practice. What I observed in my fieldwork is that a

¹⁹ *Pāna tiyā budu sāduta himidiriye – hāmadā dennā gedarin enavā; Ās nopenena amma gei tani karalā – api kocchiye viridu kiyanata enavā*

significant number of laypeople, particularly mothers and retired people continue to perform Buddha-vandanā on a daily basis.

One other indication of this practice becoming a part of domestic routine is that various items of offering, such as sticks of incense, wicks and coconut oil for lamps, have become household items. They have become common items on shopping lists. For example, a clerk from Tissava village (Kurunegala) said that when he draws his monthly salary, his elder daughter gives him the grocery list for that month. Incense and wicks are usual items on her list. He buys enough of each for the month. These two items are the most commonly purchased items for this ritual. Packets of incense are widely available in grocery stores. A packet with ten sticks costs Rs.30. A similar packet of sticks of incense made with a mixture of Ayurvedic herbs costs Rs.80. There are also imported packets of incense from India. They are usually more expensive than those produced locally. A packet of 120 cotton wicks costs Rs.15. Coconut oil has also become a very common household item used for both cooking and lighting the lamp for the Buddha. In my fieldwork, I found a number of lay Buddhists who would like to specially prepare coconut oil for the use of Buddha's lamp. The above-mentioned Mrs. Jayasinha revealed that she gets oil for her Buddha-vandanā from coconuts of their own estate. A retired school teacher from Kuliyapitiya also said that she collects coconut from her own garden and sends them to a local mill to squeeze oil.

While the above items are bought from shops, flowers for domestic Buddha-vandanā are always gained from plants purposely grown for this. Flower shrubs such as pinwheel flowers (*watusudda*), coral swirl (*idda*), jasmine (*saman piccha*), and double jasmine (*gāta piccha*) are common plants in Buddhist households. Since these shrubs produce white flowers throughout the

year, many Buddhists grow them in their gardens. A 55 years old electrician from Kuliyaipitiya said,

I have grown four shrubs to get flowers for Buddha-vandanā. Two of them are *idda* (coral swirl) and an other two are *saman piccha* (jasmine). Even during periods of some droughts, these plants have given us flowers. I have one shrub that is 20 years old. It has given us flowers all these years without a break. Even when I renovate my house, I plan renovations that will not harm these shrubs.

In the majority of homes I visited, flowers for Buddha-vandanā are obtained from plants in their own gardens. When I visited Buddhist households located within the housing project in Kotahena (Colombo 13) built for low-income families, I found that many of them grow jasmine shrubs in pots kept on the verandas for this purpose. Plants to obtain flowers for Buddha-vandanā have become a part of the landscape of many Buddhist households.

These pieces of evidence show how Buddha-vandanā has been integrated into the domestic sphere by lay Buddhists in Sri Lanka. For many Buddhists it has become a domestic custom and the failure to do it is clearly noticed or felt. A 45 years-old housewife from Kuliyaipitiya said, “Now we do this practice as a habit (*puruddak*). When we start the day we do it and when we finish the day we do it. It has become a part of our ordinary life (*sāmānya jivitaye aṅgayak*).” When asked about failing to perform the practice, a businessman from Gampaha said, “Occasionally, I miss evening worship (*vāndīma*) when I travel long distances or get sick. On those days, I feel something is lacking or incomplete (*aduvak*).” This expression of feeling “something is lacking or incomplete” (*hitaṭa aduvak*) is a common response I got from my informants when asked about occasions when they missed doing this practice. This

expression indicates that many lay Buddhists regard this practice as an integral part of the ordinary schedule of the day.

Although studying Buddhist texts and meditation have become popular among some lay Buddhists in contemporary Sri Lanka, neither of these has become a daily routine as has Buddha-vandanā. Even when meditation is practiced, it is mostly done within the context of Buddha-vandanā by many average Buddhists. That Buddha-vandanā has become one of the daily routines of household life significantly enhanced laypeople's engagement with Buddhism. This domestic practice enables lay Buddhists to encounter the Buddha regularly in their own homes; it reminds them of their Buddhist identity and the precepts that they are supposed to follow. In short, the most frequent way for lay Buddhists in Sri Lanka to be religiously active is to perform Buddha-vandanā at home.

3.5.2 Domestic Buddha-vandanā as a Family Practice

Performing Buddha-vandanā at home evolved not only into a domestic routine, but also into a family-oriented religious practice. As a member of the family, one is expected to participate in the ritual or to help its performance in some way. Family members participate either by joining the actual performance of Buddha-vandanā or by providing items of offering for it. The practice is believed to benefit the whole family, even when performed by only one person. A retired accountant from Kuliyaipitiya interviewed during my fieldwork said, "It could be only one person in the family who lights the lamp and chants. But the whole family is benefited from it. It is a blessing to the whole family." Since all members of the family are believed to benefit from the ritual, all family members are expected to participate in some way. This conceptualization of

domestic Buddha-vandanā as one of familial obligation has enhanced the religious engagement of lay Buddhists in Sri Lanka.

Duties and responsibilities of family members regarding Buddha-vandanā are closely related to the way that other family roles and responsibilities are assigned generally. In my fieldwork, I found that it is the wife who takes the lead in this practice in most cases. This is related to the general pattern in Sri Lanka whereby most domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning and washing clothes are still performed by women, even when they are working outside the home. In most families, performing Buddha-vandanā has become a domestic duty for women. That was not, however, the case in all of the families interviewed during my fieldwork. In families such as the Senanayakas of Boralessgamuwa, the Chandratilakas of Homagama, and the Ranhamis of Tissava, the husband takes the lead in performing the ritual. Even in such families, however, the wives typically prepare the items of offering and clean the house prior to Buddha-vandanā. Families with children have distributed these responsibilities among that generation. When grandparents live with the family, they generally take the lead in this practice. The following two charts on the distribution of responsibilities of Buddha-vandanā in two families that I observed can be helpful in understanding the nature of involvement of family members in the performance of domestic Buddha-vandanā.

Table 1. Distribution of responsibilities of Buddha-vandanā among members of the Abeyratna family from Kuliyaipitiya

Grandmother (76 years old)	Reminds other family members to prepare for Buddha-vandanā in the evening and leads the collective chanting in the evening. Performs an individual Buddha-vandanā in the morning after other members have left home for work or school
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Mother (47 years old)	Prepares the cup of water for offering and performs Buddha-vandanā individually in the morning. Prepares the cup of water and the cup of tea for evening Buddha-vandanā. Leads the evening chanting when the grandmother is away.
Father (50 years old)	Lights the lamp for the Buddha in the morning. Inquires whether Buddha-vandanā is done in the evening. Buys coconut oil, wicks and incense.
Elder Daughter (15 years old)	Plucks flowers in the morning, cleans the altar and offering cups in both morning and evening and participates in collective chanting in the evening.
Younger Daughter (10 years old)	Cleans the house or plucks flowers in the evening (alternately with other siblings) and participates in collective chanting in the evening.
Son (8 years old)	Cleans the house or plucks flowers in the evening (alternately with other siblings) and participate in collective chanting in the evening.

Table 2. Distribution of responsibilities of Buddha-vandanā among members of the Alahokon family from
Maharagama

Mother (62 years old)	Plucks flowers and prepares the cup of water and the cup of milk in the morning and brings these items of offering to her husband and daughter to touch. Performs morning chanting alone. Prepares the cup of water and the cup of herbal tea in the evening and leads the chanting.
Father (65 years old)	Buys incense, oil and wicks. Helps his wife in preparing items of offering whenever she asks. Performs Buddha-vandanā when his wife is away or late to come home in the evening.
Daughter (28 years old)	Plucks flowers and cleans the altar in the evening. Joins her mother in evening chanting.

The Abeyratna family and the Alahakon family represent the general pattern of involvement by family members of large families and small families respectively. As it is evident from these charts, while the wife plays the most active role, others participate in different ways. Irrespective of the different degrees of involvement of family members, the domestic performance of Buddha-vandanā has become a family affair in contemporary Sri Lanka. That it happens at home as a domestic routine provides ample opportunities for all members to play a part in the practice. As I learned in my fieldwork, even when only one person is interested in performing this ritual, he or she gets other members involved in the practice. As we saw earlier, since this practice has been promoted as a good Buddhist practice from the beginning of the

twentieth century, many Buddhists share a positive attitude towards this practice and have no serious issues or objections in taking part in or supporting this practice.

In promoting this domestic ritual, Buddhist activists emphasized the familial aspect of the practice. The prominent Buddhist monk Madihe Paññāsīha wrote in his previously mentioned booklet, *Dasa Budunu Guna hā Āgamika Velāva* (Ten Buddhist Qualities and the Religious Time):

A religious time (*āgamika velāvak*) should be agreed upon at every home. Since parents should be present for this activity, it is better to appoint a time that is convenient for the father. Since elder children as well as younger children should be made part of this activity, it should not be too late at night (Paññāsīha 1997, 5).

In my fieldwork I observed that the advice of this monk is not closely followed by many Buddhist families in terms of getting the father to participate in the actual performance of the ritual. In most families the father participates by performing tasks necessary to facilitate the actual performance of Buddha-vandanā. For example, as evident in the above chart, a common task assigned to the father is to purchase materials needed for Buddha-vandanā.

As previously noted, in most Buddhist families where Buddha-vandanā at home is practiced, some task related to the ritual is assigned to or expected from each member of the family, including children. An electrician and a father of two daughters from Peradeniya said,

My daughters pluck flowers and arrange fruit juice to offer to the Buddha. My wife chants alone in the morning and chants with my daughters in the evening. I privately chant in front of the altar late at night before I go to sleep. At the end of the day, I feel that all members of the family at some point of the day should have done something for the Buddha.

The family-oriented nature of domestic Buddha-vandanā is clearly noticed in parents' interest in getting children involved in this practice. Many Buddhist parents view performing domestic Buddha-vandanā as a part of raising their children, and children are included as participants. As seen in the above chart, children help by preparing items of offering and also participate in actual performance of Buddha-vandanā. As I learned from my fieldwork, the task that is most commonly done by children and most popular among them is plucking flowers. The above-mentioned electrician, a father of two daughters from Peradeniya, said, "The first activity that direct children to Buddhism is plucking flowers for the Buddha." I have found that not only parents but also many grandparents get their younger grandchildren to help them prepare items of offering. This is exactly what Madihe Paññāsīha, the above-mentioned prominent monk said in his other booklet, the *Bauddhayā hā Bauddha Cāritra* (The Buddhist and Buddhist Customs). He advises, "In domestic veneration of the Buddha, it is appropriate to distribute among children such duties such as removing old flowers from the altar, preparing new flowers, and lighting sticks of incense (Paññāsīha, 2010 [1994], 29).

The idea that performing Buddha-vandanā at home is part of raising children has been emphasized in Buddhist newspapers. In *Mahāmegha*, the monthly magazine of the Mahamevnā Buddhist monastery, Menike Bandusena, a social worker, published an article titled "*Obe Daruwā Surakhitada?*" (Is Your Child Safe?) in which she wrote:

The basic step in creating a good environment at home for children is to arrange a place at home to perform Buddha-vandanā as a family. The whole family should do this Buddha-vandanā daily. Gathas and Sinhala poems on the qualities of the Buddha should be chanted in a pleasing manner. Parents should make this practice a pleasant experience for children. (*Mahamegha*, Feb–March Volume, 2012, 19)

Here, the writer recasts Buddha-vandanā as a practice done principally for the benefit of children, with its daily performance transforming the home into a place in which children can grow up with Buddhist values. It is also viewed as a practice that brings the family together and teaches family values to children. In another article in *Budusaraṇa*, a weekly Buddhist newspaper, the Buddhist monk Vitiyala Kavidhaja expressed this view of domestic Buddha-vandanā.

There are still houses in this country where parents venerate the Buddha in the evening together with children. They choose a free time and venerate the Buddha together. Then it is not an unfamiliar practice for children.... At home, they train to perform Buddha-vandanā as a part of their lives. In the same way, grandmothers and grandfathers are a great resource (*sampathak*) for growing children. These grandparents teach many good things including Buddha-vandanā. In the past, Buddha-vandanā in the evening created a children's world (*lamā lokayak*). After Buddha-vandanā, children paid respect to their parents; parents blessed their children. Then the parents would also pay respect to their own parents. Looking at it, children learned good values. In this way, the day was concluded in a rhythm. Such a practice also provided an opportunity to sooth any slights or disagreements occurred in the day. (*Budusaraṇa*, 3 Nov. 2013, F5)

Again, we find that this writer refers to the past as a period when Buddha-vandanā at home was practiced more widely than in contemporary times. However, this past needs to be understood as in the previous few decades, not the previous centuries. Aspects of the domestic practice of Buddha-vandanā highlighted by this article include the opportunity for children to interact with parents and grandparents and learn from their elders; the socialization of children; and the enhancement of the relationship between parents and children. Of particular note in that regard

is the custom of paying respects to parents performed as the last item of domestic Buddha-vandanā, when children usually prostrate in front of their parents while reciting two Pāli verses, one verse to pay respect to the mother and the other to the father. These verses are among the very first Pāli chants that children learn. These Pāli verses are also taught in public schools and in Sunday Dhamma schools. As noted in Chapter Two, the liturgy of Buddha-vandanā promoted by the liturgical booklets published in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries include these two Pāli verses, which are not found in canonical or post-canonical Buddhist texts. The first written form of these verses appears in the liturgical booklets. The translation of these two verses is as follows.

Keeping me in the womb for ten months
You nourished me and made me grow
[May you have a] hundred years of long life
I venerate the feet of the mother.²⁰

You nurtured me and showed me love
by giving me hugs and kisses.
You established me in the middle of rulers.
I venerate the feet of the father.²¹

In my fieldwork, I found that children of 8 years old can recite these Pāli verses by memory. These verses are recited as a part of the liturgy of Buddha-vandanā in the domestic practice even when parents are not present. The inclusion of these verses in the liturgical booklets and in the

²⁰ *Dasa māse ure katvā – posesi vuddhikāraṇaṃ; Āyu dīghaṃ vassasataṃ – mātū pādaṃ namāmaḥaṃ* (Ñāṇawimala 2011 [1955], 271)

²¹ *Uddhikāro āliṅgitvā – cumbitvā piyaṇṇakāṃ; Rājamajjhaṃ supatiṭṭhaṃ – pītū pādaṃ namāmaḥaṃ* (Ñāṇawimala 2011 [1955], 272)

domestic practice of Buddha-vandanā shows the evolution of the ritual as a family-based practice.

I interviewed young parents who started to perform Buddha-vandanā at home when they had children. A 30 year old nurse from Homagama said,

I started to venerate the Buddha at home regularly after I had my two daughters. Because, I want to be an example to them. They learn by watching me. I want to raise my daughters as good people (*yahapat aya*) and they will learn to be religious seeing what I do at home.

This is a good example of how lay Buddhists as parents become religiously active at home through Buddha-vandanā. The evolution of Buddha-vandanā as a family-oriented practice enhanced the religious engagement of both parents and children and provided the means for Buddhism to permeate their daily lives, which was one of the two principle objectives of Buddhist activists during the modernization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

3.5.3 Following Personal Preferences

The second principal objective of activists during the Buddhist revival was getting lay Buddhists to take greater individual responsibility for their own spiritual development, both as an assertion and reaffirmation of Buddhist identity and also as an antidote to the pressures of modern society. Domestic Buddha-vandanā was also significant in furthering this objective of modernization. Promoting this practice beyond temples and bringing it into the home gives lay Buddhists the opportunity, and also the responsibility, to define their own religious preferences. They make their own choices about arranging the domestic altar and deciding what to add to the formal

structure of Buddha-vandanā without depending on monks or other religious experts. Installing an altar within the home needs planning and an organization of space. Since there is no fixed rule in this regard, lay Buddhists make the choice to install the altar either in a visible place or in a covered place. While the majority of the houses I visited had their altars in a visible place in the living room (*sālaya*), some preferred to have it in a somewhat secluded place. The retired clerk from Tissava said,

I did not install the altar in the living room. This room is a busy place. Sometimes, visitors come. Hence this is not a good place to venerate the Buddha with freedom (*nidahase*). Hence I installed it in the corner of the passage way to other rooms.

In contrast, the Pathirana family from Kotahena (Colombo) moved their old altar from an alcove into their living room when they bought a new Buddha statue (Figure no. 6). Mrs. Pathirana explained their choice,

It is a blessing for others who visit our home. As they enter the house, they see this statue with a lighting lamp and flowers. They also feel religious and peaceful when they see it. Anyone coming to our home then comes to know that this is a pious house and a Buddhist house. It will also be an example for other Buddhists.



Figure 6: Altar of the Pathirana family, Kotahena

This is an example of using the altar to display one's religious commitment. Similarly, I found a businessman in Homagama who built his altar right in the middle of his living room as a way of showing the prominence he gives to Buddhism in his life (Figure no. 6). Usually, domestic altars are installed on a wall. But this altar was a quite unusual structure. He clarified his choice,

In many houses in Sri Lanka, the Buddha is given a small corner or is off to the side. But I thought that I should give a more prominent place for the Buddha in my home. When I visited Japan in 2002, I saw how Japanese people venerate the Buddha. They keep the Buddhist altar in a prominent place in their homes. I thought I would do the same. I also liked the Japanese shrine. I took photos of it and made a similar one for my home. Then I installed it in a very prominent place in our living room.

Here we see evidence for the influence of globalization on domestic Buddha-vandanā. I also noticed in a few houses in the suburbs of Colombo in which the typical coconut oil lamp had been replaced by a glass lamp with a floating wick. Those Buddhists found that new type of lamps when they travel to Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand and Singapore.



Figure 7: Domestic Altar of a Businessman in Homagama

Affluent families usually reserve one whole room or area of their choice for the altar. The Seneviratna family from Pitakotte (Colombo) installed its altar in the courtyard (*māda midula*) of their large house while the Ranasinha family from Kottawa have reserved a whole room adjoined to the living area for their altar. Within the limits of their economic conditions, lay Buddhists in Sri Lanka select their place to install the altar.

They also follow their preferences when they purchase Buddha statues for the home. As we saw earlier, Buddha statues of various types are mass-produced and widely available in the market today. Lay Buddhists have different reasons for choosing one kind of statue over another. I observed that the use of white statues has increased in recent time. Many contemporary lay Buddhists appeared to prefer white statues. A retired school teacher from Peradeniya said,

Earlier when we live in lodges of estates where my husband worked, we had a small colored Buddha statue. When we moved to this house, I bought this larger statue (1 foot tall) from the Dhawalagiri shop in Kandy. I chose a white statue because it represents purity. I like that color.

Her choice of a white statue was based on her fondness for the color white and its meaning to her (Figure no. 8). Similarly, a civil servant from Maharagama said, “When our old colored statue was damaged, I went to a shop in Bellanwila and bought a white statue. I chose the white one because there is a kind of brightness in white statues.”



Figure 8: Altar of the Alahokon family, Peradeniya

It should be noted here that Buddhist temples do not play an important role in producing or selling Buddha statues in Sri Lanka. Only a few temples, such as the Sri Bodhi Viharaya, Narahenpita (Colombo), produce Buddha statues for the common market. But laypeople are free to choose the kind of statue they like.

Buddha statues are available not only in different colors but also in different gestures or mudras. Statues with the samādhi mudra are commonly found in shops as well as in homes. But at times laypeople also choose statues because of their particular mudra. A retired banker from Kuliyaipitiya explained his preference for a particular mudra.

I asked a craftsman in Kandy to make a Buddha statue with a mudra of Dharmacakra for me. I saw the famous Buddha statue in Saranath, India when I went on a pilgrimage. I liked that statue, which represents the giving of the first sermon by the Buddha. I wanted

to have a similar statue at my home. The Buddha statue with this gesture, unlike common statues with the samādhi mudra, gives the feeling that the Buddha is teaching us.

Following a different preference, a businessman from Kotahena (Colombo) said,

I bought a larger statue (1 foot tall) that has a peaceful face. We should have a statue that can bring some kind of peace to our mind. After going through a number of statues, I selected this one with the samādhi mudra.

It seems that, in most cases, lay Buddhists choose statues based on what kind of feeling they would like to generate upon seeing a statue. Hence, rather than paying attention to traditional iconographic principles, lay Buddhists focus on the beautiful look of a statue. A craftsman from Kandy in an interview revealed that he does not closely follow the traditional iconographic principles that his teacher taught him. If he followed them, the face of the statue would look majestic with wide open eyes. He said that Buddhists of the present generation do not like such statues. Therefore, he attempts to make status with a look that lay Buddhists like. Similarly, Citramullage Rangabuddha, a craftsman from Ederamulla reported in *Bududsaraṇa*, a Buddhist weekly newspaper that he does not closely follow *Śāriputtaya*, traditional texts on Buddhist iconography, since those statues are not that beautiful (*Budusaraṇa*, 22 Sep. 2007, F2). These craftsmen have changed the way they produced statues in response to changing preferences of Buddhists in Sri Lanka. The increased religious activism of lay Buddhists is thus seen as influencing even the iconography of Buddhism in the modern era.

Personal preferences are also followed in organizing the performance of domestic Buddha-vandanā. When Buddha-vandanā is performed as a communal practice in temples, it is led by monks or nuns. In such communal practices, there is no place for personal preferences. However, at home it is up to family members to decide how to perform it. My fieldwork revealed

that the domestic practice of Buddha-vandanā generally follows the basic structure and specific Pāli recitations that were standardized by early printed liturgical booklets. This structure consists of observance of the three refuges and the five precepts; recollection of the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha; a dedication of offerings, veneration of relics, transference of merits to departed relatives and devas, an expression of aspiration and asking forgiveness and recitation of *paritta*. What individualizes the ritual in domestic practice is the addition to this basic structure of items chosen by, and expressing the personal preference of, the practitioner. Most of the additional items I observed in my fieldwork were Sinhala poems. For example, a retired banker and his wife from Kuliyaipitiya add a Sinhala poem between the Pāli recitations for venerating relics and transference of merits. The following is my translation of this poem.

I venerate the Buddha while making my heart wet with the moisture of
the Buddha's virtues.

I venerate the Dhamma while making my heart wet with the moisture of the Dhamma.

I venerate the Saṅgha while making my heart wet with the moisture of
virtues of the Saṅgha.

I venerate the triple gem while asking forgiveness for any mistakes done.²²

The wife explained that they first heard this poem when they attended a meditation program in a temple. They wrote it down because both felt fond of it. They decided to include the poem in their practice of Buddha-vandanā due to its rhythm, meaningfulness and particularly its request for forgiveness. As the wife explained, they ask forgiveness for any mistakes or mispronunciations in their Pāli recitations by singing this poem. It was bringing the practice of Buddha-vandanā into the home that allowed this husband and wife to shape their own religious

²² *Buddha ratnaya namāmi budu sisilin hadavata temā; Dharma ratnaya namāmi dam sisilin hadavata temā; Sangha ratnaya namāmi guṇa sisilin hadavata temā; Trivida ratnaya namāmi dosā vetot ayadimi samā.*

expression and experience by singing this poem, which was meaningful to both of them in ways that went beyond the standard liturgy. I found many such Sinhala poems added to the domestic Buddha-vandanā. Some were learned from Buddhist books. Some were learned from parents or grandparents.

Some lay Buddhists add short Sinhala phrases to the section on transferring merits, which contains Pāli recitations. A retired school teacher from Peradeniya has added a Sinhala phrase to transfer merits to Anagārika Dharmapāla and other late prominent monks. She said that after going to India for a pilgrimage, she decided to transfer merits to Dharmapāla during her domestic Buddha-vandanā because she was moved by the service he had done at those pilgrimage sites in India. Similarly, I found a magistrate judge who recites a Sinhala phrase to transfer merits to departed judges.

Certain recitations are also added by some Buddhists based on their immediate needs. For example, a businessman from Kuliyaipitiya added a Pāli chant starting with “*Buddho tiloka saraṇo...*” (The Buddha is the refuge for the three worlds) after he started a project of building a stūpa in his village temple. He did this because he had read in a liturgical booklet that this Pāli verse was good in overcoming obstacles. A housewife from Kandy added a special chant, she called the “Buddha mantra”²³ that she found in a liturgical booklet. She uses it to wish her two sons success in their studies.

In explaining his addition of a Pāli recitation and Sinhala poems, an electrician from Kuliyaipitiya said, “Whenever I listen to recitations that appeal to my mind (*hithaṭa dānena*) in temples or on the radio, I add them to my Buddha-vandanā practice at home.” In this way of

²³ *Namo tassa vammā taradda dasamo – ambu bhato nato sassa hassa; Sato tambu sato bhaga tammā assaddhato vamo sarabhassa*

adding their preferred recitation to the standardized liturgy, lay Buddhists in Sri Lanka enrich their domestic religious lives.

3.6 CONCLUSION

Promotion of the devotional ritual of Buddha-vandanā as a practice to be performed by lay Buddhists at home has been a significant part of reviving and modernizing Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Through promoting this domestic practice, various Buddhist activists, both monks and laypeople, have endeavored to give lay Buddhists the means to adapt their religious practice to the changing conditions of a modernizing society. The production of new and not sanctified icons of the Buddha appropriate for use in the home facilitated the proliferation of this practice.

Just as increased lay participation in textual studies, meditation and adherence to moral standards in terms of dress and etiquette generated unprecedented religious activism among lay Buddhists in Sri Lanka, the domestic practice of Buddha-vandanā significantly enhanced the opportunity for lay Buddhists to bring Buddhism and Buddhist values into their daily lives, to express their religious and cultural identity, and to take greater responsibility for their spiritual development. More than any other practice, the domestic practice of Buddha-vandanā was accessible to and practiced by all classes of Buddhists and was embedded in domestic routines across all social strata. Moreover, it was only Buddha-vandanā, among newly promoted practices, that evolved into a family-based practice. In these ways, the domestic practice of Buddha-vandanā can be seen as providing the means for laypeople to be religiously active to an extent greater than that provided by any other practice. Although largely ignored in previous

studies, domestic Buddha-vandanā requires due consideration in our understanding and depictions of modern Sri Lankan Buddhists because it is central to their lives.

It is important to note that lay religious activism in Sri Lanka did not arise in opposition to monastic authority. It is rather a concerted effort of both monks and laypeople to enhance lay religious participation in order to keep Buddhism alive in colonial, post-colonial and modernizing conditions. This complements what Anne Blackburn observed regarding the early phase of Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka.

