

# Marathon preachers : the two-pulpit tradition in Sri Lanka

Autor(en): **Deegalle, Mahinda**

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## MARATHON PREACHERS: THE TWO-PULPIT TRADITION IN SRI LANKA

Mahinda Deegalle, Aichi

It is not an exaggeration to state that so far no academic publication exists on the two-pulpit preaching in any Asian or Western language.<sup>1</sup> The obvious reason for this is the difficulties involved in accessing Sinhala materials. Except one or two manuals in Sinhala, most of the literature on the two-pulpit preaching are buried in manuscript collections at The British Library and Sri Lankan monastic libraries. Because of inaccessibility, these manuscripts have not been used in understanding the preaching (*baṇa*) tradition in Sri Lanka. It is timely to become aware of the existence of the two-pulpit preaching ritual with marathon monks at the latter day of the *dhamma* in Sri Lanka.

One of the eminent and influential scholars of the modern period, Professor Ediriweera SARACHCHANDRA (1914-1996) remarked over four decades ago, with reference to Buddhist rituals such as the two-pulpit preaching (Sin. *āsana dekē baṇa*) that “[t]hese rituals arose mostly at a time when Buddhism began decaying ... [and h]ence they are regarded as evidences of the corruption of the *Sāsana* or as attempts to popularize Buddhism.”<sup>2</sup> Similar views of Buddhist rituals are very common in the study of Theravāda Buddhism. Though such remarks show that Theravāda Buddhists are concerned with distinctions between pure and impure religion, a study of these issues is not the purpose of this paper. I will not discuss whether rituals such as the two-pulpit preaching are pure, authentic, and orthodox, or are signs of decay of the *sāsana*.<sup>3</sup>

\* I am grateful to The University of Chicago for offering me an overseas travel grant which enabled me to use the Hugh Nevill collection at The British Library. Most of my studies would not have been possible without the kind support of Professor Frank E. REYNOLDS at The University of Chicago who oversaw my studies for six years.

1 For an exception see my short publication (DEEGALLE 1997b).

2 SARACHCHANDRA (1952: 23).

3 *Sāsana* (Skt. *śāsana*) means both the “teachings” of the Buddha and various Buddhist institutions that came into existence for preserving the Buddha’s message. For a recent exposition on the definition of the *sāsana* and its role in Sri Lankan Theravāda, see TRAINOR (1997).

For an historian of religion, an examination of the two-pulpit preaching ritual is important for several reasons. First, it demonstrates the way in which the *baṇa* tradition, which emerged in thirteenth-century Sri Lanka, evolved into a fully developed Buddhist preaching ritual in the early part of the eighteenth century. Second, it displays the way Buddhist piety, as an affective dimension of religious experience, was incorporated into the preaching ritual. Third, it shows an interesting way of using the vernacular language, Sinhala, along with Pāli, the language of scripture.

In this paper, I will examine the way Buddhist preachers employed the two-pulpit preaching as a Theravāda hermeneutical strategy to bind Buddhist communities together through the cultivation of knowledge and understanding of Buddhism; and also how they employed the preaching ritual to express Buddhist values and virtues to ordinary village Buddhists. I will focus attention primarily on the late Kandyan period (1707-1815 CE).<sup>4</sup> I argue that the two-pulpit preaching constitutes a fully-developed Buddhist preaching ritual which arose during the early part of the eighteenth century in the context of Sinhala/Pāli *baṇapot*,<sup>5</sup> and continued to exist as a Sinhala Buddhist ritual performance through which Sinhala Buddhists, versed in religious doctrines, evoked in others their emotional attachment to Buddhist values and encouraged proper Buddhist activities. Further, it taught the peasants the doctrine of *karma* and rebirth in heaven and inspired their aspiration to be reborn at the time of the Buddha Maitreya, and thereby attain Buddhahood. In order to increase pious wisdom among Buddhist communities, the two-pulpit preaching incorporated a variety of popular ritual elements, such as singing, chanting, and dramatic performance, as well as the cultivation of aesthetic pleasure as a means of conveying the lessons of Buddhism. The two-pulpit preaching became a source of cultural as well as religious instruction among Sri Lankan Buddhists.

This paper has two parts. Part One presents a historical introduction that would give a broad sketch of the historical development of the two-pulpit preaching tradition. It identifies the precursors of the two-pulpit preaching, shows its growing prominence in the late Kandyan period,

4 This chronology for the late Kandyan period is on the basis of dates for Sri Lankan kings (VON SCHROEDER 1990: 698-701). For strengths and weaknesses of such chronologies see DEEGALLE (1998: 108-9).

5 The Sinhala word *baṇapot* means “preaching texts”. For a definition of *baṇa* and *baṇapot* see DEEGALLE (1997a: 181-3).

demonstrates its continuation through nineteenth century and provides information on available sources.