[E]ven in central urban Buddhist institutions and associations linked to new forms of lay Buddhist participation, we do not see a substantial decline in monastic power and prestige, but rather continued collaboration between laypeople and monastics (Blackburn 2010, 200).

What we see throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century is a continuous collaboration of monks and lay Buddhists to bring Buddhism closer to lay life. The promotion of domestic Buddha-vandanā has been a central part of that collaborative effort.

4.0 BUDDHA FOR TRAINING: UTILIZATION OF BUDDHA-VANDANĀ IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS AS AN EDUCATIONAL TOOL

Beginning in the twentieth century and continuing to the present, a noteworthy use of the formalized and simplified ritual of venerating the Buddha has been as an educational tool in public schools in Sri Lanka. This is a non-traditional use of Buddha-vandanā, which historically was understood as a means of expressing personal devotion to the Buddha and accumulating merit. The use of the ritual in schools, which began during the Buddhist revival, is different. As a monk-teacher in Kanadulla Maha Vidyalaya in Kuliyaipitiya whom I interviewed during my field work notes:

Buddha-vandanā in temples and Buddha-vandanā in schools are not the same. There is a difference. In temples, we perform Buddha-vandanā for merits and blessings. In schools, it is performed mainly to train our children in Buddhist customs (*Bauddha cārithra*) and help them to calm their mind for studies.

The practice of Buddha-vandanā has become a part of school life in the majority of public schools in Sri Lanka, particularly in areas where the majority of the population is Sinhala Buddhist. This ritual is performed either daily or weekly at the beginning of the school day. School principals and teachers, in collaboration with local Buddhist communities, promote the performance of this ritual in public schools to achieve educational goals. Academic instruction in Buddhism using government textbooks is a part of the regularly school curriculum and takes

place in the classroom for two forty minute periods each week. Instruction in the participatory ritual of Buddha-vandanā is a different kind of teaching and a different kind of learning. It is not doctrinal and is neither rationalist nor Westernized. What Buddha-vandanā is meant to provide is a ritual encounter with the Buddha. Students learn how to honor the Buddha through offering such items as flowers, oil lamps and incense; how to chant in Pāli; and how to keep and move their bodies respectfully in front of a Buddha statue. Basically, they learn how to behave and how to act as a Buddhist in a ritual context. As discussed in the first chapter, a conception of the Buddha as a great spiritual persona worthy of veneration and many other norms of Buddhist culture are inculcated through the performance of Buddha-vandanā. Through the ritual's regular performance in schools, students are regularly inculcated with these cultural and behavioral Buddhist norms.

The role that Buddha-vandanā plays as an educational tool in public schools since the early-twentieth century has been overlooked in the current scholarship on Buddhist modernism in Sri Lanka. Scholars of the Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka did not look at public schools and the role of devotional Buddhist practice in these schools, focusing their attention instead on schools run by the Buddhist Theosophical Society. These are the schools that taught Buddhism through the Olcott Catechism and were viewed by scholars as cradles of "Protestant Buddhism." Scholars saw Society schools as the principal means by which a rationalist interpretation of Buddhism and protestant/Victorian ethical norms were transmitted to the Buddhist public (Obeyesekere 1970; Malalgoda 1976; Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988). What I discovered in my research is that by the early-twentieth century, even these schools had begun to instruct children in Buddha-vandanā, not only as a means of teaching Buddhism, but also for such purposes as instilling discipline and as a shield against the secular influences of the larger society. The use of Buddha-

vandanā in public schools, including those established by the Buddhist Theosophical Society, was an important element of the Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka. To date, it has been largely overlooked by scholars.

This chapter will provide the historical context for religious instruction in Sri Lankan schools; identify the particular history that brought Buddha-vandanā into schools during the Buddhist revival; and explore how the practice is promoted in contemporary Sri Lanka; who the principal actors are in the promotion of the practice in public schools; and for what purposes the practice is used in schools. This exploration is based on archival research, historical and scholarly surveys, and my fieldwork in 2014, during which I made extensive visits to fourteen schools (See Appendix 1) representing a broad demographic of urban, semi-urban and rural populations and one-time visits to an additional twelve schools. The chapter will show that Buddhism is taught in public schools not only through academic textbooks, but also through the participatory ritual of Buddha-vandanā. Further, Buddha-vandanā has become a foundational element of Buddhist instruction in public schools in Sri Lanka. It will also show that educators view the performance of Buddha-vandanā, more broadly, as a way to instill Buddhist cultural and behavioral norms in order to prepare students to address contemporary issues in modern society. In the light of new theories of rituals, it will be shown how Buddha-vandanā has been strategically used to construct Buddhist identity and desired dispositions among children.

4.1 HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN SRI LANKAN SCHOOLS

Teaching religion in schools is a legacy of British colonial rule in Sri Lanka. It was Christian missionaries who first established a school system in the country as a means for promoting Christianity on the island. Missionary societies such as Wesleyan Methodist Mission, Christian Missionary Society of England, Church Mission Society of the Anglican Church, and American Ceylon Mission started schools in major cities beginning in the early-nineteenth century. With the support of the British colonial government these Christian schools became the main educational institutions for teaching not only Christianity, but also secular subjects that were taught in English. The Christian schools consequently became the only path to higher jobs and careers during the colonial period, and students who attended these schools were generally from affluent families (De Silva 1981, 331).

In 1865, a committee was appointed by the British government to inquire into the prospects of education on the island. Following the recommendation of this report, known as the Morgan Committee Report (named after its president, Sir Richard Morgan), the colonial government started its own public schools providing primary education in the Sinhala and Tamil languages. At the same time the government started to provide financial assistance to missionary schools, which continued to offer secondary education in the English language to students from affluent families. This dual system actually strengthened the missionary schools for a time. The financial support the schools received from the government was one reason for this. Another can be found in the limitations of the public schools started by the government, which offered only primary education and only in the indigenous languages, not in English. This made missionary schools even more necessary to a broader class of students who, if they wanted a better job or

career, had no option other than missionary schools to continue their education and to learn English. Throughout this period the missionary schools, while providing education in the secular subjects necessary for a career, continued to teach Christianity (De Silva 1981, 329–330).

In response to the monopoly over education held by Christian missionary groups for more than a half a century, Buddhist groups in the late nineteenth century began efforts to establish non-monastic Buddhist schools. Traditional monastic schools attached to Buddhist temples were not organized or sophisticated enough to compete with the education provided in Christian missionary schools. The first non-monastic Buddhist school was established in 1869 in Dodanduwa, Galle by the Buddhist monk Dodanduwe Piyaratana (Malalgoda 1976, 234). Progress in establishing these non-monastic Buddhist schools was slow until 1880, when the American Theosophist Henry Steel Olcott established the Buddhist Theosophical Society. The Society had the explicit goal of establishing Buddhist schools to counter the proselytizing of the Christian missionary schools. A number of the Society's schools, offering English language instruction in secular subjects and in Buddhism, were started in Colombo and other major cities on the island. The purpose of these schools is clear from Olcott's diary notes.

From the Government blue books we discovered that eight out of eleven of the schools in the island were in the hands of the Missionaries, the rest of belonging to Government: in the former, the Children were taught that Buddhism was a dark superstition, in the other no religious teaching at all was given. So, between them both, our Buddhist children had but small chance of coming to know anything at all of the real merits of their ancestral faith. (Olcott 1974 [1900], 299)

The Society's schools provided the kind of secular education that was needed for a better career and that had previously been available to Buddhist children only in missionary schools.

These schools also gave children instruction in Buddhism. In 1881 Olcott produced a Buddhist Catechism that provided a rationalist view of Buddhism, stripping away traditional practices and elements that had been criticized by missionaries as superstition and presenting Buddhism as a rationalized system of ethical and moral thought. Olcott's Catechism was used as the textbook to teach Buddhist doctrine in the schools established by the Buddhist Theosophical Society.

In 1920, in an attempt to regulate religious instruction in schools, the colonial government passed the Education Ordinance. The Ordinance prohibited the teaching of religion in state schools, but regarding non-state schools, the Ordinance only advised or recommended that missionary groups not impose Christianity on students in disregard to individual beliefs or faiths. The Buddhist community at the time relied primarily on state schools for their children's education. Because the Ordinance would have prevented children from receiving instruction in Buddhism in public schools, the Buddhist community opposed the Ordinance and campaigned actively against it. In 1927 an amendment was introduced to give state schools the choice to teach religion if students requested it (Baldsing 2013, 23–24). More change came when significant educational reforms were passed in 1943, making education free from kindergarten to university. As part of those reforms the Special Committee of Education Report affirmatively recommended that children be provided with instruction in the religion of their parents. This recommendation was put into operation in 1945 (Sedere 2011, 2).

In 1948, after the country's independence, the Sri Lankan government sought to place all schools under the direct control of the state, including missionary schools.²⁴ It was not until 1960

²⁴ This was a demand from both Buddhist and Hindu activists who expressed the view that the Christian denominational groups exercised undue power over public education and disadvantaged the non-Christian population in the country (Baldsing 2013, 28). This demand was particularly pursued by the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress. In their special report produced in 1956, they specifically pushed the government to take full control of all schools (Bond 1988, 86).

that schools run by religious bodies, including various Christian denominations and also the Buddhist Theosophical Society, were brought under state control. Proselytizing efforts did not continue in schools after this. However, the government made religion a mandatory subject in the state school curriculum, with parents or children able to choose which religion to study (Sumathipala 1968, 411). The syllabus and the textbooks were provided by the Ministry of Education. Under the government curriculum Buddhism and other religions were taught as academic subjects with the focus on basic doctrine and history.

Scholarship on the Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka, to the extent it examined Sri Lankan schools and education, has focused on schools established by the Buddhist Theosophical Society, on the Olcott Catechism and on later textbooks produced for use in these schools. For example, George Bond remarks,

Although the Catechism's exact effect upon the Sinhalese Buddhist students cannot be estimated, it was widely used in the BTS [Buddhist Theosophical Society] schools and appears to represent the general approach of the new Buddhist education. (Bond 1988, 50)

Indeed, Olcott's Catechism was the textbook of Buddhism in Buddhist-sponsored schools. Both English and Sinhala versions of the Catechism were used in these schools. In 1904 C.W. Leadbeater, a British collaborator of Olcott who became the first principal of Ananda College, the first Buddhist school on the island, composed a simpler Buddhist catechism in Sinhala titled *Bauddha Śiśubodhaya* (Educator for Buddhist Students).²⁵ As the title page of the book indicates, it was meant to be studied before reading Olcott's Catechism and was aimed

²⁵ A copy of this book is kept in the library of National Museum in Sri Lanka under the call number 104 S 12.

particularly at students in primary grades. Both of these catechisms, Olcott's and Leadbeater's, provide a rationalist interpretation of Buddhism with an emphasis on doctrine.

When the Ministry of Education in 1960 started to produce separate textbooks for Buddhism for each grade, the rationalist and doctrinal approach of these two catechisms were retained to a certain degree. In 2016 the Ministry issued a new set of textbooks for religions, including Buddhism, from grades 3 to 11. In the contemporary school timetable, two periods of 40 minutes per week are allocated to teach religion. These government textbooks are used to teach Buddhism during the two periods a week allocated to religion.

Given the parameters set out in the government curriculum and textbooks, it is perhaps understandable that scholars saw Sri Lankan schools simply as vehicles for transmitting rationalist Buddhist doctrine and moral norms. Gombrich and Obeyesekere argued, for example, that "the diffusion of Protestant Buddhism" among the larger Buddhist population occurred through "Sunday schools and the state school system" (1988, 211), and they highlighted the role of school teachers in the process.

Perhaps the key figure in the diffusion of the new Sinhala Buddhist bourgeois morality into the village was the Sinhala school-teacher. He more than anyone else was the missionary of the new ethic into village society, and it was not unusual to come across school teachers, as late as the late fifties, taking upon themselves the duty of orienting peasant children to the new values, which they saw as quintessentially Buddhist values. (Gombrich & Obeyesekere 1988, 212)

Focusing on the formal curriculum of public schools and Buddhist-sponsored schools, scholars of the Buddhist revival failed to observe that alongside the academic instruction in Buddhism provided by government textbooks and the Olcott Catechism, another form of

teaching was taking place in these schools. That instruction came with the daily performance of Buddha-vandanā.

4.2 THE PRACTICE OF BUDDHA-VANDANĀ IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

4.2.1 Liturgical Booklets for Public Schools

The use of Buddha-vandanā to teach Buddhism in schools goes back to the colonial period. The first evidence for the promotion of this practice in schools is the liturgical booklet *Buddhopastānaya* (Attending to the Buddha), published in 1905, eighteen years after the earliest of the liturgical booklets I discovered in the National Museum. According to its title page, the booklet was compiled and produced specifically “for the use of students in Buddhist schools.” The title page of the booklet states that 8,000 copies were printed for sale at 10 cents a copy. It is of particular interest that this booklet was published by the Buddhist Theosophical Society and authored by D.S.S. Wickramaratne, an active member of the Society. As becomes clear here, by the earliest years of the twentieth century even Buddhist Theosophical Society schools were moving beyond the doctrinal instruction of the rationalist Catechisms to include instruction in Buddhist devotional practices,²⁶ and it was Buddha-vandanā that they selected to teach in their schools. The contents of this booklet, *Buddhopastānaya*, are not very different from other liturgical booklets produced in the same period. One noteworthy addition is that the Sinhala translation of all Pāli recitations is provided.

²⁶ It appears that Olcott’s influence on the society was minimal by this year. Olcott spent most of his last years in Adyar, India. He made his last visit to Sri Lanka (Ceylon) in 1906 and he passed away in Adyar in the following year.

That same year, 1905, a second liturgical booklet called *Sri Saddharma Mañjarī* was produced by another Buddhist group for free distribution to school children. As stated in its preface, 10,000 copies were printed in the first edition (ii). The announcement that appeared at the end of the booklet states:

This book namely *Sri Saddharma Mañjarī* is given free of charge to *upāsakās* and to students in Buddhist schools and government schools who have completed reading the *Bauddha Prashna Mañjariya* (iv).

Such booklets continued to appear in the following decades. For example, in 1948 we find a booklet with the title *Bauddha Vandanā Gāthā* (Verses for Buddhist Veneration) authored by the Buddhist monk Gurullawala Wajirawamsa. On the third page we find a declaration that states:

[This booklet] was accepted by the Board of Educational Publications as suitable book to be used in schools to teach Buddhism and was also endorsed by the Honorable Director of Education.

In the contemporary period such liturgical booklets are no longer used in schools. To some extent, it may be said that the booklets fell victim to their own success. After having been integrated in school programs for over a century, the Pāli recitations and structure of Buddha-vandanā have become common knowledge among the majority of Buddhist students. These recitations are also taught in Sunday Dhamma schools and at homes. Children learn the recitations and structure of the ritual by doing Buddha-vandanā with others. Nevertheless, during my interviews and conversations several teachers expressed the need for a liturgical booklet to standardize the recitation and the order of Buddha-vandanā in schools. Although the basic structure of Buddha-vandanā is common everywhere, each school decides the length of its

performance by adding or shortening various items, depending on their needs and interests. For example, a poem selected from Sinhala didactic literature is sung and briefly explained as a part of Buddha-vandanā at Sarasavi Uyana Vidyālaya in Peradeniya, while a verse from the *Dhammapada* [a Buddhist canonical texts of Pāli verses] is recited and explained in Maithree Maha Vidyālaya in Bandaragama.

I found one recent effort to provide common guidelines through a booklet in the Kothmale Educational Zone in Nuwara Eliya district. The assistant zonal director of education of Kothmale who is responsible for the subject, Buddhism, produced a booklet with the title *Pasal Sandahā Dainika Āgamika Vath Piliveth* (The Daily Religious Practices for Schools) in 2015. The booklet provides recitations for Buddha-vandanā in the Pāli language and the meaning of those recitations in Sinhala poems. In the preface the author suggests that all principals and Buddhism teachers in the Kothmale Educational Zone follow the order and specific recitations given in the book in order to “perform morning Buddha-vandanā in the same format in all schools within the educational zone” (Jinawansa 2015, 2). Currently, however, deciding the specific format of Buddha-vandanā is still in the hands of principals and interested teachers at each school. The common element is daily performance of the ritual, notwithstanding variations in length and structure.

4.2.2 Shrines and Altars to Facilitate Buddha-vandanā in Schools

Visible evidence for the promotion of Buddha-vandanā in schools is found in the physical structures within school premises constructed to facilitate performance of the ritual. During my fieldwork I learned that shrines for the Buddha (*Budu Māduru*) and small altars with Buddha

statues (*Budu Kuṭi*) have become commonplace in public schools in contemporary Sri Lanka. This is particularly true in the areas where the majority of the population is Buddhist.²⁷ All of the schools I visited, except those located on the premises of Christian churches, had shrines for the Buddha and small altars with Buddha statues in classrooms. All of these structures and statues were donated by either teacher-parent associations, alumni associations, local Buddhist organizations or individual donors. The government does not provide funds or get involved in building these shrines, but allows such shrines to be built within school premises.

The oldest shrine built within a school premise that I found in my fieldwork is located in Musaeus College, a high school, in Colombo. This school was established in 1891 for Buddhist girls by Mary Musaeus Higgins, who came to Sri Lanka from the United States at the invitation of Henry Steel Olcott. A shrine room with a Buddha statue was constructed at this school in 1906. The plaque of the shrine room reads:

This shrine room is built to commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of the work of MARIE MUSAES HIGGINS in the cause of female education among Buddhists of Ceylon.

Ananda College, another high school, in Colombo and the first Buddhist school started in Sri Lanka by the Buddhist Theosophical Society, had its first shrine in 1929. It was not a separate structure, but a room dedicated for the shrine. According to *Ānandaya*, the magazine of the college's Buddhist Society, the shrine was created by placing a Buddha statue that had been imported from India in a room in Harishchandra Hall (*Ānandaya* 5, April/May 2014, 26). The

²⁷ In schools located within the premises of Christian churches including convent schools, Buddhist shrines are not found although the majority of students are Buddhists. However, efforts are made to perform Buddha-vandanā occasionally even at such schools. I observed such a performance at St Joseph's College located within the premises of Catholic church in Kuliyaipitiya. Although there is no shrine for the Buddha there, once a month Buddhist teachers and students gather in the compound of the school and perform Buddha-vandanā focusing on a Buddha statue that was temporarily placed, but stored in cupboard in the school office.

magazine further noted that Buddha-vandanā was performed daily at the shrine by teachers and students. In 1953 the school initiated a project to construct a separate shrine structure to facilitate the devotional practices of an increasing student population. The student alumni association, known as the Old Boys Association of Ananda College carried out the building project, which took sixteen years to complete. The shrine was opened in 1969 at the entrance of the college. Inside the architecturally distinctive building is a 9-foot-high Buddha statue by the sculptor-monk Māpalagama Vipulasāra (Figure no. 9). The college website states that this shrine is “the third most venerated Buddhist shrine in the world” since about 6,000 students of the college pay homage to it daily.²⁸ It is still maintained with the help of the same association responsible for its construction (*Ānandaya* 5, April/May 2014, 26).

Mahamaya Girls College in Kandy also acquired a shrine in 1937. The plaque within the octagonal shrine room reads, “The Shrine was built by Talgahagoda Leuke Ratwatte Kumarihamy in memory of her son, Ananda, 1937.” Dharmaraja College in Kandy, a premier boys school started by the Buddhist Theosophical Society, constructed its shrine in 1970 according to the plaque installed there.²⁹

²⁸ <http://www.ananda.sch.lk/anandahistory.php> (Accessed on September 20, 2016).

²⁹ The plaque reads: “This Buddha statue was made by Ariyadasa Ranasinghe in memory of parents Mr and Mrs Andoris Ranasingha for their happiness of Nibbāna with a wish that may all students who graduate from Dharmaraja college be grateful people. Date 19/10/1970.”



Figure 9: Shrine at Ananda College, Maradana, Colombo

Shrines were also built in schools in semi-urban and rural areas with the support of local Buddhist communities. In my fieldwork I observed shrines built in various sizes and with various level of sophistication, based on the support each school received from alumni or local Buddhist communities. The majority of these shrines are housed in small buildings standing separately from other structures, usually in a very visible place within school grounds. Most of them are in an octangular shape with curved ridge roofs. The shrine at Maithree Maha Vidyalaya in Bandaragama, a semi-urban area in Kalutara district, which I visited during my fieldwork, was built in 1971 by a local philanthropic couple.³⁰ The shrine is located in the corner of the school on elevated land near the main office, facilitating the students' performance of Buddha-vandanā. The building measures 8 by 10 feet with a veranda (Figure no. 10). Similarly, a 6 by 6 foot shrine at Hammalawa Kanishta Vidyalaya in Hammalawa, a underdeveloped rural village in Kurunegala district, was built in 1973 at the corner of the campus facing the main hall of the school. According to the plaque attached to the shrine, it was a donation of a family of the village.

³⁰ The plaque attached to the shrine reads: "This Buddhist Shrine was built and donated to the school by Mr. and Mrs. Gunawardena in memory our departed relatives. Date 10/ 06/1971."



Figure 10: Shrine at Maithree School, Bandaragama

During my interviews with retired teachers I learned that in the past, schools in rural areas could not afford to build a separate shrine. Many of these schools were small with only a few buildings. The student population was also small. However, the performance of Buddha-vandanā was still a part of the daily schedule at these schools. A retired 85 years old teacher from Kuliyaipitiya told me that at Makandura Girls College (NorthWestern Province) in the 1950s, a small Buddha statue was placed in the principal's office, and students gathered in front of the office to perform morning Buddha-vandanā. Separate shrines were constructed in these semi-urban or rural schools when population growth and the economic conditions of local communities advanced.

The majority of separate shrines I observed in semi-urban and rural schools were built between 1985 and 1990 with donations from local families. For example, the shrine in Sumangala Vidhyalaya in Hengava, a rural and underdeveloped village in Kurunegala district, was built in 1985 as a donation from a family of the village in memory of their departed

parents.³¹ The shrine at Saranath Mahā Vidyālaya, Kuliyaṭṭiya was built in 1987 (Figure no. 11); one in Navodyā Vidyālaya in Andigama in 1985; and one in Sriṭaṭ Royal College in Diyakalamulla, Kuliyaṭṭiya in 1989.

The importance attached to the placement of devotional shrines on school grounds can be seen in how the shrines are maintained and that many were renovated in recent years. Some were removed and new shrine structures built in their places. Some schools in rural areas, such as Hammalawa Kanishta Vidyalaya and Thalahitimulla Kanishta Vidyalaya in Kuliyaṭṭiya Educational Zone, do not have science laboratories or music rooms, but they have shrines for the Buddha. Again, it is the teachers and local communities who sponsored the building of these shrines. For example, the Teacher-Parent Association of Sarasavi Uyana Mahā Vidyālaya in Peradeniya built a new shrine for the school in 2003.³² In 2015 the Association of Former Students built an additional shrine at Jātika Pāsala (National School) in Pannala (Kurunegala District) for the use of students in its primary section (Figure no. 12)³³

These shrines on school grounds or within school structures indicate an important aspect of the way Buddhism is introduced to students in the modern era. They show that Buddhist schools during the colonial period and later had a central role not only in teaching rationalist Buddhist doctrine, but also in training students in Buddhist devotional ritual practices. These schools brought Buddhism into the modern era by teaching students not just doctrine, but also Buddhist cultural and behavioral norms.

³¹ The plaque attached to the shrine reads: “This shrine of the Buddha (buddha mādura) was built and donated to this school in memory of our beloved father, P.B. Appuhamy and beloved mother, D.M. Punchinona – Children of Appuhamy family.”

³² The plaque attached to the shrine states: “This Shrine was built with the donations received from the members of Teacher-Parent Association.”

³³ The plaque attached to the shrine says: “This shrine of the Buddha was built by Shelton Medagedara upon the invitation from the Association of Former Students of Pannala National School in memory of his departed father Alexander Medagedara and was given to the school on 26th February 2559 B.E. (2015 C.E).”



Figure 11: Shrine at Saranath School, Kuliyaipitiya



Figure 12: Shrine at National School, Pannala

According to interviews conducted with teachers during my fieldwork, in the 1990s small classroom altars also began to appear in some schools, providing an additional locus for the

performance of Buddha-vandanā in public schools. This appears to be related principally to increases in student population. Where the number of students is small, all students are able to gather in front of the shrine to perform Buddha-vandanā. That is still the case in schools with small student populations, such as Hammalawa Kanishta Vidyalaya in Hammalawa (Kurunegala District), a school with only 150 students. When the student population increases, the number is too large to permit all students to assemble together in the available space in front of the shrine. As a result, the performance of Buddha-vandanā at the beginning of the school day began to be moved into classrooms. In many of the schools I visited one class was assigned to perform Buddha-vandanā in the main shrine while the remaining classes performed the ritual in their own classrooms, where their focus is directed to classroom altars and the recitations are followed through broadcast over a central sound system.

Altars were found in the overwhelming majority of the classrooms in schools I visited. All three-five classrooms at Maithree Mahā Vidyālaya in Bandaragama have altars. Holy Trinity College in Pussellawa has eighteen classrooms, and altars are found in all of them. There are eight classrooms in Hammalawa Kanishta Vidyālaya in Kuliyapitiya, and altars have been installed in all of them. As I learned from form-teachers, most of these altars were donated by parents of students of these classes. For example, the altar in class 11-C in Pannala National College was donated by the parents of one student of that class, and the altar in the class 8-B of the same school was bought and installed after collecting money from parents of all students in the class. In some cases, alumni associations donated classroom altars. The website of the alumni of Nalanda College in Colombo reported that alumni donated 52 small Buddha statues to be placed in classrooms of the school on the 14th June 2016. The report describes the ceremony accompanying their installation.

52 Buddha statues were ceremoniously escorted in procession from the NJOBA [Nalanda Junior Old Boys Association] office, under the shade of pearl parasols to the college shrine room. Buddhist religious ceremonies were conducted and a pirith chanting was performed at the shrine room on occasion of this donation of Buddha statues. After the ceremonies students escorted the Buddha statues to their respective classes under pearl parasols and thus a colorful and meritorious deed was completed successfully by the NJOBA in collaboration with the Nalanda College Prefects' Guild.³⁴

Classrooms altars are usually installed on the front wall of the classroom near the blackboard. The altars hold small Buddha statues, generally less than a foot high, and items of offering such as an oil lamp, flowers and incense, which are placed in front of the statue (Figures nos. 13, 14 & 15). As previously noted, public schools students in Sri Lanka study Buddhist doctrine through government textbooks twice a week. They perform Buddha-vandanā in front of these altars every day.



Figure 13: Altar at 10C class room, Saranath School, Kuliyapitiya

³⁴ <http://www.nalandajunioroba.org/index.php?limitstart=5> (Accessed on 30th September 2016).



Figure 14: Altar at 7B class room, Holy Trinity School, Pusselleva



Figure 15: Altar at 6A class room, Maithree school, Bandaragama

4.2.3 Organization of the Performance

Using these shrines and altars as the focus, the performance of Buddha-vandanā in public schools is organized with considerable attention to detail by principals, vice-principals, and

teachers. Elements of organization include maintenance of the shrines and altars, getting daily items of offering and deciding the format of Buddha-vandanā for each weekday. School officials organize students to do these tasks, maintaining a supervisory role. Cleaning shrines and altars and bringing items of offering are assigned to different groups of students. These responsibilities are rotated among different classes. For example, at the beginning of each semester the vice-principal of Maithree Mahā Vidyālaya in Bandāragama assigns specific days to each class to clean the main shrine and to bring offering items for the shrine. The school has thirty-five classes and each class has responsibility for these tasks for three days each semester. In Pannala National School, the heads of the primary and secondary sections assign similar responsibilities to particular classes on particular dates. A form-teacher of this school told me that her section head reminds her of the assigned date for her class a few days in advance. Then she directs the class monitor and the prefects to get the class ready for the day and to distribute among students the responsibilities of cleaning the shrine and bringing oil, flowers, incense and drinks for offering. In Holy Trinity College in Pussellava,³⁵ the committee of prefects assigns the dates to different classes with the guidance of the Buddhism teacher. A sheet that shows the classes that are responsible for cleaning the shrine and bringing offerings is displayed in the main office in this school.

Arrangements to take care of classroom altars are made in the same way. In most cases, class monitors assign different students to bring flowers, incense and oils to fill the lamp. It is the responsibility of the form-teacher of each class to check whether the altar is clean and

³⁵ This school has been originally established in 1930 as a branch of the Trinity College in Kandy, a premier Anglican school for boys and hence was named Holy Trinity. Initially the school catered to children of British and affluent families who cultivated tea in this area. After the independence of the country in 1948 and nationalization of tea estates in 1971, many British families returned to Britain. When schools were taken under the government control in 1965, this school became a public school that is open for children in the area. However, the local community and regional educational authority decided to keep the old name, Holy Trinity.

offerings are in place. The altar is an important item in the form-teacher's round of checking the cleanliness and the orderliness of the classroom. The vice-principal of Maithree Mahā Vidyālaya in Bandaragama told me that when he notices unclean altars or altars with no offerings, he talks to the form-teacher of that class and asks him or her to correct it.

It is the principals and teachers of each school who decide the format of performing Buddha-vandanā. Since there are no strict regulations for this practice by any authority, each school designs its own pattern of performing it. For example, the principal of Kotahena Madya Maha Vidyalaya, Colombo 13 has arranged five programs for the five days of the week. On Mondays and Thursdays, a longer Buddha-vandanā is performed with offerings of flowers, lamps and water. On other days students do only the traditional Pāli recitations for taking refuge and observing the five precepts before moving into other parts of the assembly, i.e., reading of news, announcements, singing of the national anthem and the anthem of the school. On Fridays a longer meditation session (30 minutes) is added after the assembly, with a recorded guided meditation broadcast through the school sound system. Students stay in their classrooms with their form-teachers for this meditation.

We find a slightly different format in Maithree Maha Vidyalaya in Bandaragama. On Mondays, a general assembly is held and Buddha-vandanā is performed as the first part of it with participation of all students in front of the main shrine, which is next to the main office. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, students gather in the playground to do mandatory physical exercise, and on those days Buddha-vandanā is done outside prior to the physical exercise. On Fridays, students stay in their classrooms and follow Buddha-vandanā that is broadcast from the main shrine. Wednesdays are named as the religious day, and a longer Buddha-vandanā is performed with more chanting and the practice of the loving-kindness meditation.

During my fieldwork I observed a number of performances of Buddha-vandanā in public schools. Following are my field notes describing what I observed at Sarasavi Uyana Mahā Vidyālaya in Peradeniya in the morning of Thursday, the 25th of September 2014.

At 7:25 am when the bell rang, forty-two students gathered in front of the shrine of the Buddha, which was located facing the open ground of the school. They were standing in 8 lines facing the shrine. Twenty-eight teachers and the principal also gathered in front of the main office while facing the students. After the second bell, fourteen students carried plates of flowers in a line and placed them inside the shrine. Two prefects lighted 3 oil lamps and 5 incenses. After they returned to the assembly, a recorded voice of a monk aired through the central sound system. Students, while keeping their palms together on their forehead, chanted in Pāli following the voice of the monk. They chanted verses to observe the three refuges (Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha) and the five precepts. Then they chanted Pāli phrases to pay homage to the Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha, tooth relic of the Buddha and Buddhist shrines everywhere. Verses were also chanted to formally dedicate items of offering they had placed inside the shrine earlier. Afterwards, they sang two poems in Sinhala language honoring both parents and another poem honoring teachers. Then they did a meditation on loving kindness quietly repeating utterances of wishing wellbeing to all sentient beings. While these forty-two students were performing this Buddha-vandanā in front of the main shrine, other students followed them in their classrooms facing small altars there. Afterwards, a poem from classical didactic literature was recited and explained by a student. They ended the session by reading the news of

the school, announcements, singing of national anthem and the anthem of the school. The whole session lasted for 15 minutes.³⁶

School principals and teachers supervise these practices and guide students to perform them properly. Just before the beginning of the above practice in Sarasavi Uyana Vidyālaya, the vice-principal went around the gathering of students and directed them to stand properly in line and put their palms together. Teachers who joined this performance near the main shrine and in classrooms were also supervising students. Some of these teachers told me that they tried to perform Buddha-vandanā attentively in school in order to be an example for students.

While principals and teachers irrespective of their academic fields joined in the process of organizing Buddha-vandanā in schools, teachers who teach Buddhism in each school assume a larger responsibility. For example, the performance of Buddha-vandanā in Sarasavi Uyana Mahā Vidyālaya was designed by a teacher who teaches Buddhism there. He also conducts meetings with prefects regularly to check whether arrangements have been made to clean the shrine and to bring offerings. As is evident from these accounts, daily performance of Buddha-vandanā in public schools requires resources, planning, persistent supervision and effortful execution.

We should also note the role of Buddhist monks working as school teachers in organizing and maintaining Buddha-vandanā in public schools. In Sri Lanka Buddhist monks are allowed to have a profession related to teaching. Accordingly, Buddhist monks who graduate from national universities take jobs as teachers in public schools. There is also one national college of

³⁶ In many of these public schools, there are Christian and Muslim students. These students are always a minority within the Buddhist majority of students. When Buddhist students engage in venerating the Buddha, students of other religions observe their own religion. When Buddhist students gather in front the shrine of the Buddha, Christian or Muslim students gather in an assigned room or a vacant place together with teachers of the same religion and perform a short prayer. When the veneration of the Buddha is performed in the classroom as a class, non-Buddhist students silently do their prayer. While Buddhist students put their palms together in *anjali* gesture placing them on their foreheads and chant in Pāli, non-Buddhist students simply keep their hands together lowering them to their bellies and stay silent with their eyes closed.

education dedicated to training monks as school teachers. Most of them teach Buddhism in schools, but they also teach other subjects such as Sinhala language, Sinhala literature, history, social studies, and the arts depending on the majors of their degrees. Buddhist monks also serve as principals of public schools. In schools where monks work as teachers, they take the lead in organizing the conduct of Buddha-vandanā.



Figure 16: Students Performing Buddha-vandanā, Holy Trinity School, Pusselleva

In 2004 the Sri Lankan Ministry of Education issued a circular providing that, “In every school, the morning assembly should be conducted together with religious observances on every day with the participation of teachers and students before the beginning of the work of school.”³⁷ This circular providing general guidelines for morning assembly further states that the assembly should be limited to fifteen minutes; the national anthem and school anthem should be sung; and a didactic talk should be given by a teacher. Although there is no instruction from authorities on what kind of religious observances is to be performed, Buddha-vandanā is the practice that was

³⁷ Circular no 2004/25 issued by the Ministry of Education on 23 July 2004.

performed during morning assembly in all of the schools I visited. It is, by report, the practice performed in the overwhelming majority of public schools with Buddhist students. As I found in my field research, organizing the performance of Buddha-vandanā has become a priority for many principals and teachers in their planning of morning assemblies.

The place Buddha-vandanā has been given in the public schools represents a non-traditional use of the ritual. When public schools became the main institution for socialization of children, Buddha-vandanā was chosen by activists and educators as a way of introducing children to Buddhism in a modern context and providing them with a beginning sense of Buddhist cultural and behavioral identity. In contemporary times, the performance of this ritual in schools has become one of the major ways that Buddhist children learn about Buddhist culture.

4.3 LEARNING BY DOING

In interviews during my fieldwork school principals and teachers consistently spoke of the educational value of Buddha-vandanā, describing the practice as a kind of training program to help achieve goals related to their mission of education and using the ritual performance to inculcate knowledge, values and skills that further educational goals. They often referred to this practice as a form of learning by doing. They ascribed the effectiveness of Buddha-vandanā in training students to this aspect of doing and performing.

The vice-principal of Maithree Mahā Vidyālaya in Bandaragama, for example, expressed the view that Buddha-vandanā is a practice that embodies a number of important cultural values

and noted the effectiveness of teaching students those values through giving them the opportunity to physically perform or embody them. He stated,

Practices such as bringing palms together to show reverence, bowing down, being silent in the presence of elders, being attentive and respectful in giving a gift attentively and removing shoes upon entering a religious place are important aspect of our Buddhist culture. These things are included in Buddha-vandanā. When students are performing this rituals, they do not simply hear about these good habits, they actually do (*yedenava*) them. They learn these cultural practices easily by regularly doing them.

Similarly, a Buddhism teacher at Kotahena Madhya Mahā Vidyālaya in Colombo 13 emphasized this aspect of Buddha-vandanā.

What we teach in the classroom is only knowledge. Buddhism is not only knowledge. We need to transform the basic knowledge of Buddhism given in the classroom into positive attitude and good skills. It is through practices like Buddha-vandanā that we can do this.

The connection that these and other teachers made between learning and doing, or performing this ritual, is on a continuum with a dimension of ritual behavior elucidated by the ritual theorist Catherine Bell. Drawing on the works of Pierre Bourdieu, she argues that ritualization is a strategic form of socialization. Seeing that ritual practices do not simply express inner states, she argues that they produce ritualized agents who have internalized a particular way of acting through their engagement with a structured ritual environment. It is particularly the body, according to her, that internalizes the principles of the structured environment. She argues,

[T]he molding of the body within a highly structured environment does not simply express inner states. Rather, it primarily acts to restructure bodies in the very doing of the acts themselves. Hence, required kneeling [in a ritual setting] does not merely

communicate subordination to the kneeler. For all intents and purposes, kneeling produces a subordinated kneeler in and through the act itself.... [W]hat we see in ritualization is not the mere display of subjective stats or corporate values. Rather, we see an act of production – the production of a ritualized agent... (Original emphasis, Bell 1996, 100).

Hence physical participation in ritual practices enables the symbols, structures, beliefs and values of a community to be internalized and inscribed.

Drawing on Bell, Kevin Trainor in his work on relic veneration in Sri Lanka argues that Buddhist rituals of paying homage to the Buddha serve “as a process of inscription through which distinctive patterns of meaningful practice become embodied in the participants...” (1997, 140). Commenting on the ritual of offering flowers to the Buddha, he states,

The gestures are all traditional gestures of respect, indicative of the lower status of the devotee vis-à-vis the Buddha. The verse evokes the exceptional qualities and exalted status of the Buddha... as the gesture of offering the flower represents the surrender of a pleasing material object for the benefit of another. (Trainor 1997, 155)

The significance that contemporary public school educators attach to Buddha-vandanā is based on their view of its pedagogical value as a bodily practice. They reason that Buddhist culture and other moral values can be better taught to students by getting students to do or perform the ritual practice of Buddha-vandanā, rather than by lecturing on those topics. What they promote is an action-oriented learning.³⁸ In this form of learning the focus is not on texts or

³⁸ Jeffrey Samuels (2004) proposes this term to understand monastic learning in Sri Lanka. He argues that novice monks in Sri Lanka learn about what it means to be a monastic not necessarily through learning the content of the texts but through engaging in ritualized practices in which doing and acting resulted in learning and knowing.

information but on specific actions or practices. Learning and knowing occur through doing and acting (Samuels 2004, 965-6).

The performance of Buddha-vandanā, for these school teachers, is a practice in which norms of Buddhist culture are learned by students through doing. A Buddhism teacher at Holy Trinity College in Pussellewa explained how the nobility of the Buddha, and by extension the ethics and morality taught by the Buddha, can be taught to students through this ritual practice.

During Buddha-vandanā when student chant qualities of the Buddha, they put their palm together and place them on their forehead. It is a physical gesture that denotes the unequivocal acceptance of the highness of the object that they focus on. By physically performing this gesture, students begin to feel (*hāgenava*) that the Buddha is such a noble one.

In the teacher's reasoning, the lessons to be imparted can be better taught through a physical gesture of honoring than through textbook instruction.

A Buddhism teacher at Sarasavi Uyana Vidyālaya in Peradeniya similarly distinguished learning in the classroom and learning through practice.

It is not like learning in the classroom. When students learn about the five precepts, they learn details about these precepts. But in Buddha-vandanā when they recite these precepts in Pāli as a group in unified voice, they develop a sense of seriousness (*hāngīmak*) and commitment (*vagakīmak*). It will not occur in classroom.

A similar belief in this affective dimension of learning with the practice of Buddha-vandanā was expressed by many of the teachers I interviewed in my fieldwork.

A teacher at Saranath Maha Vidyālaya in Kuliyaipitiya expressed the view that teaching Buddhism requires physical activity, unlike teaching subjects like mathematics and literature. In

her view, two-thirds of Buddhism is learned through engaging in Buddhist activities, and she found the daily performance of Buddha-vandanā and the observance of the eight precepts on special Buddhist holidays to be important activities for such learning.

While the primary motivator for many teachers in promoting the practice of Buddha-vandanā is its effectiveness in furthering broader educational goals, such as discipline, morality and ethics, the religious dimension of the practice is also recognized. Many teachers are of the view that religious attitudes and feelings arise in students as a result of doing practices like Buddha-vandanā. Reflecting Bell's theory of ritualization, these teachers regard the performance of Buddha-vandanā not so much as an expression of religious devotion by the students, but rather as a means of cultivating such devotion. In my interviews with principals and teachers regarding students' interest and participation in this ritual practice, they acknowledged that some students showed no interest in the practice. In the view of these school officials, that was all the more reason to encourage them do this practice. The principal of Kotahena Madhya Mahā Vidyālaya in Colombo 13 said,

Some students may not be enthusiastic about this practice. They first do this due to our encouragement without a clear understanding of its benefit. However, when they continue to do this, they will eventually understand it. Then such good habits gradually established in them.

In agreeing with him, the vice-principal of Maithree Maha Vidyālaya in Bandaragama said,

Some students perform this ritual without seriousness or any religious feeling. But when they do it every day, they eventually develop those religious feelings.

The teachers I interviewed also referred to the effect of the repetitive practice of Buddha-vandanā and the kind of somatic learning that can happen by repeating the same pattern of

behavior. This idea is reflected in the comment made by a teacher at Kekirava Central College in Kekirava.

In Buddha-vandanā, we do the same practice again and again. Repeating these chosen wholesome activities is a good way to inculcate good habits and qualities in students' lives. These good practices gradually sink into their lives by doing them repeatedly.

Other teachers emphasized the effectiveness of physical performance as an aid in remembering lessons. Buddha-vandanā, in their view, helps students commit to memory the aspects of Buddhist culture more easily than learning them in classroom. A teacher at Pannala National College stated,

Though we teach Buddhism in class, it is through engaging in activities that students remember things. When students do something, they tend to remember it better. By performing Buddha-vandanā, they remember the five precepts, the qualities of the Buddha, the proper way of behaving in front of a Buddha statue and gestures to show respect such as removing their shoes and bowing.

During my interviews it became clear, however, that the principals and teachers with whom I spoke do not consider Buddha-vandanā in the schools as simply a personal religious practice or, in Buddhist terms, a means of accumulating merit. Rather, they see it as an educational tool with a broad range of pedagogic purposes, i.e., to teach Buddhism, Buddhist culture, and also discipline, ethics, generosity and morality to students, in order to give them the means to function as Buddhists in a modern society. They recognize the devotional elements of the ritual but view those elements within the broader pedagogic framework of preparing students to function in the modern world within the ethical and moral framework of Buddhism.

4.4 INSTILLING DISCIPLINE IN MIND AND BODY

The use of Buddha-vandanā as an educational tool in public schools extends to its use to teach students mental discipline. The discipline that teachers aim to instill through Buddha-vandanā is twofold. One is calming students to prepare them for studies, and the other is to restrain them from being influenced by secular trends coming from media and the larger society. The ritual encounter with the Buddha that underlies Buddha-vandanā, performed with specific bodily postures and recitations, is seen by these teachers as effective in instilling this twofold discipline.

In general, principals and school teachers find it challenging to maintain discipline in classes and to bring students' full attention to their studies. They find that students are sometimes agitated or distracted due to challenging social backgrounds or family problems or simply as a part of adolescence. Whatever the cause, teachers are of the view that performing Buddha-vandanā as the first activity of the day is helpful in orienting students for studies. They see it as a part of creating a good learning environment.

As noted previously, the principal of Kotahena Madya Mahā Vidyālaya in Colombo 13 introduced five different programs for each weekday to start school activities. Each program includes Buddha-vandanā. On Mondays and Thursdays, he has arranged a longer Buddha-vandanā with offering of flowers, oil lamps and incense. On other days, it is short and no offerings are made. In my interview with him, he explained his aim clearly.

In arranging this fivefold program, I expected at least to calm students mind before they start their studies. I wanted students to forget their problems at home and focus their mind on studies. However, many other good things also happened as a result of this practice. The discipline of students increased.

He emphasized the impact he thinks that this practice makes on students' minds. He asserted that such a mental change is important in order to study well. He said,

After performing Buddha-vandanā, students go to their classrooms as calm and disciplined people. Emotional agitations (*āvega*) are decreased then. Such a mental state facilitates learning.

Similar views were expressed by a number of teachers during my interviews. They all found the performance of Buddha-vandanā to be effective in calming students' minds. A teacher at Sarasavi Uyana Mahā Vidyālaya in Peradeniya said,

One should have a settled mind to study. When students come to school on public buses from long distances away, their minds may not be settled. Some students have problems at homes. Then their minds are distracted. After they performed Buddha-vandanā in school, they become ready for study.

A monk-teacher at Andigama Navodyā Vidyālaya in Andigama, a rural town in Puttalam district revealed that some students coming to his schools have a lot of problems at home due to poverty or quarrels among parents and may even have exposure to domestic violence. For such students some program is needed to settle their minds and orient them for studies. In his view, collective performance of Buddha-vandanā in the morning helps these students to settle and be ready for studies.

It is not only calmness of mind that teachers aim for through Buddha-vandanā. They also view it as a way to bring discipline to students' general behavior, which in turn facilitates learning. They particularly note that specific gestures and postures performed in Buddha-vandanā influence students to behave well. They particularly refer to still body posture, the

structured performance and communal recitation as ways of bringing a form of discipline to students. The monk-teacher from Andigama Navodyā Vidyālaya said,

You cannot perform Buddha-vandanā hastily. You have to arrange offerings attentively. You have to carry these offerings respectfully. You should follow the proper order of the performance. You have to behave in a calm manner in front of the Buddha statue. You cannot chant as fast as you want. You have to take time to chant rhythmically and collectively. You need to hold your body properly throughout the performance. These behaviors make students disciplined and calm.

The discipline of students is a prime concern for many teachers I talked to. They consider it as the basis for good learning and a main goal of education. They see a relationship between the discipline of students and their performance of Buddha-vandanā. A teacher at Saranath Vidyalaya, Kuliyaipitiya said,

One important aim of this school education is to produce a disciplined (*vinaya garuka*) child. Only a disciplined child will be able to study well. Performing Buddha-vandanā in school helps students stay focused and disciplined. I have observed that those students who enthusiastically perform Buddha-vandanā are very good in their studies and general behavior.

The principal of Kotahena Madhya Mahā Vidyālaya explained how his promotion of Buddha-vandanā in his school brought a change to students' overall behavior and made his school attractive to many parents.

When I first came to this school, there were a lot of problems. The student population was declining because many parents did not want to send their children here. I introduced a lot of changes to the school. One important change I did was to organize the morning

program with Buddha-vandanā. Initially, I had to deal with a lot of issues related to bad behavior of students on a daily basis. After I organize this practice, those issues gradually decreased. Now I have fewer issues to resolve. Our school regained its reputation. Our student population grew from 225 up to 900.

The interest of teachers to promote Buddha-vandanā in schools is also related to their broader view of education. Some principals and teachers argued that education is beyond the transmission of knowledge. Education, they reasoned, is a method of forming moral citizens. They view practices like Buddha-vandanā as important to such forms of education. The principal of Saranath Maha Vidhyalaya, Kuliyaipitiya stated,

Our aim is not simply to pass knowledge to our students. What is needed is to help them to grow in skillfulness (*nipunathavaya*), wisdom (*pragnāva*) and goodness (*yahapath kama*). We should create an environment in schools that facilitate such a growth. The practice of worshipping the Buddha is one activity that creates such an environment in schools.

What we see here clearly is that principals and teachers do not see the performance of Buddha-vandanā as an additional practice or simply a religious ritual. For them, it is an integral part of their educational project of teaching mental discipline and educating students.

The second form of discipline these educators aim through Buddha-vandanā is to train students to withstand unwholesome secular influences. Principals and teachers are concerned that children are exposed to negative influences through uncontrolled media. Many of them consider TV, cell phones, computer games, the internet and other technological tools as channels of secular and immoral influence. This concern is quite clear in the following speech given by the

president of All Ceylon Buddhist Congress, Dr Praneeth Abeysundara, at a gathering of children of a Dhamma school in Homagama.

Today what many mass media telecasts are low, uncivilized and vulgar things. Because of these influences, the foundation of our culture is being shaken in a subtle manner. Many tele dramas watched enthusiastically by many people together with their families cannot provide any understanding of life. They simply bring destruction to our lives (*Dinamina*, 6 June 2015, 19).

Concerned parents and teachers feel the need to mitigate these influences and to preserve cultural values and morality among children. In interviews teachers expressed the view that Buddha-vandanā provides some counter balance to this exposure to secular values. A teacher at Maithree Mahā Vidyālaya said,

Today our children are vulnerable to being exposed to immoral behaviors through various media and technology. They learn from what they encounter. We need to provide more opportunities for children to encounter good things. Performing Buddha-vandanā and seeing the Buddha image in the morning at school give them at least some exposure to goodness.

Another teacher at Sarasavi Uyana Mahā Vidyālaya in Peradeniya expressed a similar view:

There is a rapid decline of moral values (*sāra dharma*) among children. ... But children are innocent. They learn from the environment. Today we have an environment that is not very healthy for our children. Buddha-vandanā is one good practice that helps our children to be moral.

Parents and teachers organize various school programs with the aim of mitigating against or countering the negative influences to which children are exposed through media and other

sources. For example, in many schools observance of the precepts (*sīla vyāpāra*) is arranged for students in commemoration of important full moon days such as Vesak and Poson. Monks are invited to give sermons (*baṇa*) in schools, and children are encouraged to attend Sunday Dhamma schools in temples. Promotion of daily Buddha-vandanā in schools is central to these efforts to counter negative influences among children.

Another underlying idea is that learned verbal and physical behaviors related to Buddha-vandanā counter *saṅkara* behavior in children. The Sinhala term, “*sankara*,” is often used to refer to indecent behaviors and appearances. However, the original meaning of the term is “mixed” or “hybrid,” referring to behaviors that deviate from indigenous culture. Within that cultural context, the term is used to describe behaviors that reflect Western rather than indigenous culture. Changes in the way people dress, exposing certain parts of the body, following various fashions in hairstyles and dress, disrespectful behaviors towards elders, and carelessness in traditional customs of greeting are examples of *saṅkara* behavior. School teachers as well as many social leaders express the concern that children and younger generation in Sri Lanka have become *saṅkara*. Welipitiye Indananda, a Buddhist monk from Kandy, wrote in a national newspaper,

Our children are entangled in immoral ideas and behaviors, which are adopted from outside without any evaluation or examination. Hence, culture, morality, politeness are deteriorating at a speed that is unbelievable. Consequently, our identity that has been derived through eastern civilization is diminished with the presence of indecent mixed [*saṅkara*] habits and behavior. (*Divaina*, 3 March 2012, 8)

The diminishment of a cultural identity derived through eastern civilization and the encroachment of Western norms on that cultural identity are further factors underlying the promotion of Buddha-vandanā in public schools.

Body movements, gestures, speech and clothing followed in the practice of Buddha-vandanā are viewed as the opposite of these *saṅkara* behaviors. Clothing used in this practice is usually white or at least modest and clean. Postures and gestures are respectful. There are recitations of traditional Pāli verses and Sinhala poems. During the practice children engage in bowing down and in calm conduct of the body and pay respect to parents and teachers. The performance of Buddha-vandanā thus recreates an ideal behavior favored in Sinhala Buddhist culture. What teachers believe is that children's performance of these culturally appropriate practices during Buddha-vandanā will counter the influences they get from exposures to *saṅkara* behaviors. They also believe that such practices will enable children to behave properly and in a culturally appropriate manner in other social contexts. Such appropriate behavior is regarded as *saṅvara*, which means polite, decent and disciplined. Thus, Buddha-vandanā is seen as a way to transform children's *saṅkara* behaviors into *saṅvara* behaviors.