Part Two presents a “thick”<sup>6</sup> description and analysis of the thematic structure and dynamics of the two-pulpit preaching ritual. To demonstrate continuities, after a brief description of ancient preaching styles, it proceeds to discuss four segments of the two-pulpit preaching ritual:<sup>7</sup> (i) the verses praising the Three Refuges (*namaskāragāthās*), with the aim of demonstrating aesthetic aspects in the preaching ritual in relation to a discussion of *sārtha* and *savyañjana*; (ii) the request to administer the Five Precepts; (iii) the invitations to preach *baṇa*; and (iv) the ritual culmination, the narration of the story of future Buddha Maitreya, which encourages the listeners to support preaching activities. These ritual episodes are crucial in understanding the two-pulpit preaching as a hermeneutical strategy and a means of cultivating knowledge, values and virtues among Theravāda Buddhists.

## PART ONE

### Religio-historical Background: Sources of the two-pulpit Preaching

Robert KNOX’s (1640-1720) account of preaching associated with post-death rituals is the earliest native or European evidence which can be used with certainty to argue for the existence of a prototype that gave birth in time to the two-pulpit preaching in Sri Lanka. KNOX’s account demonstrates that preaching in the seventeenth century in the Kandyan kingdom was different from the *baṇa* preaching in the thirteenth century,<sup>8</sup> and from the two-pulpit preaching of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This was a period in which *baṇa* ritual passed through a stage of transition, as evidenced by the incorporation of musical elements into preaching rituals, reported by KNOX in his account of *mataka baṇa*.

6 Clifford GEERTZ (1973: 9-10) defined “ethnography” as “thick description”. A full, detailed description is “thick”, as opposed to a “thin” one.

7 Several segments of the two-pulpit preaching ritual that are not included in this discussion are: *devatā ārādhana*, *dharmānisamsaya*, *saṅgrahava*, *mātr upamāva*, *sūtraya saha pada ānuma*, and *punyānumodanāva*.

8 For a discussion on the development of *baṇa* within Sinhala Buddhism, see DEEGALLE (1997a: 183-8). The way *baṇa* relates to the *bhāṇaka* tradition and other early Buddhist practices is discussed in DEEGALLE (1997c).



Describing his experiences as a captive for nearly twenty years in the Kandyan kingdom under the reign of Rājasiṅha II (1635-1687), KNOX wrote *An Historical Relation of the Island of Ceylon* in 1681.<sup>9</sup> KNOX's ethnographic description of Buddhism and its practices, though inadequate in some respects, is very useful in corroborating the existence of post-death rituals, as well as attesting to the growth of preaching rituals in Sri Lanka. His observations show that modern *mataka baṇa* rituals can, with certainty, be traced far back in time. Furthermore, KNOX's description of the way *mataka baṇa* rituals were performed in the Kandyan kingdom in the seventeenth century indicates a developing preaching tradition with aesthetic orientations:

Some days after his disease, if his friends wish well to his soul, they send for a priest [Buddhist monk] to the house, who *spends a whole night in praying and singing for the saving of that soul*. This priest besides very good *entertainment*, in the morning must have great gifts and rewards<sup>10</sup> (emphasis added).

Though *mataka baṇa* itself has nothing to do with the two-pulpit preaching, the kind of ritualistic atmosphere where the preacher “spends a whole night in praying and singing” seems to have given birth to the two-pulpit preaching in the early eighteenth century. KNOX further explains the ceremonial atmosphere of Buddhist preaching rituals:

[W]hen any man is minded to provide for his soul, they bring one of these Priests [Buddhist monks] under a cloth held up by four men, unto his house, with drums and Pipes and *great solemnity which only can be done unto the King besides*. Then they give him great entertainment and bestows gifts on him ... which, after he hath tarried a day or more, they carry for him, and conduct him home with the like solemnities as he came.<sup>11</sup>

KNOX's usage of “soul” here may not be agreeable to modern readers and such usages in KNOX's description will demonstrate the inadequacies of KNOX's understanding of Buddhist doctrines and rituals. Even so the importance and value of his observations in understanding religious matters

9 Robert KNOX, *An Historical Relation of the Island of Ceylon, in the East-Indie: Together, with an Account of the Detaining in Captivity the Author and Divers Other Englishmen Now Living There, and of the Author's Miraculous Escape* (London: Richard Chiswell, 1681).

10 KNOX (1966: 217-8).

11 KNOX (1966: 141).

in the seventeenth-century Sri Lanka should be asserted. All these ceremonial customs that KNOX recorded are typical in preaching rituals and they demonstrate the respect and high social status that Buddhist monks enjoyed in Sri Lankan society. Observing these peculiar customs, then KNOX refers to *baṇa*:

*But the night that he tarries with them he must sing Bonna, that is matter concerning their Religion out of a Book made of the leaves of Tallipot: and then he tells them the meaning of what he sings, it being in an eloquent style which the Vulgar people do not understand (emphasis added).*

It is interesting to note KNOX's identification of this particular preaching activity as "singing" and his reference to *baṇa* as "*Bonna*". KNOX's description gives the impression that this preaching lasted an entire night, perhaps even several days. From this description, two crucial aspects become apparent: (1) reading/reciting from a palm-leaf manuscript (the exact word used here to identify palm-leaf manuscripts (*puskolaṭṭa*) is "Tallipot") and (2) explicating what the preacher already had read/recited.