4.5 CONCLUSION

The use of Buddha-vandanā in public schools beginning in the colonial era and continuing to the present day, as well as the expanding purpose and influence of the practice beyond the traditional ritual expression of devotion or veneration is an important element of the modernization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. This chapter has shown the broad use and influence of Buddha-vandanā in shaping children's engagement with Buddhism, with Sinhala Buddhist culture, and with

Buddhist ethics, morality and discipline. Such use of Buddha-vandanā represents an enlargement of the purpose and use of the traditional ritual to meet the demands and pressures of modern society, particularly as that society is experienced by its children.

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, religious instruction in schools was a legacy of the colonial era in Sri Lanka, when missionary schools were established to promote Christianity on the island. Some scholars might argue from this that the use of Buddha-vandanā in public schools is simply imitative of Western norms. But the dynamic of modernization in Sri Lanka was not binary, i.e., either imitative or indigenous. The use of Buddha-vandanā in public schools can be seen as an example of those two streams flowing together, both in terms of antecedent models for the practice and the innovative manner of it is used in schools.

While the historical context yields the assumption that missionary schools provided the model or inspiration for activists in taking Buddha-vandanā into public schools in Sri Lanka, there is also an indigenous antecedent. That antecedent is found in the liturgical booklets discussed in Chapter Two and in the movement that surrounded them. The liturgical booklets, which not only simplified and formalized the ritual but also provide historical details of its use in the colonial era, stand on their own as original source material for the promotion of Buddha-vandanā during the Buddhist revival, including its promotion in schools. As previously noted, the first printed liturgical booklet, Guṇānanda's *Buddha Ādahilla* to promoting Buddha-vandanā was published in 1887. By the time the first liturgical booklet was published specifically for use in schools in 1905, the movement to promote Buddha-vandanā as a signifier of Buddhist identity was well established. Within that historical context the appearance of the ritual in public schools, with liturgical booklets published specifically for school children, can be seen as a logical continuation of the broader movement's flow.

The use of Buddha-vandanā in public schools can also be seen as a Western model appropriated by Buddhist activists and used in quite a different way. There was in Sri Lanka during the colonial era no Western norm for the kind of experiential bodily learning for which Buddha-vandanā was used in public schools. The evidence we have suggests that religious education in Christian missionary schools focused on studying the Bible. From reports of the headmasters of missionary schools, we know that Christianity was taught in classrooms during the first hour of the school and that the method of instruction was through reading the Bible (Malalgoda 1976, 209). From the autobiography of Anagārika Dharmapāla we learn that in Catholic missionary schools students were expected to attend early morning mass in the church attached to the school and that students of St Mary's college in Pettah, Colombo said a prayer praising St. Mary every half hour (Dharmapāla 1933, 32). Though one can argue that such religious observances have instigated the practice of Buddha-vandanā in Buddhist schools, such an influence has not determined the way that this practice was utilized in public schools in later decades.

The concerted effort of Buddhist activists, teachers and parents to bring the devotional ritual of Buddha-vandanā into public schools in Sri Lanka, beginning in the colonial era and continuing to the present day, and the non-traditional use of Buddha-vandanā to instruct children not simply in Buddhist doctrine but in what it means experientially to be and behave like a Buddhist, were important elements of the modernization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Such use of Buddha-vandanā in the schools shows that Buddhist education was not limited to teaching rational interpretations of Buddhist doctrines. This use of Buddha-vandanā in public schools continues to enlarge the narrative of the modernization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, further demonstrating that prior scholarship missed a significant part of the story.

5.0 BUDDHA IN THE MARKET PLACE: VENERATING THE BUDDHA IN PUBLIC PLACES

The continuous effort to promote Buddha-vandanā finds its most visible manifestation in the appearance of Buddha statues in public spaces, such as city centers, junctions and roadsides. In recent decades construction of Buddhist shrines with Buddha statues in such public places has been on the rise. Many of these statues have become centers for the performance of Buddha-vandana conducted by shopkeepers, taxi drivers or residents of the area. The performance of Buddha-vandanā in such public places is not simply the restoration of a traditional devotional ritual. There is no historical antecedent for performing the practice in such public places. I will argue instead that veneration of the Buddha in public places is a novel and strategic utilization of the ritual to address very contemporary concerns of Buddhists. Prior chapters discussed how, in the late colonial period, the ritual was taken out of its traditional setting in temples and into homes and schools as a significant part of modernizing efforts in Sri Lanka. Taking the ritual out even farther, into public spaces, continued that trend in the post-colonial era, further enlarging the narrative of Buddhist modernization in Sri Lanka and providing further evidence that modernization did not just proceed along Western models or rationalist norms, but included innovative uses of indigenous cultural forms.

This chapter will show that veneration of the Buddha in public places is neither a continuation of traditional Buddhism nor an imitation of Christian practice, but a novel

utilization of an indigenous practice to meet the challenges of modern life. Based on my fieldwork in 2014 when I studied fifteen Buddhist shrines in public places, this chapter will demonstrate how the proliferation of this form of Buddha-vandanā is part of Buddhists' responses to perceived threats to Buddhism that are seen as arising from globalization and the secularized Western influences that come with it and, further, from the propagation of other religions in Sri Lanka that are perceived as challenging the dominant influence of Buddhism. It will also show that taking Buddha-vandanā into public spaces is a local level response to these perceived threats. While major Buddhist organizations and prominent monks at the national level engage in active politics to persuade the government to secure Buddhism from these threats, ordinary Buddhists at the local level promote Buddha-vandanā in public places as way to reassert the Buddhist identity of local communities; to make Buddhist practice more visible and accessible to the community, with the aim of inspiring and reinforcing religious engagement by Buddhists; and by creating “a Buddhist atmosphere”, to shape or reinforce social structures more in accordance with Buddhist cultural norms.

5.1 WIDESPREAD PRACTICE

Erecting Buddha statues in public places has become a very common practice among Buddhists in contemporary Sri Lanka. The practice was quite prominent on the west coast dating back to the 1950s. Within the last two decades it has become very common throughout the country, including rural areas. Anyone who travels the main roads in Sri Lanka will see a significant number of roadside shrines with Buddha statues, built mostly at junctions with smaller roads leading to villages. During my fieldwork in 2014, along the 23 mile long road from the city of

Kurunegala to the town of Kuliyaipitya (B 247) I found 14 such shrines. Along the main road from Kurunegala to Kandy (A 10), a distance of 25 miles, 10 shrines are found. Similarly, within the 8 miles distance from Kadawata to Gampaha along Colombo-Kandy road (A 1), 8 shrines are found. Raluwe Padmasiri (2013), in a preliminary study on outdoor Buddha statues, found 15 such shrines located within the suburbs of Colombo. These statues do not only appear in urban areas. I found that in some rural villages such as Thalahitimulla in Kurunegala district and Pänideniya in Kandy district, shrines with Buddha statues are built at the entrance to the village. These shrines have been built by local groups, such as the village Buddhist Association, Youth Association, Association of Three-Wheeler Taxi Drivers, or ad-hoc committees collecting donations from villagers and other benefactors. Donation boxes are kept near these shrines to collect further funds to maintain them. In most cases villagers, taxi drivers or shop keepers have organized themselves to make regular offerings at these shrines. In some cases, each day of the month is assigned to a family to bring offerings and clean the place. These shrines are maintained by villagers or other associations in addition to their efforts in maintaining local Buddhist temples. Most Buddhist families bring offerings to the Buddha and monks of their local temple on a monthly basis. Taking care of these shrines in public areas has become a new task that Buddhists have voluntarily undertaken.

5.2 PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

Scholarly attention was first brought to the practice of erecting Buddha statues in public places by Gananath Obeyesekere (1972). He noted the practice beginning in the 1950s and '60s in and

around Colombo. The practice seems to have been quite prominent during that time along the west coast where the Buddhist revival was first initiated. He observes,

As we reach Lunava, 10 miles from Colombo we see a Buddha at another roundabout; in the next town, Panadura, a huge gilt Buddha is erected at a fork in Galle road; in Kalutara, another town, there is a cement-Buddha...elsewhere at other roundabouts in the urban west coast, Buddha statues have sprung up...The Buddha, to put metaphorically, has been brought to the market place. (Obeyesekere 1972, 63)

Identifying the novelty of erecting Buddha statues outside of the monasteries, he states that traditionally the Buddha was never represented spatially in this way (Obeyesekere 1972, 63).

Raluwe Padmasiri (2013) in a brief survey reveals the continuation of this trend into the twenty-first century. Focusing on 15 outdoor Buddha-statues in Colombo, he identifies the construction of these statues as mainly a lay initiative. He writes, “None of these statues was initiated by Buddhist monks. It is the lay organizations such as associations of taxi-drivers and venders’ associations that have constructed them. However, the help from Buddhist monks was sought to get recommendations for auspicious times to install Buddha statues, to preside over opening ceremonies and to conduct monthly or annual programs near these statues” (Padmasiri 2013, 3). He further recognizes the multiplicity of purposes behind constructions of these statues. As he points out, while expressing Buddhist identity is the dominant aim, some statues were also built to facilitate the devotional practices of older residents in areas where temples are not available within walking distance (Padmasiri 2013, 4). He notes other, more secular reasons for the installation of some statutes, such as “to protect one’s land from government’s development project and to stop disposing garbage in the land” (Padmasiri 2013, 5)

In Obeyesekere's seminal article (1972), he focuses on the spatial shift in the placement of Buddha statues in public places and presents two interpretations of this shift. First is that this practice is an emulation of a Christian practice. Second is that this was a symbolic expression of actual political changes that occurred in Sri Lanka, namely, the acquisition of political power in the hands of Sinhalese Buddhists from the British colonial rule and the active political involvement of Buddhist monks.

His first interpretation is a reiteration of his model of Protestant Buddhism in which many new Buddhist practices were viewed as derivations from Protestant Christianity. After mentioning a number of examples for new Buddha statues in public places, he claims, "Incidentally the 'model' for emulation is once again Christian. Christian missionaries planted churches in centers of Buddhist worship all over Ceylon" (Obeyesekere 1972, 65). Just like Sunday Dhamma schools and Vesak carols, this practice is also viewed as copying from Christianity. However, reducing this Buddhist practice to mimicry of Christian practice is an oversimplification. As Obeyesekere himself notes, what Christian missionaries built in urban areas and in centers of Buddhist worship were churches, not statues. This was an effort to compete for the social capital associated with urban centers and well-established religious sites. It is not through erecting isolated religious statues that they pursued this goal but by building large scale cathedrals in cities like Colombo, Kandy and Kurunegala.

In responding to this trend, Buddhists, too, built new temples in urban Colombo during the late colonial period when it was transforming into a major city in South Asia. T. Sanathanan mentions six such new temples built during the late-colonial period around Colombo (Sanathanan 2010, 218). As shown by Robert Hayden et al. (2016), however, competing for urban centers and sacred sites and expressing one religious group's political dominance through

visible religious structures are not exclusively Christian practices. Rather, they have been common practices of many religious groups in Europe, the Middle East, Latin America and South Asia. In that sense even building Buddhist temples in Colombo cannot be simply called a mimicry of a particular Christian practice. In fact, Obeyesekere admits in a footnote that this practice is not unique to Christianity or to Buddhism and could be true for any religion in a position of dominance (Obeyesekere 1972, 65, n. 20). We are left then with the question: on what basis can the appearance of Buddha statues in public spaces be called an imitation of a Christian model?

Instead we should look at Buddhists' choosing to erect Buddha statues in public places as pointing to a different trend of the Buddhist response. As we saw in Chapter Two, veneration of the Buddha was established as a marker of Buddhist identity by the turn of the twentieth century. Expressing Buddhist identity through Buddha statues can be related to this trend. How this practice evolved in to the twenty-first century also indicates a Buddhist development. The majority of Buddha statues that I observed in public places are the focus of ritual activities, particularly Buddha-vandanā. Unattached to Buddhist temples, these statues are taken care of by small committees or volunteers from the local community as independent shrines. As mentioned above, daily offerings are made to many of these statues by local people following a roster. Veneration of such independent shrines has no precedent or parallel within Christianity in Sri Lanka.

There are statues of Catholic saints along the west coast road from Negombo to Chilaw, although it is not clear whether they preceded, or were a response to, the more prevalent practice of erecting Buddha statues in nearby areas around Colombo. Given the more common and widespread distribution of Buddha statues, and also their use as a locus of ritual practice – which

does not appear to be the case with the saint statues – the existence of these statutes on the road from Negombo to Chilaw does not provide a sufficient predicate for calling the Buddhist practice an imitation of Christianity. The two religions did influence each other in Sri Lanka, and the threads of that influence may in some instances be difficult, if not impossible, to sort through. But to load scholarly analysis so far over to one side of that dynamic, and reduce this Buddhist practice to mimicry, distorts the narrative of Buddhist modernization in Sri Lanka.

Obeyesekere's second interpretation of the practice, namely, seeing expanded symbolic value in the Buddha statues in relation to socio-political changes in Sri Lanka, is on stronger ground, although somewhat limited by its functionalist approach. He argues that with its placement in public spaces the Buddha statue has become more than a religious symbol. In these public places, it functions as a "visible public symbol of Buddhist nationalism like a flag or the totem animal in Durkheim analysis of Australian aboriginal religion" (Obeyesekere 1972, 64). More important symbolic meaning lies in its spatial shift in contemporary times. As he argues, placing the statutes in public places is not simply a "fortuitous" occurrence, but an expression of a social fact. "[T]he movement of Buddha statues from the traditional isolated repositories to the 'market place' suggests important antecedent socio-political changes in urban Ceylon" (Obeyesekere 1972, 63). This change was, as noted earlier, the transference of political power to Sinhalese Buddhists, the majority population in Sri Lanka, and their active involvement in political affairs, particularly by monks. As Obeyesekere puts it, "The Buddha in the market place expresses, on a symbolic level, the involvement of Buddhist activists in the world" (1972, 64).

While this explanation is helpful in understanding the relationship between cultural symbols and social process, it presents cultural symbols in a secondary role as arising from underlying social processes. Obeyesekere's analysis is akin to a structural functionalist reading

of religious symbols as simply reflecting an existing social reality. Structural functionalist like Alfred Radcliffe-Brown argued that it is the underlying social structure that is being expressed in cultural or religious symbolic systems. The structural order of the symbols is closely associated with the structural order of the society. In this approach, religious symbols, myths and rituals provide a window to discover underlying structural principles on which a particular society functions or thinks (Kunin 2003, 80). What this offers is a mechanical picture of the society, leaving no room for the creative and improvisational use of symbols to shape underlying social structures. Obeyesekere's interpretation follows this mechanical model. He starts his essay by stating, "with massive political changes concomitant changes in Buddhism, on the behavioral level, would have occurred. I propose to examine some of these changes." He finds that a change in religious orientation of Buddhists has occurred to move away from other-worldly interests and actively engage in this-worldly asceticism directed at political and social goals. The concomitant change in the symbolic level that reflects this change is the spatial shift of the Buddha statues (Obeyesekere 1972, 78).

In order to understand the full significance of erecting and venerating Buddha statues in public places, we need to go beyond this mechanical explanation. In this analysis, persons who engage in this activity are not seen as agents of their own actions. Rather, the appearance of Buddha statues in public places is viewed almost as a necessary or logical occurrence reflecting antecedent social change. Attention has not been paid to the capacity of cultural actors to utilize religious symbols and rituals for strategic purposes. Obeyesekere hints at this agentive capacity of Buddhists when he says, "An attempt is made by Buddhists to regain their self-esteem or self-worth; in the process a kind of reaction-formation or overcompensation has occurred. This is manifested in another aspect of spatial symbolism – the size of the statues" (Obeyesekere 1972,

65). Here he indicates that beyond simply reflecting a social change, these statues are purposely utilized by Buddhists for a particular purpose. However, he does not pursue this.

That is, however, the direction that I will take in the following pages of this chapter based on what I learned in my fieldwork. Building on Obeyesekere's point that the placement of Buddha statues in public places is a new phenomenon, I will show how this practice has been strategically utilized by Buddhists in Sri Lanka for a number of purposes, including to influence social structures. As will be shown below, Buddhists in Sri Lanka erect and venerate Buddha statues in public places as a means of constructing, or reconstructing, Buddhist identity in a particular area and to inspire or reinforce religious engagement by Buddhist members of that community. These statues are not just reflections of antecedent and existing social fact. They represent purposeful strategies used by Buddhists to achieve social, cultural and religious goals. As such, veneration of the Buddha in public places reveals another aspect of the utilization of Buddha-vandanā for modernizing Buddhism in Sri Lanka. This practice is not simply a restoration or a residual of traditional practice, but a modern and strategic use of it to address contemporary concerns of Buddhists in Sri Lanka.

5.3 PERCEIVED THREATS TO BUDDHISM

During my interviews and conversations with people who are involved in constructing and maintaining shrines with Buddha statues in public places, they often referred to concerns over what they perceived to be increasing threats to Buddhism and its consequent, seeming decline in the country. For example, a shop keeper at Hädeniya junction who helped to build the Buddhist shrine there said, "Day by day, the Buddhist heritage (*urumaya*) of the country is declining. So

many un-Buddhist things have plagued our society.” A female devotee who makes offerings at Weerambagedara junction expressed concern that, “Our youth are moving away from Buddhism. Their idols are fake heroes in TV shows. Buddhist values and culture in the country are decaying rapidly.” Efforts to construct and maintain such shrines are in large part responses to these perceived threats and to the seeming decline of Buddhism. It is important to understand these concerns in order to contextualize this practice.

Since the colonial period, Sinhalese Buddhists in Sri Lanka have seen Buddhism as an endangered religious culture. During the colonial era, Western political dominance, the proselytizing efforts of Christian missionary groups and the spread of Western cultural norms were viewed as threats to Buddhism. Even after receiving independence in 1948, and despite the vast majority of people self-identifying as Buddhists, Buddhism was viewed as a religion under threat (Wickramasinghe 2006, 323).

These perceived threats can be broadly categorized as external and internal. External threats are mainly related to globalization. However, Neil DeVotta (2007) notes that the geographical location of the island also creates a sense of insecurity among Sinhalese Buddhists.

India’s proximity to Sri Lanka and its 850 million Hindus (over 60 million of whom are Tamils in the southern state of Tamil Nadu), the millions of Muslims in nearby states, and the dominance of Christianity in the West are also said to have caused “a deep-seated sense of insecurity” among the Sinhalese Buddhists, leading this majority community to suffer from a minority complex and embrace nationalism. (DeVotta 2007, 11)

This concern surfaced during my interviews. Sinhalese Buddhists view themselves not only as a minority religious group in the world, but also as guardians of an “authentic” form of Buddhism. A more pervasive concern is related to the increasing influence of Western culture.

Although Sri Lanka has benefited from globalization in terms of economic opportunities and technological advancements, globalization's cultural influence has been viewed negatively. The Buddhist monk Medagama Dhammānanda expressed this negative view in a newspaper article.

What is happening in the name of globalization is spreading both good and bad habits of powerful Western countries throughout the other parts of the world. It is mixing of Western customs to traditional societies of other countries. It is a cultural and religious devastation (*saṅhārayak*). (*Budusarana* 14 February 2014, 8)

The flow of Western customs, dress codes, fashions and art forms is viewed as a threat to indigenous Buddhist culture. Casinos, fashion shows and night clubs are regarded as signs of these external cultural influences. Such influences are even referred to as “neo-colonial invasion,” deepening concerns about the vulnerability of Buddhist culture. There is even some mistrust of the increased interest of the younger generation to learn English, which some social critics regard as a way to spread a kind of neo-colonial culture. For example, an article by a certain Senarath Kotuwila in *Divaina* newspaper stated:

We should use English language as a medium to maintain international commercial and diplomatic relations. But we should not let this need of English to be misused to import neo-colonial thinking and Western customs that will bring cultural degeneration....What I am criticizing here is the importation of Western nude culture in the guise of English education. (*Divaina* 27 March 2011, F 17)

One of the prominent spokesman who warned of the negative aspects of globalization was the late charismatic monk Gongodawila Soma (1948–2003). He interpreted globalization, which he saw as the intrusion of Western ideologies and culture, as posing a major threat to the

continued existence of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Stephen Berkwitz (2008) comments on Soma's position,

The true "Buddhadharma," for Soma, existed locally and was sustainable by the immediate cultural context of Sinhala life.... In contrast, globalization and its forced intrusion of distant ideas and technologies into local customs and institutions were generally seen by Soma as major threats to be actively confronted and resisted. (Berkwitz 2008, 80)

Soma emphasized that the value system underlying globalization is in direct opposition to Buddhist values. Hence, the more entrenched globalization becomes, the more of a threat it poses to Buddhism. He explains,

The devil of misguided economic theory which promotes the idea of attempting to fulfill limitless desires through limited resources is swallowing the whole world. In recent times, this devil has disguised himself as globalization. Those foolish people who seek sensual pleasures without a restraint have become preys to this devil.... This is the way to suffering and decline according to Buddhism. This is what is happening in our country today. That is why we see an increase in immoral behaviors such as robberies and rapes. (Soma 2002, 26–27)

Soma was influential in popularizing these ideas. His sermons were widely distributed, and many people accepted his viewpoints. He even claimed in an apocalyptic tone that Buddhism and the Sinhalese will disappear from Sri Lanka within the next half-century if this influence and the increase of immoral behavior continue at the current rate (Soma 2002, 11). Such fears are still alive among Buddhists, as I learned in my interviews.

Many other perceived threats can be viewed as arising within the country. Before the end of the internal war, activities of the terrorist group known as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) were viewed as detrimental to Buddhism. Terrorist attacks on Buddhist sacred sites such as the Temple of the Tooth Relic and killing of Buddhist monks aggravated these fears. However, when the war ended in 2009, such imminent threats disappeared. What still worries some Buddhists is the demands by some Tamil nationalist activists for territorial autonomy in the North and Eastern provinces of the country where many Buddhist archaeological sites are located.

What appeared to be the deepest concerns for Buddhists at present are activities of evangelical Christian groups to convert Buddhists and the expansion of a Muslim presence with alleged extremist activities. Gangodawila Soma had previously voiced concerns about the efforts of these evangelical groups and the extremist activities of some Muslim groups. At the turn of this century, he had already complained of a well-organized and foreign-funded project to convert poor Buddhist families to Christianity. (Soma 2001, 75). He also charged foreign NGOs for covertly supporting evangelical Christian groups in the guise of social welfare. These aids and services are, in his words, “bribes to persuade impoverished Buddhists to abandon their religious heritage” (Soma 2001, 75).

Not only Soma, but many Buddhist monks and lay leaders were concerned about these missionizing efforts of newer evangelical groups. As early as 1991, the Buddhist organization, Success Sri Lanka, was established in Kandy with the specific aim of addressing the vulnerability of impoverished Buddhist families to these conversion initiatives. As its website states: “There is a well-planned attempt to convert Buddhists and Hindus to other religions by unethical methods,” and one of the aims of this organization is to “neutralize” the situation by

running welfare projects such as free medical clinics in poor rural areas.³⁹ These concerns were often expressed in Buddhist gatherings encouraging Buddhist temples to be more active in helping poor villagers and in advising ordinary Buddhists to not give up their religious heritage for material benefits. For example, a Buddhist monk addressing the anniversary meeting of the Young Men's Buddhist Association in Hatton in March 2013 said that he came to know about ten families who were converted to evangelical Christianity in a nearby village, and he urged Buddhists to be vigilant about various tactics used by these missionizing organizations to convert Buddhists (*Divaina* 13 March 2013, 10). Similarly, the prominent Buddhist monk and chancellor of Sri Jayawardenapura University, Bellanwila Wimalaratana, expressed his concerns in a newspaper interview.

There are more than 100 organizations in Sri Lanka that are working to convert Buddhists in this country to other religions. These organizations have been registered as NGOs. They work in areas where a lot of poor Buddhists live. They even have published books, which provide guidance on how to work in these areas. In these books, poor Buddhists have been identified as “target groups.” They work in a well-organized and shrewd manner. (*Divaina* 11 May 2014, F 14)

One of the conditions that led to the formation of an originally monks-only political party, called Jatika Hela Urumaya (National Heritage Party) in 2004, as Shanta Hennayake explains, was concern about these conversion efforts targeting the poor and the perception that the government failed to prevent such “unethical” conversions of Buddhists (*Island* 18 May 2004, F 2).

³⁹ <http://www.successlanka.org>

Recent decades have also seen increased concerns over alleged extremist sermons and activities of certain Muslim groups that are perceived to be on the rise. Some complain that preachers of Tablighi Jamaat, a fundamentalist Islamic group, travel to Sri Lanka and attempt to radicalize younger Muslims (Pamunuwa 2013, 58). Others complain that the Wahhabi form of Islam is spreading in Sri Lanka with financial aid from Saudi Arabia (Pamunuwa 2014, 14). Buddhists have expressed fears that these forms of Islam are intolerant of other religions and would lead to religious conflicts. However, what initially caused Muslims to be viewed as a threat to Buddhism were incidents that damaged Buddhist archaeological sites in the Eastern province, where a large Muslim population lives. In 1998 a controversy arose with regard to charges against the leader of the political party, Muslim Congress, for damaging a small stūpa in the Dīghavāpi site of Ampara district. In 2012 tensions arose with regard to the ownership of an ancient cave with archaeological ruins located in Kuragala, Ratnapura district. Some Buddhist groups blamed Muslim pilgrims for damaging Buddhist monuments (*Lakbima* 4 April 2016, 11).

Fears about the spread of fundamentalist forms of Islam are related not only to incidents in Sri Lanka. The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddha statues in Afghanistan, conflicts in the Middle-East among Islamic groups and the activities of ISIS have fueled these fears. The formation of the ultra-nationalist Buddhist organization, Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist Power Force) in 2012 marked a high point in growing tensions. This organization is very vocal about the increasing presence of Muslim religious markers and propagates Islamophobic messages among the Buddhist public (Stewart 2014, 242). It recently demanded that the government probe alleged extremist Islamic groups, Madrasas (new Islamic schools), frauds in issuing Halal certifications and unethical land acquisition by Muslims, all of which were interpreted as threatening to the Buddhist community (*Divaina* 30 December 2015, 21). Whether these allegations are founded or

not, such propaganda shapes the perception of the Buddhist public regarding the vulnerability of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

5.4 RESPONSES AT THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVELS

In addressing these concerns, Buddhist monks, Buddhist organizations and ordinary Buddhists continue to take measures to safeguard Buddhism and the religious commitment of their fellow Buddhists. These measures include both movements by major organizations at the national level and also small-scale projects carried out by communities at the local level. Erecting and venerating Buddha statues in public places falls within local level measures.

At the national level, we see the political activism of Buddhist organizations such as Jatika Hela Urumaya (National Heritage Party), Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist Power Force), Success Sri Lanka and the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress. A common theme of these Buddhist organizations is to persuade the government to fulfill its constitutional duty to safeguard Buddhism. Clause 9 of Chapter II in the Constitution in Sri Lanka, established in 1978 states: “The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster the Buddha Sasana, while assuring to all religions the rights granted by Article 10 and 14 (The Official Website of the Government of Sri Lanka, n.d. n.p.).⁴⁰ Soon after independence, the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress persuaded the government to restore what they viewed as the pre-colonial relationship between Buddhism and the state. The culmination of these efforts was the insertion of the above clause in the

⁴⁰ http://www.priu.gov.lk/Cons/1978Constitution/Chapter_02_Amd.html

constitution. Benjamin Schonthal examines the effects of this constitutional protection of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, showing that it has created a climate of Buddhist-interest litigation. He particularly demonstrates that this protection has enabled Buddhist organizations based in Colombo or Kandy to file legal litigations even for remote parts of the country, a warrant, he argues, that implicitly communicates the idea that the whole of Sri Lanka is a single, continuous space for Buddhism (Schonthal 2016, 1994).

Also noteworthy on the national level were attempts by Jatika Hela Urumaya, the Buddhist nationalist party led by Buddhist monks, to pass an anti-conversion bill. In January 2009 Jatika Hela Urumaya made a second unsuccessful attempt to pass an anti-conversion bill in the Sri Lankan parliament. The bill called for a seven-year imprisonment and a fine of up to 500,000 Sri Lankan rupees (US\$3,800) for converting a person from one religion to another by using “force, fraud or allurement.” Though the bill on its face would protect all religious groups, the Buddhist monks who helped write it wanted to prevent Evangelical Christians from converting impoverished Buddhists. Protestant and Catholic communities protested the bill, and under pressure from the United States the Sri Lankan government shelved it (Hertzberg 2016,, 191).

Moving away from the overtly political arena, Mahamevna Bodhignana Sabhava, a new Buddhist movement led by Kiribathgoda Ñānānanda, focuses on enhancing the religious faith of Buddhists. Its initiatives include establishing Buddhist centers throughout the country, publishing books on Buddhism, organizing mass-gatherings for devotional performances, running their own television station and publishing a magazine. This movement encourages Buddhists to learn Buddhist doctrines and commit to religious practice without becoming prey to a capitalist economy (Ñānānanda 2003).

These concerns and perceived vulnerabilities have caused many Sinhalese Buddhists to become intolerant of other religions and what they view as foreign. H.L. Seneviratne (1999, 189 ff) saw the redefined role of Buddhist monks in modern Sri Lanka, which allowed active monastic involvement in politics, as a factor leading to a nationalist interpretation of history that claims special status for Sinhalese Buddhists. Stanley Tambiah (1992, 58 ff) also shows how political developments in 1950s gave rise to a climactic phase of Buddhist nationalism and chauvinism in Sri Lanka.

Many of these Buddhist responses at the national level have been studied by scholars like Stanley Tambiah (1992), Tessa Bartholomeusz (2001), Mahinda Deegalle (2002, 2013, 2016) and Suren Raghavan (2016). What is not well-known in either academic literature or news media is how Buddhists responded to these concerns at the local level. What I observed in my fieldwork is that such responses are embedded in the daily lives of Buddhists. At the local level Buddhists are responding to these concerns and perceived threats by enlarging their religious practices beyond fulfillment of their own religious needs and devoting significant time to practices geared towards maintaining the vitality of Buddhism for their larger communities. In these efforts can be seen an attempt to use Buddhist religious symbols to reconstruct Buddhist identity, to inspire or reinforce religious engagement by Buddhists, and to reshape or reinforce social structures that were perceived to be collapsing. Moving the ritual practice of *Buddhāvandanā* out into public spaces in the community has been the principal means utilized for these purposes.

5.5 REASSERTING THE BUDDHIST IDENTITY OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Situating the practice of Buddha-vandanā in public places shows the strategic utilization of this traditional devotional practice by local communities to address perceived threats and concerns. Challenging the view that rituals represent the old, traditional Buddhism and that modernized Buddhism is constructed on Western or Christian forms, I argue below that erecting Buddha statues in public places and performing Buddha-vandanā before those statues are ways both modern and indigenous for local communities to assert and maintain Buddhist identity.

The majority of Buddha statues I observed in public places were built within the last two decades to address a lack of Buddhist markers in local communities. For example, a shop keeper in Narammala town said, “There is a mosque in our town and a Christian church less than two miles away at the roadside. We did not have any Buddhist symbol in this town before we build this Buddhist shrine.” Erecting such statues has been inspired by the building of new religious monuments by another religion in the same area, or by comparing one’s neighborhood with another where such statues are built. These signify an intent to reassert the Buddhist identity of the area or the community. This phenomenon is in line with the contemporary worldwide trend of expressing “religious territoriality” that has been studied by Roger Stump (2008). He notes,

Although adherents of hegemonic groups have traditionally taken for granted their control of public space, in contemporary settings such adherents have become more reflexive in their efforts to maintain that control. At the same time, religious minorities have also sought to shape the character of public space, often in response to hegemonic practices, while secular forces have challenged the legitimacy of religious influences generally within public contexts. (Stump 2008, 269)

The placement of Buddha statutes in public places and the performance of Buddha-vandanā before these statutes is a way of controlling public space by marking it with a Buddhist identity and asserting “hegemony” as a dominant influence in the area. Below I will analyze two selected Buddhist shrines to show how Buddhists in these respective areas utilized the ritual of Buddha-vandanā to reassert the Buddhist identity of their areas and communities. In the following section, I will analyze two other shrines that represent a different utilization, that is, fostering religious commitment among Buddhists. Both of these utilizations are related to the perceived threats discussed earlier.

5.5.1 The Shrine at Hädeniya Junction

A beautifully erected colorful Buddha statue with a decorated shelter has been built in Hädeniya junction where the road from Pujapitiya meets the main road between Kandy and Kurunegala. (Figure no. 15). Located 8 miles away from Kandy, this junction is a semi-urban place with 115 small shops (Figure no. 16). Offerings are made to this shrine in the morning, at mid-day and in the evening by Buddhist families living in the vicinity, including some shop keepers who have divided the days of the month among themselves. It has also become a focus of veneration for three-wheeled taxi drivers of the nearby taxi stand. Recorded Buddhist chanting is broadcast every morning from this place.

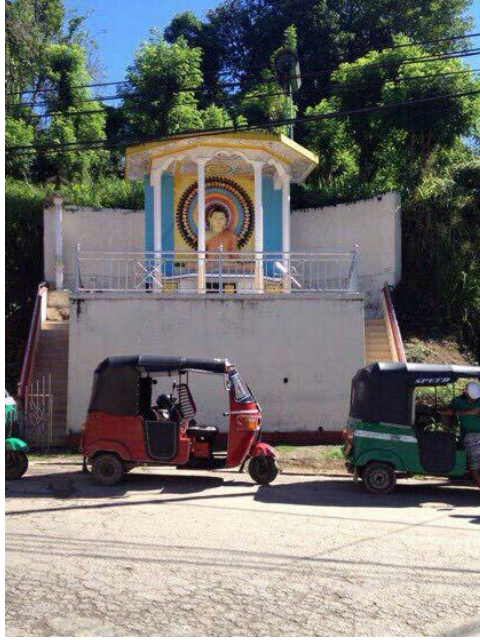


Figure 17: Shrine at Hädeniya Junction

This shrine was built in 1998 by the Hädeniya United Buddhist Association (Hädeniya Eksath Bauddha Sangamaya) with donations from villagers and local businessmen. It has since become a part of the daily activities of many Buddhist residents in the area. This association, formed in 1994, is a small organization with 180 members. As its secretary explained, the association meets approximately every three months at the community hall built by the United Funeral Assistance Society (Eksath Maraṇādhāra Samithiya) of Hädeniya, which is located at No. 23, Pinpāla Road, Hädeniya, Werellagama.⁴¹ The primary purpose of this Buddhist association, as indicated in its constitution, is to promote Buddhist culture and morality in the vicinity of Hädeniya. During my interview with Ajith Gnanadasa, the current secretary of the association, he explained how the decision was made two decades ago to build a shrine. Of the 115 shops located at this junction, eighteen shops are run by Muslims. The Muslim vendors

⁴¹ During my visit to this place on the 8th of August 2014, I learned that this hall functions as a community center for this area. Other local volunteer organizations such as Village Protection Committee also meets here. The offices of the government village officer (*grāma niladhāri*) and the public health midwife are located here as well.

started a Friday prayer service in one of the shops in the late-1990s and later planned to build a mosque in the neighborhood. When this plan became known to other vendors and villagers, they wanted to build a Buddha statue in a visible place at the junction. At a meeting held in 1997, some of these concerned vendors and villagers, who were also members of the Buddhist association, proposed to build a Buddha statue at the junction. The association approved the proposal. The secretary said, “We did not want people travelling to this area to have the wrong impression that this is a Muslim village.” The Buddhist association, with the guidance of its president and the head-monk of the local temple (Daluggala Raja Maha Vihara), approached villagers to solicit funds and acquire appropriate land for this new shrine. The owner of the land adjacent to one corner of the junction donated a small piece of land upon a request made by the association. With monetary donations and free labor from villagers, the land was prepared and the external structure of the shrine was built. One villager, a 62 year old farmer, told me, “Those days, we worked day and night at this place. People who go to work in the day time came here in the evening and worked until about 9:00 pm. Masons in the village took the lead and others supported [them].” As the secretary explained, they later hired a craftsman from the neighboring village to construct the Buddha statue. The cost of sculpting the statue was sponsored by the owner of the nearby Delma Mount View Hotel.⁴² Within a year, they completed the project and had a consecration ritual conducted by the craftsman.⁴³ Once the shrine was completed, the Buddhist association asked the villagers to volunteer to make regular offerings to the statue.

⁴² Located at no. 213/7, Werellagama, Kandy, Sri Lanka, this hotel is semi-luxury hotel that caters to foreign tourists and is owned by a local businessman.

⁴³ In Sri Lankan Theravāda Buddhism, consecration ceremonies for Buddha statues are conducted by hereditary craftsmen who are also lay ritual specialists. Buddhist monks do not have a role in this ceremony even when a Buddha statue in a temple is consecrated. Occasionally, monks chant Pāli recitals outside of the building when the craftsman performs the ceremony behind closed doors. This ceremony is, however, less prominent in the contemporary period, since the use of un-consecrated and commercially produced statues are on the rise in Sri Lanka. For details of the ceremony and social status of craftsmen, see Gombrich 1966.

According to the list provided by the secretary, thirty-seven families have taken the responsibility of performing Buddha-vandanā in the morning, mid-day and evening of each day of the month. The Association of Three-wheeled Taxi Drivers of Hädeniya, which was formed in 2001, later joined this project. This association renovated the shrine in 2013.

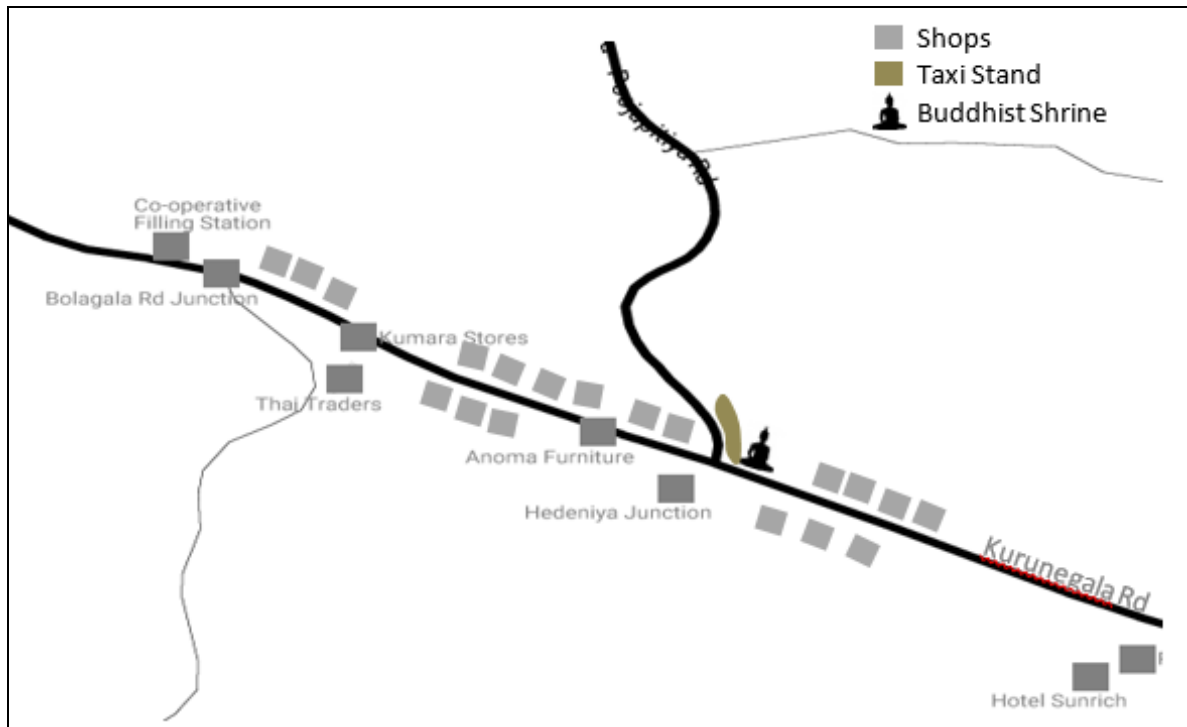


Figure 18: Hädeniya Junction

5.5.2 The Shrine at Urupitiya Junction

A similar shrine with a white Buddha statue can be seen in a more rural neighborhood in Urupitiya, a village one mile away from Kuliyaipitiya town in Kurunegala district. A 3 ½ foot Buddha statue made from concrete was installed in a 10 foot tall and 4 by 6 foot shelter in the

junction where the gravel road running from Kuliyaipitiya town to Dandagamuva village meets the gravel road coming from Hammalava village (Figure no. 19).

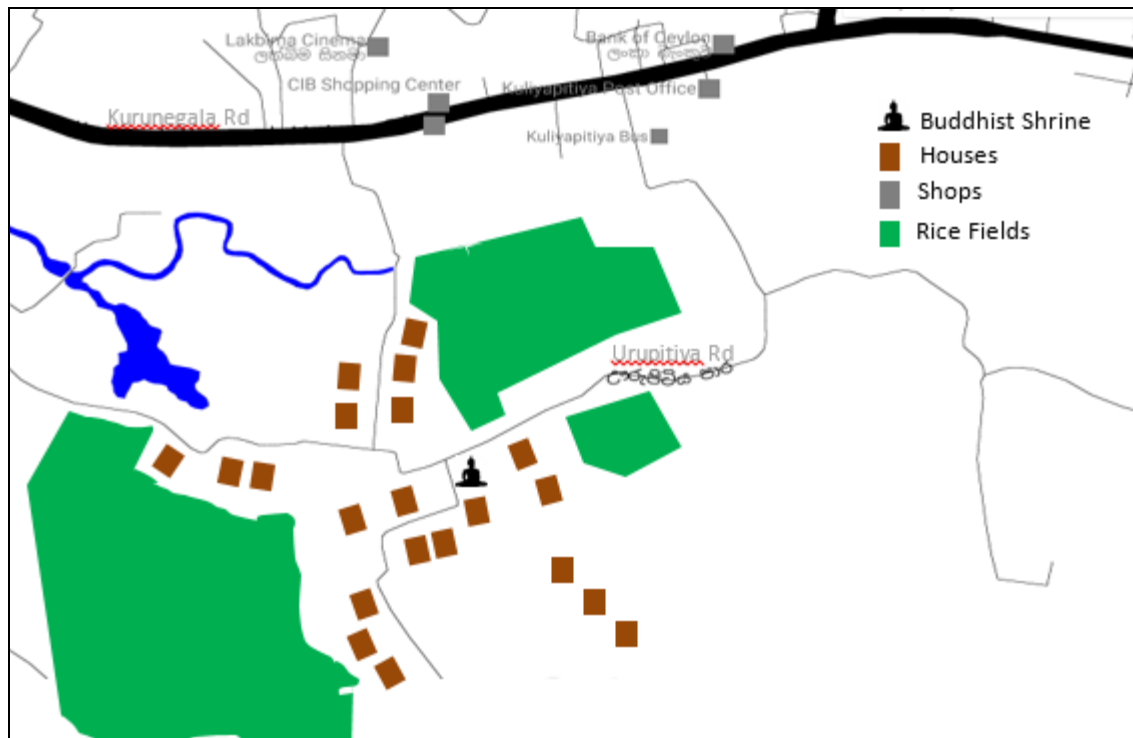


Figure 19: Urupitiya Junction

Quite similar to Hädeniya shrine, this shrine was also built as a response to a new religious edifice in the village, namely, a prayer house for Jehovah's Witnesses. As I learned from my interviews with four persons who were directly involved in this project, the following is the series of events that brought this new shrine to Urupitiya. In 2004 the residents of a house located at no. 7, Pin Linda Road converted their home into a prayer house for Jehovah's Witnesses. They were new converts to that religion. On Sundays they started to hold prayer meetings at their home. A group of people from other areas started to come to these meetings. When other villagers noticed this new place of worship and the gathering of Jehovah's

Witnesses, they started to talk about the absence of any symbol of Buddhist identity in the village, despite the majority of villagers being Buddhists.

Urupitiya does not have a Buddhist temple of its own. Residents of Urupitiya are members of three temples in neighboring villages. About half of them are members of Sri Sudarshanarama Purana Viharaya in Dandagamuwa. Some are members of Dharmashoka Buddhist temple in Kuliypitiya town. The rest are members of Sri Sasanalankara Maha Viharaya in Assedduma. With the coming of this center of Jehovah's Witnesses, many villagers started to express the need to have a symbol of Buddhism in their own village. They decided on building a shrine with a Buddha statue. There is no formal Buddhist association in Urupitiya. The only formal organization of the village is the Dutugemunu Grāma Sanwardhana Samithiya (Dutugemunu Village Development Committee). Interested villagers brought the proposal for the shrine to this organization. Although the purpose of this organization is not related to religious affairs, they appointed a sub-committee to oversee the project. One villager volunteered to donate a piece of land adjacent to the above-mentioned junction. No permission was sought from any authority. According to my informants, since the shrine was built on private property, no permission was needed. Donations were collected from villagers. Many also donated materials. Some also offered their labor. The shelter was erected first, and then a cement Buddha statue in seated posture with the *samādhi* gesture was bought from a shop in Pilimathalawa, Kandy (Figure no. 20).⁴⁴ Unlike the Hädeniya shrine, there was no consecration ceremony held for this statue. It is a white statue with no eyes marked. However, the statue was brought to the shelter in a procession from Kuliypitiya town on 2 February 2007, as the head of the committee responsible for this project informed me.

⁴⁴ Sandaruwan Sculptures, Colombo-Kandy Rd, Nanuoya, Pilimathalawa.

The shrine was open to public veneration from that day onwards and became a center of Buddhist activities of the village. Every evening a group of residents who live nearby come to the shrine, light oil lamps, place flower offerings and perform Buddha-vandanā. On full moon days a large crowd from the village gathers here to light oil lamps and perform a collective Buddha-vandanā. There is no arrangement here as there is at the Hädeniya shrine to distribute the responsibility of making offering among villagers for each day of the month. At Urupitiya shrine Buddha-vandanā is performed only in the evening by a few families living close by.



Figure 20: Shrine at Urupitiya Junction

A few times a year villagers organize larger Buddhist activities at the shrine. As I learned from the residents of the area, on the evening of 1 January 2015, for example, a Buddhist monk from Vidyavinoda Buddhist temple in Kuliyaipitiya was invited to give a sermon. In May 2016 the shrine was repainted and new lights were installed for the celebration of Vesak full moon day. My field interviewees indicated that the shrine has generated much enthusiasm among Buddhists in the village and has, in fact, increased the number of people who overtly engage in Buddhist activities. It was mentioned during my interviews that activities surrounding the

Buddhist shrine have overshadowed the prayer house of Jehovah's Witnesses in the village, which has only weekly religious gathering on Sundays.

5.5.3 Legal Framework for Constructing Buddhist Shrines in Public Places

A formal legal framework for the building of Buddha statues in public places did not exist until late-2008. As we saw, permission for the above two shrines was sought from the local Divisional Councils. Those permissions were sought and given for the use of public land for religious purposes. Approval specifically to build a Buddhist shrine was not required. Organizations who built the public shrines in Hädeniya and Urupitiya junctions did not seek permission from any authority, because their respective shrines were built on private property, and there were no rules governing the construction of religious structures.

That changed on 10 September 2008, when the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Moral Upliftment issued its first circular related to the construction of religious monuments in public places.⁴⁵ The circular was issued in response to the increase in construction of Buddha statues and monuments of other religions in public places. In the circular, the Ministry issued the following orders covering all types of religious structures.

- When constructing a religious building in a new place, an approval should be sought from the secretary of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Moral Upliftment. An application with accurate details should be submitted to the respective Municipal Council, Urban Council or Divisional Council.

⁴⁵ Circular No: MRAMU/SAD-1/Con.Gen/2008.

- The respective Council will examine information supplied in the application and then submit it to the Ministry together with their observations and the recommendation of the Divisional Secretary.
- The Ministry will present the application to a committee appointed for this purpose for further examination.
- The respective institutions will be notified of the decision once the report from the above committee is produced.
- There is no way to get the approval of the Ministry without following the above procedures. Without receiving such an approval, religious buildings should not be allowed.⁴⁶

Another circular issued in 2013, defines what is meant by the term, “new religious buildings”, and lists several types of buildings. This list specifically mentions religious statues. Requirements for construction of a religious building, as listed on the application, include appropriate distance from the road, non-disturbance to other business and institutions, and the lack of objection from neighbors.⁴⁷ The Buddhist shrines in Kadakula junction and in Narammale junction, which were built in 2014, went through this process to get Ministry approval before building.

5.5.4 New Use of Buddha-vandanā

Performing the ritual in public spaces like this is a new way of venerating the Buddha in contemporary Sri Lanka. Observing the practice performed by villagers at the shrines of

⁴⁶ This is my translation of the relevant text from the circular.

⁴⁷ Circular No: MBRA/SAD-2/10/Con.Gen/2013.

Hädeniya and Urupitiya, it appears as a traditional devotional practice. What the villagers offer and how they conduct themselves at these shrines is not different from the traditional ritual of Buddha-vandanā performed in temples. What they chant is also similar, except that the liturgy can be shorter at these shrines. But the location in which this ritual takes place and the way these ritual performances are organized are indicators that this is not simply a restoration of a traditional ritual, but a strategic new way to use the ritual to assert a Buddhist identity of an area or community.

The location of these shrines is new in the history of Buddhist practice in Sri Lanka. The Buddha statue has been brought outside of the temple and, as Obeyesekere observed, to “the marketplace,” to “the hub of events” (1972, 64). The shrine in Hädeniya is located on a very small piece of land amidst shops, a taxi-stand and busy traffic. Although the space is limited, this is a very visible location in this small town. The Urupitiya shrine was built at the entrance of the village, where it cannot be missed by anyone entering the village. The locations of these and other similar shrines are quite opposite to the relatively peaceful and enclaved environment of Buddhist temples, which is the traditional place for such statues. As we saw in previous chapters, bringing the Buddha statue and the practice of Buddha-vandanā outside of the temple and into places like homes and schools has been a growing trend since the late colonial period and a key part of efforts to modernize Buddhism in Sri Lanka. In Hädeniya and Urupitiya, we see that bringing the Buddha to the market place is another more recent manifestation of this trend.

Interviews and conversations with people involved in these two projects revealed that prior to construction of these shrines, the Buddhist identity of Hädeniya villagers and Urupitiya villagers was invisible and taken for granted. Facing a plan to build an edifice of another religion, they became self-conscious of their Buddhist identity and wanted to express it

outwardly. This was also tied to the perception of Buddhism as being under threat from various forces, including the alleged expansion of Muslims and what were seen as unethical conversion practices of evangelical Christians. At the local level, these villagers reasoned that the best way to respond to such threats was to reassert the Buddhist identity of their area by having a visible Buddhist symbol. This would not reduce perceived external threats, but did provide a way to strengthen Buddhist identity and assert Buddhist hegemony over the area or community as a way of responding to such threats.

What we see with these shrines are local responses to the perception that Buddhism was underrepresented in terms of visibility. During my interview with Laksman Niyadagala, the treasurer of the Buddhist association, I asked why they had built the statue and shrine when there is a temple only a mile away.⁴⁸ He answered, “Our temple and other temples in the area are located inside the villages and away from the main road. They are not easily noticeable. But many Muslim mosques and buildings of other religions are mostly located in towns and along main roads.” What they needed in Hädeniya was a more visible representation of Buddhism. In the case of Urupitiya, there was no visible symbol of any religion before the opening of the prayer house of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Once this prayer house was there, Buddhists wanted to have something to represent their religion. A 32 year old mason who volunteered his labor to build the shrine said, “There was nothing in our village to say that we are Buddhists. I am glad that now our village has a Buddhist shrine. It brought a Buddhist atmosphere to our village.” The hitherto implicit Buddhist identity of the majority of villagers was made explicit. This mason’s further statement that the shrine “brought a Buddhist atmosphere to our village” suggests that the

⁴⁸ Nearby temple, Daluggala Raja Maha Viharaya, is located little less than one mile away from the junction along the road to Pujapitiya.

purpose of these public shrines, not just to reflect underlying social structures, but to affirmatively influence and shape such structures.

The novel and strategic aspect of taking Buddha-vandanā into these public spaces is further illustrated in the increased use of unconsecrated Buddha statues in these public shrines. As noted earlier, the statue installed in Urupitiya shrine is an unconsecrated one. In many other shrines I observed, such as those in Narammala town, Meegahakotuwa junction, Kuliyaipitiya, and Trackmo junction, Ihala Imbulgoda, Buddha statues have not been consecrated. What we have in these shrines are white Buddha statues with no marking of eyes, which is a central feature of the consecration ritual. As discussed in Chapter Three, the appearance of unconsecrated statues is a twentieth-century phenomenon and indicates a shift in the way the Buddha statues are used. Such unconsecrated statues stand as Buddhist symbols rather than as sacred objects of worship in the strict sense. As we saw earlier, Buddhists do venerate and make offerings to these unconsecrated statues. However, rather than treating them as holy objects, such as relics and consecrated statues that are believed to bestow blessings, these statues are seen as reminders of one's Buddhist identity and, present an opportunity to behave as a Buddhist by venerating them. These unconsecrated statues depart to an extent from the traditional Buddha-vandanā in an effort to increase the visibility of Buddhism and Buddhist identity. In the context of a perception that Buddhism is under threat and its hegemonic position in the country is being challenged, such statues have become important objects for asserting Buddhist identity.

Desmond Mallikarachchi (1998) noticed the trend of utilizing Buddha-statues for nationalistic purposes in his study on Buddhist traders in Kandy city. He examined the construction of two outdoor Buddha statues, one in front of the central market and the other at the top of Bahiravakanda hill, by Kandyan Buddhist traders in the 1990s, and interpreted these

projects as expressions of nationalistic sentiments by Sinhalese Buddhists in response to the increasing commercial power of Tamil and Muslim traders in the city. As Mallikarachchi points out, Sinhalese Buddhist traders were particularly concerned with the appearance of four mosques in the city. “Not only has the Muslims’ power in commerce increased, but the Sinhalese traders feel that the religious power of Buddhism itself is decreasing and that their Buddhist identity is under threat” (Mallikarachchi 1998, 301). Tying together their commercial needs with religious and nationalist needs, Buddhist traders in Kandy expressed their religious identity outwardly through erecting Buddha statues in public spaces, in addition to having altars with Buddha images in their shops. Mallikarachchi analyses the meaning of these statues for Sinhalese Buddhist traders,

The Buddha image for these traders... is an ‘indicative reminder’ of Sinhalese nationalism, as it enables them to express their ethnic identity more forcefully than any other symbol or sign in the Buddhist iconography. The Buddha’s image, in both its indoor and outdoor manifestations, serves this purpose, at least as far as Kandy traders are concerned. They not only use this religious and cultural symbol strategically to meet their commercial needs and aims, but in the process, they also contribute significantly to the ethnic meaning of the Buddha. (Mallikarachchi 1998, 303)

While not all projects to place Buddha statues in public places demonstrate the same level of nationalism attributed to the Kandy traders, they do all share the common purpose of using the religious symbol of the Buddha to promote Buddhist identity.

This evidence shows that the way Buddhists tried to adapt their religion to contemporary conditions involved a novel utilization of traditional practices like Buddha-vandanā. Buddhists’ choice to erect Buddha statues and to perform Buddha-vandanā in public places as a way of

responding to the seeming diminishment of Buddhist identity is not an imitation of a Christian or Western practice, as suggested by Obeyesekere (1972). The above analysis shows the complexity of issues that Buddhists are responding to. These statues and the performance of Buddha-vandanā in public places have in many cases been inspired by the presence of edifices and practices of other religions. However, choosing to build independent shrines with Buddha statues, rather than a stūpa or other Buddhist edifice, and changing the meaning of the devotional ritual of Buddha-vandanā to be a clear pronouncement of Buddhist identity are explicitly and uniquely Buddhist developments.

The liturgical booklets that were discussed in Chapter Two began the process of recasting Buddha-vandanā as a marker of Buddhist identity. These booklets essentially communicated the idea that “a Buddhist is one who venerates the Buddha.” We then saw in the Chapter Three the change in material culture related to the production of Buddha statues. With the use of inexpensive materials such as cement, plaster of Paris and fiber glass, production of Buddha statues became an industry that is open to all, not only to traditional craftsmen. This ease of producing Buddha statues and the powerful impact that the human figure of the Buddha can make facilitated the popularity of shrines with Buddha statues in public places. These independent shrines in public places, maintained by small committees of local residents, vendors or taxi drivers, and the performance of Buddha-vandanā before such shrines, show a modern and indigenous strategy for asserting Buddhist identity in response to perceived challenges to Buddhist hegemony in local communities.

5.6 INFLUENCING THE BUDDHIST PUBLIC

As we saw earlier, the perceived threats to Buddhism come not only from other religions, but also from the influences of globalization and secularization. This has led to deep concern that some Buddhists are moving away from their religious values and practices. My fieldwork indicates that the construction of Buddhist shrines in public places and the performance of Buddha-vandanā at such shrines is seen as a way to influence the Buddhist public to enhance their religious commitment.

While six of the fourteen Buddhist shrines in public places that I studied were, at least in part, responses to the building of new places of worship by another religion, other shrines were not directly instigated by such incidents. These other shrines were installed when a neighborhood was developed. My fieldwork indicates that construction of this latter category of shrines and local organization of Buddha-vandanā at such shrines were motivated largely by the perception that the religious faith and commitment of some Buddhists was in decline. I will analyze two such Buddhist shrines and the views of those involved in building and maintaining them.

5.6.1 The Shrine at Thalahena Junction

Thalahena junction is where the road between Kotte and Malambe (B 240) meets Thalahena road within the municipality of Kaduwela in Colombo district (Figure no. 21). At one side of the junction is a 2-acre cemetery. On the edge of the cemetery stands an old Bodhi tree facing the fork of the junction. As I learned from three-wheeled taxi drivers and shop keepers in this junction, residents of the area used to light oil lamps under this Bodhi tree on full moon days. When a three-wheeled taxi stand was opened at this place in 1986, a few drivers installed a small

wooden frame with a picture of the Buddha and started to light oil lamps in the morning. In 2007, the roads at the junction were expanded and renovated. A few new business places were added. It became a small but busy town. Two older taxi drivers told me that the original small wooden shrine was thought to no longer be appropriate for the junction once it had been developed with new buildings and wide roads. In 2008 the association of three-wheeled taxi drivers at Thalahena junction agreed to build a large Buddhist shrine. However, the land they chose for the project was part of the cemetery, which belonged to the Kaduwela Municipal Council. The taxi drivers' association made a request to the municipal council to allocate a small piece of land near the Bodhi tree and for permission to build a bigger shrine. During my fieldwork I spoke to the current secretary of the association, who reported that the initial request for land and construction of a shrine was denied. However, the association continued making the request and approached a few elected councilors for support. After about a year of continuous lobbying, a piece of land in the size of 3 perches (816 sq foot) was given to the care of the association of three-wheeled taxi drivers. The secretary of the association said, "Getting this land and permission [for the shrine] was a difficult task. Because all of our taxi drivers stayed determined as a group and kept pushing, we got it." Donations were collected from shop-keepers and residents of the area. The association received both monetary donations and building materials from individuals as well as organizations such as the Lions Club. An artisan from Kelaniya was commissioned to build a Buddha statue and a shelter around it. A pavilion 8 feet by 8 feet and 15 feet high was built with a 6-foot white statue in it (Figure no. 4). No consecration ceremony was held. So the eyes are not marked on this white statue made of concrete. According to the treasurer of the association, the total cost of building the shrine was approximately Rs. 800,000 (US \$ 6,000). In 2010 the shrine was opened for public veneration.

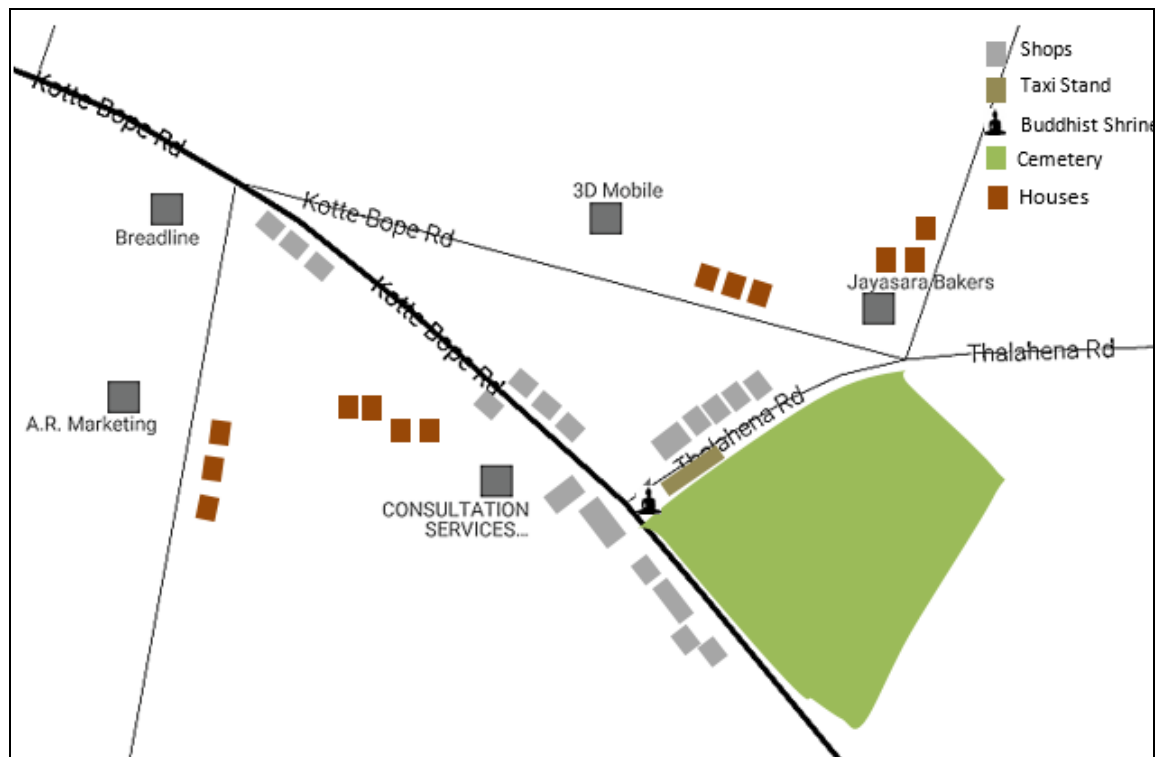


Figure 21: Thalahena Junction

A committee of five was formed among taxi drivers to take care of the shrine. They were assigned to clean the shrine, make offerings and broadcast recorded Pāli chanting through a sound system every morning and evening. A donation box was installed near the shrine. The money collected in this box, according to the treasurer, is used to pay the electricity and water bills of the shrine. As one taxi driver explained, morning offerings with food are made by an owner or one shop in the junction, and mid-day offerings are made by another shopowner. In the evening, one resident of the area has volunteered to make offerings to the shrine. Taxi drivers who are free at that time join this evening veneration. Throughout the day, vendors and travelers visit the shrine and venerate the Buddha. The bus stop at the junction is next to this shrine. Hence, many people who go to work in the morning come to this shrine first and venerate the Buddha (Figure no. 22).



Figure 22: Shrine at Thaladena Junction

In my interviews with people about this shrine, enhancing opportunities for people to practice Buddhism was the most often expressed reason for the construction of the shrine and the principal motivation of those who maintain it. While this motivation may accomplish ends similar to motivations focused more on identity and hegemony, namely, the strengthening of Buddhism and Buddhist identity, it approaches the issue on a somewhat different level.

5.6.2 The Shrine at Mellawagedara Junction

In 2004 an octagonal shrine with a Buddha statute was built at the left corner of Mellawagedara junction where the Negombo Giriulla road (B 322) meets Pannala Mellawagedara road. (Figure no. 23). Located within Gampaha district, Mellawagedara is a small town with 22 shops. Shopkeepers and residents of the area take care of this shrine by cleaning it regularly and making daily offerings. As I learned from three shopkeepers and two residents, before this shrine was built, there was a very old tamarind tree at this junction. Some villagers used to light oil lamps under this tree as a way of venerating tree spirits or local deities. But when Nigombo- Giriulla road was expanded in 1998, the old tamarind tree was removed. Villagers and shopkeepers

wanted a replacement for the tree, which they thought of as a religious monument. A 68 year old shop-keeper said, “After the tree was removed, the junction was empty. Without a religious monument, we felt that something was lacking here.” Consequently, construction of a Buddhist shrine was suggested. Unlike Thalahena junction, at Mellawagedara junction there was no taxi-stand and no formal organization to undertake the project. Hence, in 2002 a temporary committee was formed consisting of three shop-keepers and five villagers. Their first effort was to get permission to use the piece of land located at the fork of the junction for the shrine. The land belonged to the local government authority, the Divulapitiya Divisional Council. After several requests, the committee got permission to use the land. Then the committee started to raise funds from residents of the area. Funds were hard to come by in the beginning, but the committee continued its efforts. Villagers asked a craftsman who lived in the village to sculpt a Buddha statute and build an octagonal structure, and he agreed. In 2004, after two-years effort, the shrine was completed (Figure no. 24). On the day the shrine was opened, the committee asked villagers to take responsibility for making offerings to the shrine on each day of the month on a rotating basis. Thirty-one families volunteered to make offerings and perform Buddha-vandanā on each day of the month. Unlike in Thalahena, at this shrine many families share the responsibility of making offerings. During one of my visits to this shrine, I met an old woman who came to perform Buddha-vandanā on the morning on 12 December 2014. She said, “The twelfth of the month is my turn to make offerings. I never forget my turn. It is a great joy (*sathutak*) for me to do this every month.” Later a villager built a small hall adjacent to the shrine. This hall was used on full moon days to conduct communal Buddha-vandanā and to listen to sermons given by invited monks.

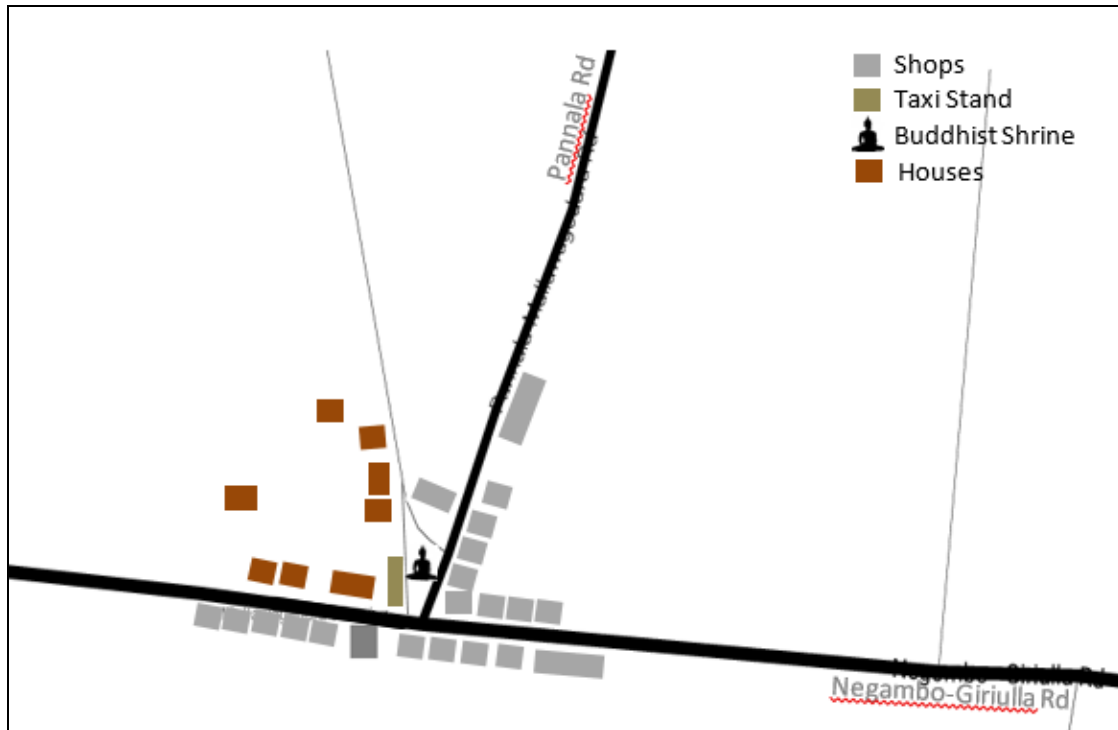


Figure 23: Mellawagedara Junction

In 2010 the shrine was threatened by a project of the Road Development Authority to expand the Pannala-Mellawagedara road, which required the removal of several structures at the junction, including a few shops, the shrine and the adjacent hall. Villagers and shopkeepers again organized and protested the plan to remove the shrine. Two monks in the area helped the villagers protest. They approached politicians to seek support to change the layout of the plan. Finally, in a meeting of villagers held with participation of the divisional secretary of Divulapitiya and engineers of the road expanding project, a decision was made to redraw the plan and save the Buddhist shrine. The road was expanded in 2010. The hall adjacent to the shrine was removed, along with two shops, but the Buddhist shrine was spared. Now the shrine is taken care of by shop-keepers and those who are in the monthly roster to make offerings. On the day prior to every full moon day, the shrine is cleaned. Annually, money is collected, and the shrine is given a fresh coat of paint.



Figure 24: Shrine at Mellawagedara Junction

As with the Talahena shrine, the apparent main motivation for building this shrine was to provide an opportunity for Buddhist practice and, by doing so in a public place, to influence other Buddhists to restore their own faith and practice.

5.6.3 Fostering Religious Commitments of Buddhists

Thalahena shrine and Mellavagedara shrine were not built as direct responses to the construction of edifices of another religion, but were instead the modernization of two old places of Buddhist worship that focused on revered trees. Both projects were undertaken to provide a place of worship suitable to the development of the surrounding area. When government authorities developed the roads and new buildings were erected in the area, interested Buddhists wanted to present their Buddhist shrines in a way that did not fall behind this developing environment.

My interviews and conversations with people involved in these two shrines revealed that their concerns are related more to issues of declining Buddhist values and the spread of Western customs. Some expressed concerns about the negligence or lack of attention by nominal Buddhists with regard to Buddhist practice. Others complained that some Buddhists are focused

too exclusively on earning money. Many were concerned with the young generation. They perceive that many youngsters have adopted Western culture and have ignored Buddhist customs. These concerns were quite similar to the critiques of globalization discussed earlier. Buddhist shrines in public places, for them, are means of countering these trends and enhancing the religious faith (*shraddhāva*) of Buddhists.

A 55 year old woman who helped build the shrine in Mellavagedara expressed her view of the Buddhist public, in general, and what she expects from this statue,

Nowadays, many people simply want to enjoy life by eating, drinking and going after pleasures. Their religious feelings have dried up. We try to bring whatever hidden religious feelings out. When they see this statue and other people who faithfully venerate the Buddha, such hidden feelings can resurface (*mathu venava*).

A three-wheeled taxi driver at Thalahena expressed a similar view.

People remember Buddhism when they see this statue. Some people have forgotten that there is a spiritual aspect to life. For them, the Buddha statue is a good reminder of that forgotten aspect of life.

I came across similar opinions in my conversations with Buddhists from other areas. Using different terms, they referred to the trends of secularization and Westernization of society. The idea that Buddhist values and indigenous culture are in decline is particularly prevalent among the generation who are now in their 60s. This generation has gone through a radical transformation of Sri Lankan society. With the introduction in 1977 of an open economy and free trade, many new technologies and new cultural forms entered Sri Lankan society. This generation grew up in the society that existed prior to these changes, and it is difficult for them to witness the transformation of the current younger generation. For them, this transformation is a

decline of Buddhist culture. They see the appearance of Buddha statues in public places as an effort to remind Sri Lankan Buddhists of their cultural values. For example, a 66 year old retired clerk from Kuliyaipitiya said,

It is a good thing to build Buddha statues everywhere. People build them to regenerate the weakening interest of some people in Buddhism and morality. After the arrival of new technological devices such as TVs, people slowly began moving away from religious things. This trend started about 30 years ago. But some people are still religious. They get together and build these Buddha statues in public places to remind other Buddhists of the Buddha and that we should give spiritual practice a place in our lives.

A similar view was expressed by a resident in the newly opened Araliya Uyana housing complex in Kurunegala. Speaking of the new shrine built there, he said, “It is good to have these shrines to remind people that there is more to life than economic or material pursuits.”

These shrines in public places are viewed by many Buddhists as particularly appropriate for modern times, facilitating practice even among people whose lives are very busy. As one taxi-driver at Thalahena junction explained, visiting a temple requires some preparation and planning. Some Buddhists may not have such free time, which makes it difficult for them to venerate the Buddha in temples. These public shrines at road junctions, bus stops and market areas are easy to access. As he put it, “Now people are busy and they have no time for religion. Having this kind of shrine in places where people can encounter a Buddha statue frequently is a good way to bring Buddhism to them.”

As we saw earlier, taxi drivers in Thalahena and shop-keepers in Mellavagedara make efforts to keep their shrines clean and vibrant. On a yearly basis these shrines are repainted. I learned in my interviews that the maintenance of these Buddhist shrines is done not only out of

respect for the Buddha, but also as a way to attract so-called negligent Buddhists to Buddhism. A shop-keeper at Mellavagedara junction said, “We make sure that this place remains clean and nice. We always try to beautify it. Because when it looks nice, people are attracted to come and pay respect to the lord Buddha.” A taxi driver at Thalahena junction similarly said, “We should keep this place clean and tidy. It should be pleasant to those who see it. Then only they will generate a willingness to come here.”

One common theme that appeared in my interviews and conversations with concerned Buddhist groups is the impact they hope to have on the Buddhist public through mere sight of a Buddha statue. Apart from the ritual of venerating the Buddha, it is the visual presence of Buddha statues in public spaces that is emphasized. The Buddha statues themselves are regarded as having the capacity to bring forth religious feelings. A 62 years old shop keeper at Mellavagedara junction said, “When people see the serenity (*siriyāwa*) of the face of the Buddha, the religious faith can come forth (*mathu venava*).” Another shop keeper at the same place reiterated the same point. “[T]he sight of the statue brings spiritual thoughts (*dāhāmi sithivili*) to our mind. Now people, specially children, can see a serene Buddha statue at the junction instead of looking at billboards.”

A Buddhist monk from Kuliyaipitiya who pioneered in erecting fifteen Buddha statues in public places in the area also emphasized the serene look of the Buddha statue and the visual impact it can have on people.

When we see other common visual forms (*rūpa*), our mind does not cool down. They arouse passion, competitiveness, or jealousy. But the Buddha *rūpa* cools (*nivanava*) our mind. It brings our agitations down. It is not an embellished (*visithuru*) image but rather

simple and serenely beautiful. Therefore, we should bring the Buddha *rūpa* to places where we can see it very often.

Buddhists involved in constructing both Thalahena shrine and Mellavagedara shrine believe that they have made a change in the area and the community through these projects. In their view, they have not only reminded residents of Buddhist culture but also enhanced moral behavior. A shop keeper at Mellawagedara said, “ People used to drink alcohol and quarrel here, But after the shrine was built, they do not do so here. No one can do such things in front of a Buddha statue.” A taxi-driver at Thalahena junction said, “People have some discipline near this statue. They do not blame or shout here. If one does, others remind him that this is not a place for such things.”

A Buddhist monk from Peradeniya explained how a visual image of the Buddha can instigate a sense of morality in Buddhists.

It is like the scenario that laypeople would not smoke in front a monk. Even a person was smoking, he would hide his cigarette when a monk approaches to talk to him. In the same way, when people see a Buddha statue, moral shame and moral fear (*lājja bhaya*) arise in them. People have moral shame and fear deep in their blood (*jīva rudhiraye*). It surfaces by seeing a Buddha statue. In that way, people come to a certain level of discipline (*yam shikshnayakata*).

He further emphasized the transformation that Buddhist shrines bring to an area. He pointed out that junctions in villages used to be places where people got together to drink, smoke or gossip. They were places for immoral behaviors. In his opinion, when a Buddha statue is built, such places transform into religious places with the effect of enhancing the moral behavior of the residents in the area.

In this way, constructing Buddhist shrines in public places is seen by involved Buddhist groups not only as a means of reasserting Buddhist identity, but also as a way to strengthen the faith, morality and religious commitment of Buddhists amidst various forces that push them away from Buddhism.

5.7 CONCLUSION

The widespread practice of placing Buddha statues in public places and organizing the performance of Buddha-vandanā in these public places represents a further, novel utilization of the ritual to address the contemporary concerns of Buddhists. This is a modern use of a traditional indigenous practice, used strategically to position Buddhism as an accessible means for dealing with the stresses and challenges of modern life. It is a key part of the way that Buddhists at local levels responded to perceived threats to their cultural and religious identity brought on by globalization and the propagation of other religions. Concerned Buddhists at the local level build Buddhist shrines and promote Buddha-vandanā in public places as a means to reassert the Buddhist identity of an area or local community, to promote Buddhist practice, and to inspire greater religious engagement by local Buddhists. This evidence reveals yet another aspect of the central role that the ritual of Buddha-vandanā plays in the process of modernizing Buddhism in contemporary Sri Lanka.

6.0 BUDDHA-VANDANĀ AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING

The preceding chapters illustrated how Buddha-vandanā was taken out of its traditional religious context and then introduced into homes and schools as part of the modernization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, thereby promoting both lay religious activism and Buddhist identity. In those two settings the ritual retained much of its nature as a devotional practice, performed both as a means of affirming Buddhist identity and furthering spiritual development. A more recent and more mundane use of the ritual is as an antidote to stress and for the promotion of general psychological well-being. Buddhists in contemporary Sri Lanka are using Buddha-vandanā as a helpful practice to counter the mental turbulence created by changing economic and social conditions. As will be seen, this more mundane use of Buddha-vandanā is most evident in such secular settings as workplaces, hospitals and prisons, where immediate stressors are most intense and immediate countermeasures are most needed. The ritual is also used as a positive intervention by Buddhist counselors and therapists. This chapter focuses on the way Buddhist practitioners perceive and use the ritual to promote psychological wellbeing and not on whether improved wellbeing can empirically be established.

Expanding upon the narrative of Buddhist modernization in Sri Lanka articulated in the preceding chapters, this chapter widens the historical lens of what is considered devotional practices. Prior scholarship on psychological wellbeing as an objective of Buddhist modernization focused almost entirely on the practice of meditation. I found no scholarly

references to the use of devotional practices for this purpose. This lack of attention to devotional practices is consistent with the general scholarly view that such practices are no more than remnants of traditionalism and have no place in the narrative of Buddhist modernism in Sri Lanka. Fieldwork showing the non-traditional use of Buddha-vandanā to further the modernist objective of promoting general psychological wellbeing provides further evidence that the modernization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka did not involve a rejection or de-emphasis of ritual practices. Indeed, it shows that the ritual of Buddha-vandanā has been a significant part of the continuing efforts of Buddhists in Sri Lanka to modernize or adapt their religion to meet the changing conditions of their lives.

6.1 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

While the use of Buddha-vandanā to relieve psychological stress is a modern phenomenon, it connects to a deeply grounded history in Buddhism of using devotional practices to work with the mind. Some of the earliest sources describe the generation of wholesome mental states flowing from devotional practices. For example, one of the earliest Buddhist literary sources on devotional practices, the *Mahāparinibbāna sutta*, records the final weeks of the Buddha's life and his last advice to his disciples. In this discourse devotional practices are described as a means to generate purity and pleasantness of mind. Here we find reference to four places related to the life of the Buddha that faithful followers are encouraged to visit. These sites are where the Buddha was born, attained enlightenment, gave his first sermon and passed away. Upon visiting these sites, followers are encouraged to generate feelings of reverence through reflection on the events signified by each site. The term “*cetiya-cārikaṃ*” (touring the holy places) is used to refer to this

practice (Dīgha-nikāya ii 141). This discourse introduces the concept of Buddhist pilgrimage and interpretes such pilgrimages as means of generating religious feelings (*saṃvega*). Here we see the connection that this discourse makes between devotional practices, such as veneration of the stūpa of the Buddha and pilgrimages to Buddhist sites, and the generation of what is called *pasāda citta*, a pleased or purified mind. In explaining what makes the Buddha and other persons worthy of veneration, the discourse places emphasis not on the greatness of those persons but on the potential of the memory of such persons to please the minds (*cittam pasādentī*) of many people.

Ananda, why is a Tathāgata worthy of a stūpa? Because, Ananda, at the thought: “This is the stūpa of that Blessed One, Arahant, Fully Enlightened One!” the hearts of many people will be pleased. (Dīgha-nikāya ii 142)⁴⁹

The same is said of three other persons, namely, a solitary Buddha (*pacceka Buddha*), an enlightened disciple of the Buddha (*arahant*) and a universal monarch (*cakkavatti rājā*). According to the discourses, stūpas are to be built not primarily to honor such persons but rather to help the common public generate wholesome mental states. Such a purified mind is explained as one that brings long-term benefits and guarantees rebirth in a happy destination after death (Dīgha-nikāya ii 141). The same theme is emphasized again in recommending the four sites of Buddhist pilgrimage. The discourse explains that visitations to these sites produce a pleasant mind (*pasanna citta*) and, if someone happens to die while making pilgrimage to these sites with such a mind, it is certain that he or she will have rebirth in a good destination (Dīgha-nikāya ii 141). What we see in contemporary Sri Lanka is a utilization of this potential of devotional practices to work with the mind for more mundane purposes.

⁴⁹ *Kiñcānanda atthavasam paṭicca tathāgato araham sammāsambuddho thūpāraho? Ayaṃ tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa thūpo ti ānanda bahū janā cittam pasādentī.*

6.2 BUDDHIST MODERNISM AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING

David McMahan has identified three cultural processes that differentiate modernized Buddhism from more traditional forms of Buddhism: psychologization, detraditionalization and demythologization (2008, 42 ff). “Psychologization” is used to refer to processes that highlight the psychological values of Buddhist doctrines, reinterpret Buddhist concepts and cosmology in psychological terms, and present Buddhist practices as psychologically beneficial. As to the last of these, i.e., Buddhist practices, it is Buddhist meditation that has attracted scholarly attention. These scholarly accounts describe how Buddhist meditation has been transformed into a method of enhancing the quality of everyday life, often relating it to some form of psychological wellbeing. McMahan argues,

Rather than exclusively a means of achieving awakening in a traditional sense, it has in some cases been reconfigured as a technique for self-discovery, self-discipline, self-transformation and physical and mental health outside of doctrinal and sectarian formulations. (McMahan 2008, 184)

McMahan describes a general trend observable in both Asian Buddhist countries and some Western countries. He ties this reinterpretation of Buddhist meditation to the larger trend of modernity to bring a new valuation and even sacralty to ordinary life (McMahan 2008, 219). Such an “affirmation of ordinary life,” he argues, allowed Buddhist meditation, particularly the practice of mindfulness, to be adopted as a technique to deal with “the fast-paced complexities of modern life with its seemingly endless stream of tasks and obligations” (2008, 220). The application of mindfulness has been extended to reduce stress, manage physical pain and to treat depression (2008, 56).

In describing the popularization of meditation among Buddhists in Sri Lanka in the 1980s, Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988) make two principal points. Consistent with the modernist trend towards greater lay activism, they note the increasing practice of meditation among lay practitioners, when traditionally it had been a practice principally of monks. Traditionally, the practice of meditation was also focused almost exclusively on spiritual attainments. The second point noted by Gombrich and Obeyesekere is the non-traditional use of meditation in the modern era for secular, this-worldly purposes.

[T]he clients of meditation centers are popping in and out of their ordinary lay life with its worldly concerns, and it is inevitable that they soon come to regard meditation as something besides progress towards salvation: it can also help them to improve their lives. For the first time meditation is thus seen as *instrumental*, a means to success in ordinary life. (Gombrich & Obeyesekere 1988, 237, original emphasis)

This change in the perception of meditation as something that can be utilized for achieving immediate needs has also been pointed out by George Bond (1988). Based on his ethnography with lay meditators, Bond notes that some people come to the practice of meditation for very practical reasons, such as dealing with the crises of everyday life. What they perceive as benefits of meditation include not only spiritual attainments, but also some form of psychological wellbeing.

Among the benefits that meditators said they derived from *vipassanā* [insight meditation] were the attainment of peace of mind, less anxiety, and more self-confidence. Many meditators said that since they had been practicing *vipassanā* they had overcome anger and irritability. (Bond 1988, 194)

What we find in the scholarship on Buddhist modernism is this emphasis on the way reform-minded Buddhists and Western sympathizers have connected meditation to psychological wellbeing. This limited focus on Buddhist meditation has ignored how Buddhist practitioners have utilized other forms of Buddhist practices for similar purposes. This is particularly true with regard to rituals and devotional practices. Such practices are generally seen not as a part of reformed or modernized Buddhism but as residual of traditional Buddhism. However, what I found in my fieldwork is that a similar connection between the ritual of Buddha-vandanā and psychological wellbeing has been made by many Buddhists in contemporary Sri Lanka. Although current scholarship highlights recent applications of Buddhist meditation to achieve psychological wellbeing that are becoming popular in the Western countries and among circles of educated Buddhists in Asia, including Sri Lanka, meditation is not the only practice used by Buddhists to achieve general psychological wellbeing. According to my fieldwork, it is not even the primary practice used for that purpose. For many average Buddhists, it is the devotional practice of Buddha-vandanā that is perceived to be the more effective means for achieving a sense of wellbeing in response to the stresses encountered in such settings as the workplace, hospitals and prisons.

Nevertheless, what we find in current scholarship on Buddhist modernism in Sri Lanka is a focus on the practice of meditation to promote general psychological wellbeing. The analytical lens is again not opened widely enough to perceive how Buddhists in Sri Lanka utilized other forms of Buddhist practice, particularly the devotional practice of Buddha-vandanā, for the same purpose.

6.3 USE OF BUDDHA-VANDANĀ IN THE WORKPLACE

What I found in my fieldwork is that many Buddhists use the practice of Buddha-vandanā to counter the mental stress and emotional turbulence they experience in the workplace. The practice is seen as providing a sense of balance to alleviate the emotional burden of stresses at work. Accordingly, many Buddhists have incorporated the ritual into their working lives. Such a utilization of this devotional ritual should be understood within the socioeconomic and political conditions of the country.

Toyomasa Fusé has written that rapid social change and the inadequacy of available social institutions to manage such transitions create an environment that is conducive to increased mental stress. He points out a number of specific social factors that contribute to mental stress, including rapid and unplanned industrialization, overcrowding in urban life, disruptive mobility of rural populations to urban centers, and uneven economic growth (Fusé 1975, 6). All of these factors are found in contemporary Sri Lankan society. The dramatic changes in the nation's political and socioeconomic landscape that took place after independence in 1948 brought many challenging issues into people's lives. The rapid rate of population growth (0.8%) resulted in increased density of rural population, while limited resources and migration to cities led to a breakdown of stable traditional community structures (Gombrich 2006, 200). The introduction of economic policies in 1977 linking Sri Lanka fully to the capitalist global economy brought not only new opportunities but also more risk, more competition, and greater challenges to earning a living. These enlarged economic opportunities, together with a democratic political system and mass universal education, increased social aspirations. However, the country's economic performance and growth have not been adequate to successfully meet these aspirations. Nira Wickramasinghe sums up the situation,

The inheritance rooted both in a plantation export economy and in welfarism was later reshaped by a brusque turn to liberalism and further disembodied by war. Sri Lanka in the twenty-first century has thus to bear the stigma of a mixed inheritance of Fabianism and Friedmanism that accompanied these fifty years of uneven development performed by democratically elected governments. (Wickramasinghe 2006, 333)

Irrespective of slow economic growth, Sri Lankans continue to be “willing consumers of modernity” (Wickramasinghe 2006, 330). Working families continue their struggle up the social ladder and aspire to give their children a better life than their own. The influence of globalization drives this sense of greater aspiration without necessarily providing people with the resources needed to achieve these goals. In this struggle, people often experience frustration, oppression and restlessness. The youth uprising in 1989 expressed these mounting frustrations. More recent research has shown the increase of work related stress among bankers (Kodagoda 2013), nurses (Nishshanka et al. 2016), and workers in the apparel industry (Fernando et al. 2010) in Sri Lanka. Moreover, a civil war for minority rights that lasted for thirty years, until 2009, imposed a heavy economic burden and created an environment of mistrust and uneasiness among ethnic communities.

While there are many collective responses to these complexities, one common way that Sri Lankans individually deal with mental stress has been to turn to religious practices. R.M. Jayasuriya argues that work related stress among Sri Lankan IT professionals is less when compared to IT professionals in other countries due to the availability of coping strategies that include close social relationships and religious practices (Jayasuriya et al. 2012, 114). This is supported by my fieldwork and interviews with Buddhists who perform Buddha-vandanā in their

workplaces and find the practice to be helpful in countering stress and other psychological challenges at work.

In contemporary Sri Lanka, the appearance of Buddha statues in offices, factories and shops has become a common phenomenon. For example, three offices within the headquarters of the Ministry of Education in Battaramulla, Colombo have small altars with Buddha statues attached to walls (Figure no. 25). The branch office of Trico Cargo Company in Sandagala, Kurunegala has a Buddha statue on the top of an office cabinet. The medical superintendent of Kuliyaipitiya Base Hospital has installed an altar with a Buddha statue in his office. Shrines with Buddha statues have been built in the Noblewear apparel factory in Kandy, the Casualline apparel factory in Mawathagama, and the Slimline apparel factory in Pannala (Figure no. 28). Small altars with Buddha statues are also found in bookshops such as Vidhyadhara in Maradana (Figure no. 26) and Samudra Book Curio in Kurunegala.

Installing Buddha statues and venerating the Buddha in such contexts are often interpreted by Buddhists as ways of relieving stress and calming the mind. The deputy director of the National Institute of Education (NIE) in Maharagama explained to me that they installed a marble Buddha statue in the lobby of the main office building (Figure no. 27) on 20 May 2016 for the benefit of all employees of the institution. The funds for the statue were provided by the employees' Buddhist Association in conjunction with the welfare fund of the Buddhist temple in Duwa, Brahmanagama. What he saw as the benefit of this act was to help employees to calm their minds. He said,

More than before, people's minds are agitated (*kalabalakāri*) nowadays. People have a lot of expectations. They have a lot to do. Their lives are busy now. Therefore, now people have started to use Buddha statues to calm their minds. When we installed this

Buddha statue in our institution, we also wanted all people entering this building to calm their minds.

The deputy director further shared with me that before this marble statue was installed, there was a smaller statue in a corner of the building. The director of the institution made a suggestion in April 2016 to replace this small statue with a bigger one and place it in a more visible place. The director's reason for this was that the small statue couldnot make a big impact on the viewer's mind. They thus installed this 3-foot-high statue and placed it in the lobby. The deputy director reported to me that a significant number of people who work in the building stop at this statue and bow down or chant before going to their offices. In his view, such an activity cools one's mind (*hitha nivenava*) and helps employees to start their day with a settled (*thänpath*) mind.



Figure 25: Altar at an Office in the Ministry of Education

It should be noted here that the placement of Buddha statues and the performance of Buddha-vandanā in workplaces may have more than one purpose. As we saw in Chapter Five, veneration of the Buddha in public spaces is also used as a marker of Buddhist identity. The

purpose explored in this chapter, however, is the individual use of Buddha-vandanā in the workplace to promote psychological wellbeing.



Figure 26: Altar at the Vidyadhara Bookshop, Maradana



Figure 27: Buddha Statue at NIE, Maharagama

What I learned in my interviews was that the performance of Buddha-vandanā in workplaces is done at the beginning of the day and is viewed as a way to prepare oneself to face the challenges of the day. A nurse working in the primary care unit of the Kuliyaipitiya Base Hospital informed me that after her unit was moved to a new building, the nursing staff prepared a small altar with a Buddha statue near the entrance. The statue was donated by a former patient upon his recovery. She told me that she brings flowers from home to offer to the Buddha in this small shrine. Many nurses take a few minutes to perform short Buddha-vandanā individually before beginning their workday. The nurse explained that performing a short Buddha-vandanā everyday allows her “to reduce anger, disappointments, fatigue and other similar negative moods.” She further elucidated how this practice helped her to handle work related stress,

This unit is a stressful place. We get patients who need immediate care. We need to be very vigilant all the time. We also have to deal with some relatives of patients who make unreasonable demands. Our minor staff does not perform their duties well sometimes. On such occasions, my mind tends to get unsettled and angry. However, doing a worship of the Buddha before I start my duties early in the day helps me to keep my mind relatively settled (*thānpath*) on such occasions. The serenity (*shān̄thi*) I develop in the morning stays in the back of my mind.

Here she believes that the mental state she creates through worshiping the Buddha helps her to counteract turbulences throughout her work day. For her, the practice of venerating the Buddha is not simply devotional, but more a tool to keep her mind calm and focused.

In a similar fashion, a magistrate judge in Kandy believes that this practice helps to bring clarity to his mind. He performs Buddha-vandanā in his private chamber in front of a very small sandalwood Buddha statue kept on the top of a file cabinet. Although he performs a similar ritual

at home before leaving for court, he feels that doing this practice again in his chamber is important to perform successfully as a judge. He revealed that he experiences a higher level of tension during the first two hours in the morning since he has to handle issues and problems related to administration and management of the staff before hearing cases. He does not believe that a tense mind helps him to hear those cases objectively.

With this kind of tense mind I cannot handle my cases. I do not know what kind of points of law those lawyers will raise. If there are new cases, I should be able to know which aspects of the law are applicable to them. I should have a clear mind to be able to identify applicable areas of the code of law for each case.

Then he explained how he achieves this needed clarity of the mind,

Therefore, just before I start hearing my cases, I do not allow anybody to enter my chambers. I perform a short Buddha-vandanā and read a randomly chosen verse from the *Dhammapada*. This focused practice makes my mind clear. After this, I straight away go to my bench to hear the cases of the day. Because of this practice, I have managed in my career so far to issue verdicts with no hesitation but with a firm conviction that it is the justice.

In this case, venerating the Buddha and reading a Buddhist text have become an important part of preparing for the tasks of the day. This practice, for the judge, balances his mind by releasing tensions he had experienced earlier.

Seeing Buddha-vandanā in this way is not limited to professionals. Laborers in garment factories, cleaners and office assistants also shared with me that they engage in this practice as a way either to temporarily feel free from the pressures of their workload or to gain strength to continue their tedious work. For example, I met floor cleaners working in office buildings in

Colombo when they were visiting the shrine of the Buddha located in the Fort district. They told me that they visit the shrine during their breaks to venerate the Buddha in this quiet place amidst the noise of the city. They find some relief when they are at this shrine. One cleaner said, “I make every effort to come here during my break. This is the only place where I can sit down calmly in the city. When I venerate the Buddha by lighting an oil lamp and reciting verses, I feel relief (*sahanayak*) and comfort (*suvayak*).”

Similarly, the factory manager of the Slimline apparel factory in Pannala told me that, when the factory began in 1993 a shrine with a Buddha statue was built near the entrance of the factory and then renovated and upgraded with a new statue in 2008 (Figure no. 28). The manager has appointed a worker of the factory’s cafeteria to clean the shrine and prepare offerings. The manager told me that some workers, mostly women, bring flowers from their homes and offer them to the shrine in the morning before they start work. She said,

This shrine is a big help to our workers. They have a lot of problems at home. This job is also a stressful one. They have to work hard to meet the set targets each day. They experience mental stress quite often. This shrine provides a space for our workers to come and relax. This place makes their mind at ease (*suvapath*).

During my conversation with a worker, she said,

It is good to have such a shrine in our factory. When we see the Buddha statue upon entering the factory, a sense of happiness comes to our minds. This statue creates a spiritual environment here. This statue is very peaceful (*shānthai*). It influences my mind and helps me settle (*thänpath*) my mind.



Figure 28: Shrine at the Slimline Apparel Factory, Pannala

Sri Lankan Buddhists who practice Buddha-vandanā in the workplace conceptualize differently about how or why the practice provides relief (*sahanaya*), peace (*thānpath*), serenity (*shanthiya*), comfort (*suwaya*) or any other state of wellbeing they experience. For many, venerating the Buddha creates an opportunity to focus their minds on a positive thing, that is, the good qualities of the Buddha, which makes them happy and settle their minds. Some find that the rhythmic chanting helps to relax their minds. For some Buddhists, just the sight of a Buddha statue brings relief or comfort.

The Buddha statues these days are made mostly in seated posture and in meditation gesture (*samādhi mudrā*) with serene faces. As discussed in Chapter Three, in the contemporary production of Buddha statues priority is given to making the statues look beautiful or peaceful, rather than to following traditional iconographic principles. When buying a Buddha statue, many Buddhists choose statues that look beautiful and serene to them. The above-mentioned manager of the Slimline apparel factory revealed to me that when they renovated the shrine in 2008, they brought a “more beautiful” statue than the earlier one. The clerk I mentioned earlier who works

at the headquarters of the Department of Prisons in Colombo emphasized the change that happens in his mind through the sight of the Buddha statue. “I have a lot of work to do here. There are also a lot of problems and difficulties I have to deal with. I get mad sometimes. On such occasions, seeing the statue of the Buddha is very helpful. It brings serenity (*shantha bavak*) to my mind.” In *Budusaraṇa*, a weekly Buddhist newspaper, Dharma Sendanayaka expressed a similar viewpoint in his article on the history of constructing Buddha statues in Sri Lanka.

Whenever one gets to see a Buddha statue, whether he is a Buddhist or non-Buddhist, his mind is appeased with a happiness of serenity. For a person who is experiencing suffering or whose mind is polluted with anger, such unwholesome mental states disappear in front of a Buddha statue. (*Budusaraṇa*, 16 January 2012, 11)

Whether through focusing on the goodness of the Buddha, rhythmic chanting or seeing the image of the Buddha, the performance of Buddha-vandanā has come to be seen as a way to relieve stress and other negative moods at workplaces.

6.4 USE OF BUDDHA-VANDANĀ IN HOSPITALS AND TO DEAL WITH PHYSICAL AILMENTS

Buddhists in Sri Lanka also utilize Buddha-vandanā when they are sick. Shrine rooms with large Buddha statues can be found in many public hospitals in Sri Lanka. Recently, small Buddha statues in hospital wards have become commonplace. For example, all 14 wards of the Kuliyaipitiya Base Hospital have altars with small Buddha statues. Out of 43 wards in the General Hospital in Colombo, 40 wards have Buddha statues. All 20 wards in the National

Cancer Hospital in Maharagama have altars with Buddha statues. However, venerating the Buddha is not considered a healing practice in the strict sense in contemporary Sri Lanka. It is mainly viewed as a way to achieve a sense of mental peace, to have the strength to deal with being ill, and, at times, to find temporary relief from pain.

A 28 year old single woman from Kuliyapitiya who suffered a back injury three years ago is getting treatment for her chronic back pain. For her, venerating the Buddha at home is a way to escape her pain.

I like to worship the Buddha every day at home, particularly in the evening when it is quiet.

I like doing it because when I engage in chanting focusing on the Buddha I feel an incredible comfort (*puduma suvayak*). I do not know how to explain it. I suffer from back pain during the most of the day. But when I worship the Buddha, those pains disappear. It brings a great relief (*puduma sahanayak*) to both my body and mind.

In a similar fashion, a middle-aged man receiving treatment at the Kurunegala Ayurvedic Hospital told me that he experiences a temporary relief from his back pain when he engages in Buddha-vandanā on the ward.

Many healthcare workers in hospitals such as nurses and attendants promote this practice in their hospitals. They believe that it helps patients to get rid of negative thoughts such as disappointment and sadness. A 48 year old nurse at the Kurunegala Public Hospital prepares flowers, incense and drinks in the evening to offer to the Buddha, and brings them to patients to touch them. As we have seen in Chapter Three, touching items of offerings is a customary practice to be part of the ritual. This nurse considers this as a way of helping patients remain mentally positive.

Patients on the ward often have negative thoughts. They experience sorrow, fear and disappointments. But when they are given an opportunity to touch these offerings, they have a change of mind and feel some release (*sahanaya*). Many patients like to do it. When we ask them to join us, people who can walk come to the shrine to venerate the Buddha.

The ward master of the surgical ward at the National Cancer Hospital in Homagama also expressed a similar view. He keeps a Buddha statue on his ward (Figure no. 29) and encourages his patients to venerate the Buddha. He also grows flowering plants around the ward to obtain flowers for offerings to the Buddha. He emphasized the possibility of changing the focus of patients' minds through venerating the Buddha.

It is good to do such a good thing rather than simply staying in bed. Otherwise, these patients just keep on thinking about their sickness. This activity helps them to have a different focus and at least to experience temporary relief from their physical and mental pains.

He further explains the psychological impact of cancer and the value of religious practices on overcoming a negative mentality.

Cancer patients are different from other patients. In most cases, cancers get worse. There is also a social phobia about cancer. Therefore, many cancer patients experience mental breakdowns. Sometimes we need to remove their body parts like hands or legs. In such cases, they become depressed. The Health Education Unit conducts programs to help these patients deal with these issues and have a positive outlook on life. For this purpose, we recommend they read certain books and engage in religious activities. Venerating the Buddha is one such activity that helps them become psychologically strong.



Figure 29: Buddha statue on the Surgical Ward, National Cancer Hospital, Maharagama



Figure 30: A Mobile Altar in the National Cancer Hospital, Maharagama

Besides small altars on the wards, this hospital also has a main shrine built around a Bodhi tree (Figure no. 31). Patients and visiting relatives often go there. They light oil lamps and offer flowers and incense to the Buddha. Many sit on the floor of the shelter, built by a local

welfare association, and chant Pāli verses and sing Sinhala poems venerating the Buddha and the Bodhi tree. A healthcare worker attached to the Health Education Unit has been assigned to take care of this place. He helps people perform rituals there and coordinates with local organizations to maintain it. He strongly believes that this place provides both patients and their families what the hospital itself cannot provide.

These patients receive only medicine from the hospital. But they have mental pain, stress and agony. They come here when they have such issues. They clean this place, light oil lamps, offer flowers. They relieve their stress, agony and pain by doing that. Patients gain such a great mental relief (*mānasika sahanayak*) by coming to this place.



Figure 31: Shrine at the Entrance of the National Cancer Hospital, Maharagama

He explained that there are many sources of mental distress (*mānasika pīda*) for these patients. According to him, patients are distressed by not only their physical ailments but also sometimes the conduct of healthcare workers. Many patients who are angry and disappointed need a lot of help to overcome these issues. However, he also pointed out the limitations of hospital resources

to provide such care. For him, the practice of worshipping the Buddha is an alternative to overcome these psychological issues.

As the Health Education Unit, we try our best to educate patients to maintain their psychological health. But we do not have enough staff and resources to provide all that is needed. Therefore, having this kind of place in the hospital where people can come and release some of their stress is very good.

The practice of Buddha-vandanā has come to be seen within hospitals in Sri Lanka as a practice that can bring some psychological relief to patients.

6.5 USE OF BUDDHA-VANDANĀ IN PRISONS

A similar attitude towards Buddha-vandanā is found in prisons in Sri Lanka. All 32 correctional institutions in Sri Lanka have shrines of the Buddha as well as assigned places of worship for Christian, Hindu and Islam followers. In addition to a main shrine, the high-scale prison in Welikada, Colombo, the remand prison in Negombo and the prison for youthful offenders in Dalupotha,⁵⁰ have altars with Buddha statues in each ward of the prison. The official website of the Department of Prisons indicates that one of the standing orders for prisons is providing inmates with opportunities to practice their own religion.⁵¹ As I learned from the rehabilitation officer of the remand prison in Negombo, engaging in religious activities is optional, but attending Sunday religious observance is mandatory. As for Buddhist activities, weekly meditation classes, occasional sermons by an invited monk and observance of the eight precepts

⁵⁰ Although this prison is designated “for youthful offenders,” at present it is run as an ordinary prison with adult inmates.

⁵¹ http://www.prisons.gov.lk/Law%20and%20Reg/lawreg_english.html.

on full moon days are conducted in all prisons. At the prison for youthful offenders in Dalupotha, a weekly class for *paritta* chanting is also conducted. According to my interviews with officers and prisoners, the main religious activity that occurs around these prison shrines and altars is Buddha-vandanā (Figure no. 32). While the primary aim of the government is to make it possible for inmates to continue their religious practices during their incarceration, many officers and inmates interpret Buddha-vandanā as something other than a religious activity. They attach psychological value to the practice.



Figure 32: Buddhist Shrine at the Prison for Youthful Offenders in Dalupotha

The main rehabilitation officer of the prison in Dalupotha said that the goal of the prison system is not punishment but rehabilitation. In his institution he gives priority to religious activities in order to facilitate rehabilitation. Another rehabilitation officer at the remand prison in Negombo said,

Incarceration is a mental punishment more than a physical one. Prisoners are removed from their families and are forced to stay with unfamiliar people. One familiar thing they can do here are religious activities like Buddha-vandanā. In this particular prison, inmates

are distressed due to not being able to get bail or pay a fine. For such inmates, religious activities bring some sort of mental relief (*mānasika sahanayak*).

The officer sees Buddha-vandanā as a practice that inmates can easily relate to within the confines of imprisonment.

What we see in these prisons is the “psychologization” of Buddha-vandanā and its modern use to relieve mental stress and promote greater psychological wellbeing in prison populations. In 2008, a new shrine with a 4-foot-high Buddha statue was built at the entrance of the remand prison in Negombo, in addition to the main shrine located inside the prison (Figure no. 33). The funds were provided by the prison welfare association comprised of local benefactors. When I asked about the need for such a statue at the entrance, a rehabilitation officer said,

When new inmates come to this prison, they are mentally down. They are also fearful. They think that the prison is a horrible place. We needed to give these inmates a good impression about the prison. When they see this statue as the first thing when they arrive here, their fears are reduced and they feel comfortable.



Figure 33: Buddha statue at the Entrance of the Remand Prison, Negombo

The rehabilitation officer reasoned that the Buddha statue is a very familiar positive object for many Buddhists. Seeing such a familiar object upon entering the prison helps inmates to relieve their anxiety. He also shared with me that inmates encounter this statue whenever they go to the hospitas and go to court. Such frequent encounters, according to him, remind prisoners of the peacefulness and compassion of the Buddha and hence help bring a measure of mental relief (*loku mānasika sahanayak*). He further asserted that this statue is not only helpful for inmates but also for the officers and employees of the prison to let go of mental preoccupations with problems at homes and get ready for the work of the day.

With limited opportunity to meet inmates, I interviewed four inmates at the prison for youthful offenders in Dalupotha regarding their religious practice and performance of Buddha-vandanā. They reported to me that every morning at 6:00 am they gather in front of the main shrine to perform Buddha-vandanā just prior to taking their breakfast. They pluck flowers from bushes grown around the shrine. After placing offerings, an elder person in the crowd leads the chanting. They again gather here at 4:00 pm. They also perform a short Buddha-vandanā in each ward when the doors are locked at 6:00 pm. While they recognize the religious value of Buddha-vandanā as a merit-making act, most often they referred to the mental relief they get by performing it. One inmate said,

Most of the time what we do here is mentally suffer. Our minds are filled with all sorts of negative thoughts. We feel a kind of relief from these thoughts only when we venerate the Buddha.

Another inmate related calming of his mind to his performance of Buddha-vandanā.

Many of us live here under a lot of pressure (*pīḍana*). We get angry very easily. Some people even get into fights. Some even cry. During my first few months, I was like that.

However, later I managed to reduce my anger and frustration by attending to Buddha-vandanā. The temporary relief I get during this practice helped me to calm my mind.

These statements suggest that the performance of Buddha-vandanā gives the prisoners an opportunity to change the focus of their minds. Such a change helps to make their minds free from constant negative thoughts. When I asked about their practice of meditation, they said that it is helpful to calm their minds but admitted at the same time that it is more difficult than performing Buddha-vandanā. They attend weekly meditation classes offered by a volunteer lay teacher. While some inmates are interested in learning meditation, they told me that it is a challenging practice. However, Buddha-vandanā is not as challenging as meditation and it appears to bring calmness to their minds more easily than meditation. As one inmate put it, “When we see the peaceful images of the Buddha and beautifully arranged flowers and when we chant together, my mind automatically settles” (*nikamma thānpath venava*).

This is not to suggest that all inmates relate to Buddha-vandanā in this way. As I learned in my interviews, among nearly 300 Buddhist inmates in the Dalupotha prison, only about 100 inmates participate in the morning performance of Buddha-vandanā at the main shrine and the number reduces to 40 in the evening. Those who do practice Buddha-vandanā find it aesthetically appealing and helpful to calm their minds.

6.6 BUDDHA-VANDANĀ AS POSITIVE INTERVENTION IN COUNSELING

The practice of Buddha-vandanā has also been incorporated into therapeutic counseling services as a positive intervention in Sri Lanka . Formal therapeutic counseling services are still a new phenomenon in Sri Lankan society. Often, village elders, monks or doctors of indigenous

medicine served as informal counselors in traditional societies in Sri Lanka. Healing rituals known as *bali* and *tovil* were also used to treat patients with serious disorders. In recent times, therapeutic counseling has begun to appear as a distinctive profession. Several non-governmental organizations have started counseling centers around the country. Some hospitals have hired professional counselors. Many companies and factories have also hired counselors in their human resources departments. A few counseling centers have also been established in Buddhist temples in Kandy and Colombo.

During my fieldwork, I found several counselors who view veneration of the Buddha as an important assignment that can help their Buddhist clients. They particularly see this practice as an effective intervention for stress reduction and family counseling. A counselor who works in the Slimline apparel factory in Pannala revealed that he suggests to workers experiencing stress that they perform a short Buddha-vandanā at home or work. He believes such a practice is a helpful addition to other methods of reducing stress in professional and personal lives.

Workers who are stressed due to workload or other problems in their personal lives come to me to receive counseling. After guiding them on how to manage their time, workload and relationships, I usually end my counseling session by suggesting that they start practicing Buddha-vandanā. For me, this suggestion is like the “icing on the cake” of my counseling sessions. Such a practice can add extra peace to their lives.

He further said that many workers later thanked him for this suggestion. He pointed out that he has helped them see this traditional Buddhist practice in a different light. In his view, many Buddhists have superstitious beliefs about this practice. He helps them correct those beliefs and see the practical value of this practice to daily life. He referred to the reformist monk,

Gangodawila Soma mentioned earlier and said that he followed this monk's interpretation of Buddha-vandanā.

A Buddhist monk who runs a counseling center at his temple in Kandy also recommends this practice to his clients. He has received professional training and certification in counseling from the University of Peradeniya. In 2007 he established the Vīmasanā Counseling Service, which mainly provides counseling to families and youths. Starting or resuming the practice of Buddha-vandanā at home is one of the assignments he gives his clients after the first session. He believes that this practice helps maintain harmony among family members and enhances the relationship between parents and children, which in the long run will help them to maintain psychological health.

Now people have a lot of economic hardships. Both parents have to work in many families. Parents do not spend enough time with their children. Because of this, the relationship between parents and children is not healthy in many families. Starting a practice of Buddha-vandanā in the evening is a good way to bring families together.

There are parts in this practice that both parents and children can perform.

He further explained specific items of this practice that directly help nurture family relationships. Plucking flowers for offerings is usually done by children, something they enjoy doing. The flowers are then arranged neatly in a tray. The tray is then brought to everyone in the family to touch, following the traditional custom of letting every participant in touching the offerings. This is also an invitation to join Buddha-vandanā. The parents light the oil lamp and incense at the altar and lead the chanting. Towards the end of this ritual, it is customary for children to pay respect to their parents by reciting a traditional formula and prostrating at their elders' feet. He pointed out that this allows both children and parents to express their respect and

love to each other. He highlighted that having their children pay respect reminds parents of their value and their honorable status, which can restrain parents from improper or immoral behavior, such as excessive use of alcohol. The monk believes that this aspect of the practice can function as a corrective measure for such unhealthy behaviors.

He further expressed his view that this is an appropriate assignment for counseling clients, for a number of reasons. First, it is a simple practice and does not require many resources or much effort. One only needs flowers, incense, oil lamps and occasionally fruit juice or tea, which are not difficult items to arrange. Second, this is a familiar traditional practice to Buddhists. Most of them have done this practice at home before. Renewed instruction, together with discussion of the value of this practice, is generally enough to encourage Buddhists to resume it. Third, rhythmic chanting of this practice is soothing and something most practitioners come to enjoy.

He shared with me one case in which starting a practice of Buddha-vandanā at home was effective in helping a suicidal boy in a troubled family. The young boy was referred to this monk's counseling center after a few attempts at suicide. After listening and talking to the boy, the monk realized that the root of the boy's problem was conflict between his mother and father and lack of familial love. His father is an engineer and his mother is self-employed. Both were very busy and were constantly quarrelling and arguing. The father drank alcohol after work and neither parent spent much time talking with children. The monk summoned both parents to counsel the whole family. The family's first assignment was to begin the ritual of Buddha-vandanā at home. They already had a small altar with a Buddha statue at home but did not venerate the Buddha regularly. He encouraged them to perform this ritual in the evening as a family before dinner. He gave them a specific time (6:00 pm) to perform it and a small chanting

booklet to follow during this practice. He followed up on this practice during their counseling sessions. He guided them to overcome challenges of getting everyone in the family to do it together. He explained the process and the transformation achieved through this practice,

It took about one and half months to get everybody in the family do it willingly. The father did not come for this ritual on some days because either he was late or drunk. But I advised the children and the mother not to be disappointed but to show their respect to their father on the days that he joined them. Through constant encouragement, the family started to do Buddha-vandanā together. Eventually, the father stopped drinking and came home early to participate in this ritual. The relationship between father and mother grew. They started to enjoy this family time together. Following this practice, they ate dinner together. The suicidal boy gradually became stable with the love of his family and developed an interest in his studies again. Now the family lives in harmony.

The monk further pointed out that people end up with troubled lives when they do not appear to have order to their lives. Having a regular religious practice, according to him, can bring much needed order to individual and family lives. Since people give some seriousness to religious practices, committing to such a daily practice allows them to organize other activities of the day around it. He asserted,

If one performs Buddha-vandanā at 6:00 pm with one's family, he or she has to complete other tasks in advance. One should plan to be at home earlier. Then the house should be cleaned up. Offerings should be arranged. The whole family should get ready for this. Such a practice brings an order and organization to one's life and that of the family, which is very important for psychological health.

Here, this monk emphasizes the social value of worshiping the Buddha at home. For him, this practice is not purely devotional or spiritual. It is a practical means to strengthen family relationships and enhancing the overall psychological wellbeing of the family.

6.7 CONCLUSION

Given that modern scholarship has identified the process of “psychologization” as one of three key factors defining the modernized Buddhism, this chapter has demonstrated the significant role played by the devotional practice of Buddha-vandanā in modernizing Buddhism in Sri Lanka. The chapter shows how the practice has been “psychologized” and used in a non-traditional way to further the modernist objective of promoting general psychological wellbeing. Contrary to the common scholarly view that the modernization of Buddhism meant the decline of rituals and devotional practices, this chapter shows that the ritual of Buddha-vandanā took on a renewed meaning and importance in the process of adapting Buddhism to meet the challenges of modern life in Sri Lanka. Just as the practice of meditation was transformed into a method for achieving psychological wellbeing, the devotional practice of Buddha-vandanā went through a similar transformation during the period of Buddhist modernization in Sri Lanka. For many ordinary Buddhists, directing their minds towards the Buddha through offerings and recitations is a more accessible practice and more helpful for finding psychological wellbeing than the practice of meditation. My fieldwork demonstrates that ritual practice is not merely a remnant of traditional Buddhism. It is a strong current in the flow of Buddhist modernization in Sri Lanka.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this dissertation has been to enlarge the narrative of the Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka by challenging the scholarly characterization of modernizing efforts of Buddhists. The preceding chapters have shown how the indigenous ritual of Buddha-vandanā was taken out of its traditional context and utilized by activists in innovative ways as a significant part of the process of modernizing Buddhism in Sri Lanka. By doing so, my dissertation challenges two views that are central to the current scholarship on the modernization of Sri Lankan Buddhism, namely, that the modernization of Buddhism is essentially an appropriation of Western models by Buddhists and that the process of modernization involved a rejection of rituals or a marginalization of them. First, the evidence presented in this dissertation showed that efforts of Sri Lankan Buddhists to modernize their religion was not limited to simply imitating or appropriating Western models but also included innovative utilizations of indigenous cultural forms, in this case, Buddha-vandanā. Hence, the dissertation revealed a greater breadth to modernizing efforts than had previously been recognized or acknowledged, opening an avenue of inquiry into other modernizing efforts that fall outside the Westernization paradigm. Second, the evidence presented shows that, contrary to the current scholarly characterization of Buddhist modernization as anti-ritual, ritual was in fact used in innovative and creative ways as part of modernization process.

Using the widespread practice of Buddha-vandanā as a vantage point, this dissertation revealed a strand of modernization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka that has not previously been

acknowledged. The beginning of this strand, namely Buddhist activists' efforts to use Buddha-vandanā as an instrument of modernization was traced to the late colonial era in Chapter Two. Chapter Two showed that during the same period that Henry Steel Olcott, Anagārika Dharmapāla and their followers were introducing doctrinal reforms and new practices and institutions following Christian models, such as Buddhist carols, Buddhist Sunday schools, Buddhist public schools and Young Men's Buddhist Association, other groups of Buddhists led by the Buddhist monk Mohoṭṭivatte Guṇānanda began to promote this devotional ritual among lay Buddhists in a non-traditional way as a principal marker of Buddhist identity, using newly acquired print technology to make the practice accessible to lay Buddhists and to encourage greater lay activism.

The popularization of this reformed devotional ritual among lay Buddhists through distribution of the printed booklets paved the way for various other utilizations of the ritual within the lay practice of Buddhism. Buddha-vandanā was taken farther out from its traditional temple context and into homes, schools, workplaces and public spaces. Novel utilizations of this ritual in these new contexts showed the greater agency of Sri Lankan Buddhists to rely on their own cultural forms to modernize Buddhism without limiting themselves to following Western models for the same purpose.

The Protestant Buddhist model would lead us to expect a decrease in lay Buddhist involvement with ritual activity in modern Sri Lanka. What this dissertation discovered, to the contrary, was an increase in lay Buddhist practice of this devotional ritual in its new contexts. Chapter Three revealed that more than any of the newly introduced practices seen as inspired by Protestantism, such as textual study or lay meditation, it is the domestic practice of Buddha-vandanā that became embedded in domestic routines across all social strata. This devotional

ritual, focused on new and unconsecrated icons of the Buddha, provided the means for laypeople to be religiously active to an extent greater than that provided by any other practice. Chapter Four demonstrated how children's engagement with Buddhism was enhanced by performance of the ritual in public schools, particularly through "learning by doing." In that chapter we also learned that it is not only the rationalist interpretations of Buddhism through Olcott's Buddhist Catechism and other similar textbooks that were taught to children in Sri Lankan schools. Children perform the devotional practice of Buddha-vandanā more regularly than they study such rationalist texts. Buddha-vandanā has also been used by school principals and teachers to teach children cultural and behavioral norms.

The increase of lay participation in Buddhism through this ritual activity does not appear as a protest or an opposition to monastic authority, as the model of Protestant Buddhism suggests. As these chapters revealed, authoring and producing the liturgical booklets, promoting the ritual as a domestic practice and teaching it to children in schools were concerted efforts of both monks and laypeople. The promotion of this ritual reflects a continuing collaboration between monks and lay Buddhists to bring Buddhism closer to lay life in order to keep Buddhism alive in colonial, post-colonial and modernizing conditions. This does not mean that monks and laypeople did not have different invested interests. Monks maintained an interest in teaching laypeople proper recitations and a proper order for the ritual, while lay Buddhists were inclined to create a more personal Buddhist atmosphere in their homes and a more personal manner of performing Buddha-vandanā. But these different interests do not appear to have been significant enough to have disrupted the otherwise unified efforts of both monks and lay practitioners to restore and to strengthen the vitality of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

In line with performative and practice theories of rituals, the preceding chapters also demonstrated the potential of ritual activities to address contemporary social issues. With Buddha-vandanā, children learn Buddhism by doing. By performing the ritual, cultural, moral and ethical norms are instilled at a formative age, shaping social behavior. Buddhist shrines to facilitate performance of the ritual are erected in public spaces both as markers of Buddhist identity and to influence social behavior in the surrounding area. The practice is performed in workplaces with the aim of reducing stress and enhancing a productive and cooperative work environment. These improvisations of the devotional ritual of Buddha-vandanā show how social actors can use rituals to actively influence the formation of collective identities as well as to facilitate an individual's dealings with stressful situations. Hence, ritual appears in these chapters not as a static reflection of traditional patterns of behavior but as an active strategy to reshape patterns of behavior and construct social identities. All of these uses of Buddha-vandanā in contemporary Sri Lanka show that modernization of Buddhism cannot accurately be characterized as anti-ritual.

Current scholarship on Buddhist modernization characterizes the modernization process as an effort to “beat the modern West at its own game” (Gombrich 1988, 194). This dissertation has opened for reexamination the Westernization paradigm of current scholarship, showing that the focus of existing analytical models only on those modernizing efforts that moved Sri Lanka Buddhism closer to Western and rationalist norms missed a significant part of the picture. While acknowledging that contact with Western colonial powers, Christianity and other Westernized influences of globalization had significant and enduring influence on the modernization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, the argument of this dissertation and the evidence provided to support it showed that these conditions did not uniquely determine the parameters or the direction of the

process of modernization. There is a broader narrative and greater breadth to modernizing efforts beyond the parameter of Western and rationalist norms. A significant part of this narrative is the way in which indigenous actors using indigenous practices in creative ways to carry Buddhism forward into the modern era. With these pieces of evidence the dominant scholarly models of Protestant Buddhism and Buddhist Modernism, both used as referents for modernization models conforming to Western and rationalist norms, are shown to be deficient in representing the full spectrum of Buddhist modernization in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, continuous use of these terms ignores the agency of Sri Lankan Buddhists and continues the legacy of Orientalism which presents Asian people as simply unreflective receivers of dominant Western culture.

This dissertation opens a number of avenues of inquiry for further studies. The wider analytical lens used here could provide new insights as applied to the modernization processes of other Asian Buddhist countries. Moving beyond the limitations of the Westernization paradigm, inquiry can be directed to look for utilizations or improvisations of indigenous cultural forms to better understand the process of modernization. The general scholarly tendency has been to see traditional practices, particularly devotional practices, as a form of resistance to change and modernization. The perspective offered in this dissertation invites scholars to go beyond this traditional view of traditional practices and to look for the dynamic potential of ritual in modernization contexts. Performed in new contexts, traditional practices assume new meanings. The creative use of a traditional, and therefore familiar, practice can be a very effective strategy to overcome resistance to change and move processes forward in a new direction. Recognizing the dynamic potential of traditional practices opens a wider avenue of inquiry into the modernization processes of other Asian Buddhist countries. Within Sri Lanka, it also invites

further inquiry into other indigenous forms that may have been utilized during the Buddhist revival.

This dissertation's discussion of rituals not simply as a static reflection of traditional structures and values but as a means that can be actively employed towards a strategic end, can also provide a new perspective on Buddhism in the West. The terminology of "Two Buddhisms" was originally used by scholars to refer to the different perspectives and practices of Buddhism as followed by ethnic Asians born in or migrated to Western countries and by non-Asian converts to Buddhism. The terminology was later reframed to mean two styles of Buddhist practice in the West: traditionalist and modernist (Baumann 2002, 56). One criterion used to distinguish these two forms of Buddhism in the West is the presence or absence of rituals. Treating rituals as relevant only to merit-making and reflective of a traditional cosmological worldview, they are placed in the category of traditionalist Buddhism. This dissertation can be helpful in expanding this limited view of rituals and to explore their possible inventive roles within Buddhism in the West.

The focus of this dissertation is on the lay practice of Buddha-vandanā and its novel utilizations in non-monastic contexts including homes, schools, public places such as street-corners and junctions, and workplaces such as hospitals, factories and offices. Buddha-vandanā in its original form still exists in Sri Lanka in its performance by Buddhist monks and nuns in Buddhist temples and in occasional lay practice in temples on full moon days. In those traditional religious contexts Buddha-vandanā is still largely practiced in its traditional form. Morning and evening performances of Buddha-vandanā by monks and nuns in temples are focused on consecrated Buddha statues or on stūpas enshrining relics. On full moon days lay practitioners will still gather in temples and perform either communal Buddha-vandanā led by monks or

individual Buddha-vandanā in front of consecrated images and stūpas in temples. Buddha-vandanā is also performed as the opening part of other longer Buddhist ceremonies such as whole-night *paritta* chanting and offering alms and requisites to the order of monks (*sāṅghika-dāna*). Annual gatherings for offering flowers in sacred Buddhist sites, such as the Great Jasmine Flower Offering (*mahā picca mal pūjāva*) at Anuradhapura, have also become important public performances of Buddha-vandanā. These performances are understood predominantly as acts of merit-making and receiving blessings. The traditional practice of Buddha-vandanā in these traditional contexts was not part of this dissertation’s analysis or discussion, which focused on the innovative use of the ritual as a lay practice in non-religious settings.

Although analysis of the monastic practice of Buddha-vandanā was not within the scope of this dissertation, during my fieldwork I did observe the way the ritual is practiced by novice monks in teaching monasteries (*pirivenas*). From my conversations with head monks and monastic teachers of these *pirivenas*, I learned that they view the practice of Buddha-vandanā by novice monks not just as a simple expression of devotion, but as a means to actively generate and enhance devotion to the Buddha. Further, the practice is viewed as a means to inculcate customs and skills of monastic behavior. This echoes the “learning by doing” use of the practice in public schools. The particular use of Buddha-vandanā in teaching monasteries to educate novice monks would be an important area for future research.

A further avenue of inquiry opened by this dissertation is the role of religious symbols in the promotion of nationalism and, more particularly, in the rise of what is referred to as Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka. The dissertation examines the way religious symbols such as Buddha statues and rituals can be used to construct and communicate religious and cultural identity within a local community. In the context of India, Peter van der Veer (1994) argued for the

significance of ritual modes of communication, other than print media, to assert translocal religious identities. The use of Buddha-vandanā to assert religious identity was particularly noted in Chapter Five of this dissertation, which discusses Buddha-vandanā in public spaces. This utilization invites further investigation into the relationship between Buddhist shrines and rituals in public places and their relationship to the question of Buddhist nationalism. An inquiry into the role of rituals in forming Buddhist nationalism would be a profitable research.

Another area of inquiry relates to the existence of transnational Buddhist networks among Asian countries during the late British colonial period. These networks represent an intra-Asian source of influence on Buddhist modernization in Asia. Richard Jaffe has noted that reformist Buddhists in Japan looked to other Asian Buddhist countries to reconstruct Japanese Buddhism in the modern era. In particular, he notes that Japanese monks who studied in Sri Lanka during the late-nineteenth century, upon their return, promoted the veneration of Śākyamuni Buddha in Japan (Jaffe 2004, 87–89). Buddha-vandanā was thus taken even farther from its original context in the temples of Sri Lanka to become part of modernization efforts in Japan. Further exploration of such influences on religious practices between Sri Lanka and other Asian Buddhist countries would be illuminating.

This dissertation adds to the scholarship of Buddhist modernization in Sri Lanka by identifying an important stream of modernizing efforts that had not been noted or examined by prior scholars. In particular, evidence presented here regarding the significant role played by the indigenous ritual of Buddha-vandanā in modernizing Buddhism in Sri Lanka shows that the dominant modernization model of Protestant Buddhism, which considers only those adaptive changes that moved Sri Lankan Buddhism towards Western models and norms, presents an incomplete narrative of Buddhist modernization during and after the period of the Buddhist

revival. Overall, this dissertation opens further avenues of inquiry to continue to expand the scholarship of Buddhist modernization in Asia.

APPENDIX A

Table 3. List of schools studied

	Name of the School	Address
1	Sarasavi Uyana Mahā Vidyālaya	Colombo Rd, Peradeniya
2	Holy Trinity College	Holy Trinity College Rd, Pussellewa
3	Saranath Mahā Vidyālaya	Kurunegala Rd, Kuliyaipitiya
4	Hammalawa Kanishta Vidyālaya	Hammalawa, Kuliyaipitiya
5	Sripathi Royal College	Pannala Rd, Diyakalamulla, Kuliyaipitiya
6	Sumangala Kanishta Vidyālaya	Hengawa, Paragammana
7	Kanadulla Mahā Vidyālaya	Madampe Rd, Kanadulla, Kuliyaipitiya
8	Pannala Jathika Pāsala (Nationa College)	Giriulla Rd, Pannala
9	Andigama Mahā Vidyālaya	Anamaduwa Rd, Andigama
10	St. Joseph Boys College	Madampe Rd, Kuliyaipitiya
11	Ananda College	Kularathna Mawatha, Maradana, Colombo 10
12	Kotahena Madhya Mahā Vidyālaya	Maha Vidyālaya Mawatha, Colombo 13
13	Galahitiyawa Central College	JaEla Rd, Ganemulla, Gampaha
14	Maithree Mahā Vidyālaya	Bandaragama Rd, Wevita, Bandaragama

APPENDIX B

Table 4. List of public shrines studied

	Location of the Shrine	Responsible Organization	Year of Construction
1	Megahakotuwa Junction, Kuliyaipitiya, Kurunegala District	Dharmaraja Youth Society	2004
2	Urupitiya Junction, Kuliyaipitiya, Kurunegala District	Dutugemunu Village Development Committee	2007
3	Narammala Junction, Narammala Town, Kurunegala District	Narammala Vendors' Association	2016
4	Vadakada Junction, Narammala, Kurunegala District	Vendors' Association of Vadakada Junction	2013
5	Weerambugedara Junction, Weerambugedara, Kurunegala District	Association of Three-Wheeled Drivers, Weerambugedara	2014
6	Hädeniya Junction, Hädeniya, Kandy District	United Buddhist Association, Hädeniya	2007
7	Aladeniya Junction, Aladeniya, Kandy District	Association of Three-Wheeled Taxi Drivers, Aladeniya	2010
8	Kadakula Junction, Thalaathuoya, Kandy District	Kadakula Buddhist Association	2014
9	Trackmo Junction, Imbulgoda, Gampaha District	Association of Three-Wheeled Taxi Drivers, Imbulgoda	2009
10	Mellawagedara Junction, Divulapitiya, Gampaha District	Nearby residents and shop keepers	2002
11	Pradeshiya Sabha Junction, Mahara, Gampaha District	Sinhala Vendors' Association of Mahara Town	2002
12	Mahabage Junction. Mahabage, Gampaha District	Association of Three-Wheeled Taxi Drivers, Mahabage	2007
13	Thalahena Junction, Malabe, Colombo District	Association of Three-Wheeled Taxi Drivers, Thalahena	2010
14	Koswatta Junction, Thalangama, Colombo District	Association of Three-Wheeled Taxi Drivers, Koswatta	2008

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