KNOX further suggests that some people were prevented from benefiting from such preaching because of its eloquent style. KNOX's reference to "an eloquent style" here is significant. It is important to note that eloquent style became a major attraction in the two-pulpit preaching, as can be seen in the incorporation of the *cūrṇikāva* and the like. The eloquent style that KNOX refers to is a result of the incorporation of aesthetic elements such as singing verses and prose sections with alliteration into the ritual performance. Though the meaning of what is recited in Pāli in the ritual is given in Sinhala, it is perhaps difficult to be comprehended by the masses at once since it comes in an alliterative prose called *vr̥ttagandhi*. Nevertheless, it produces *rasa* and creates serene joy in the hearts of pious listeners. However, an interpretation of the content of the sermon for the public was subsequently required because the singing itself, which was in "eloquent" and ornate style was not sufficient to make the meaning of the text intelligible to uneducated people. These characteristics – expressing the meaning of what is preached and the use of an eloquent language – became peculiar features of the two-pulpit preaching later.

In many ways KNOX's description is inadequate as an explanation of the gradual emergence of the two-pulpit preaching in the seventeenth century, and as a key to its nature and qualities. However, it is valuable for this study as evidence of a prototype which eventually may have given birth

to the two-pulpit preaching, which in turn became a full-fledged ritual during the early part of the eighteenth century.

The strongest evidence for the existence of the two-pulpit preaching in the early part of the eighteenth century comes from the palm-leaf manuscripts of the Hugh Nevill collection and of Sri Lankan monastic libraries.<sup>12</sup> The palm-leaf manuscript copies of the Hugh Nevill collection that are used for this research belong to the period of the eighteenth through nineteenth centuries. In the case of the Hugh Nevill collection, the distinction that exists between a *manuscript* and a *manuscript copy* is an important one. Most of the manuscripts of the *Hugh Nevill collection* are *actually manuscript “copies”* because many of them were deliberately copied for Hugh Nevill’s library.<sup>13</sup> Hugh NEVILL (1848-1897), who served as a civil servant from 1865 to 1897 in Sri Lanka, is believed to have collected 2227 manuscripts and some of them contain many *baṇa ārāḍhanā cūrṇikās* and the like that were used in the two-pulpit preaching rituals during the nineteenth century. Some palm-leaf manuscripts in his collection, however, belonged to a period as early as the fifteenth century. NEVILL and SOMADASA have assigned approximate dates to those manuscripts which do not bear specific dates and they are published at the beginning of each entry and at the end of each volume of the printed catalogue. In dating manuscript copies, the quality of palm-leaves in the manuscript has been the sole criterion. However, such assigned dates, in many cases, do not say anything at all about the content of the manuscript or its actual date. It is reasonable to assume that the content of most manuscript copies on the two-pulpit preaching in the Hugh Nevill collection belong to pre-eighteenth century period.

There is no complete ritual manual for the two-pulpit preaching. The manuscripts of the Hugh Nevill collection, as well as of the collections in Sri Lankan monastic libraries, that relate to the two-pulpit preaching are not found collected in a single volume. Each segment of the preaching ritual exists as individual units (for example, the verses praising the Three Refuges (*namaskāragāthās*), the request to administer the Five Precepts, the invitations to *baṇa*, or *Maitreya Varṇanāva*). In terms of relationships, however, the contents of some of these manuscripts are similar to those of the printed edition (1894) of the *Mallikovāda Sutta*.

12 SOMADASA (1959-1964; 1987-1995).

13 SOMADASA (1987: vii).

Since I have used this late nineteenth century printed edition of the *Mallikovāda Sutta*, which contains materials used in the two-pulpit preaching, a little description on this source is necessary. For a better understanding of the printed edition of the *Mallikovāda Sutta*, I present here an outline of its contents: (1) *Pansil Illīma*, p. 1, (2) *Baṇa Ārādhana*, pp. 1-3, (3) *Devatā Ārādhana*, p. 3, (4) *Namaskāra Gāthā Paṅktiya*, pp. 3-13, (5) *Saṅgrahava* (for the *Mallikovāda Sutta*), pp. 14-16, (6) *Saṅgrahava (Mātr Upamāva* – “Mother Simile”),<sup>14</sup> pp. 17-20, (7) The *Mallikovāda Sutta*, pp. 21-23, (8) The *Mallikovāda Sūtrasannaya*, pp. 24-34, (9) *Maitreya Varṇanāva*, pp. 35-38, and (10) *Saṅgrahava* (for the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*), pp. 39-40.

A word of caution is however necessary here: it is important to distinguish this printed edition from the two *Mallikā Suttas* (A.II.202ff; S.I.75) in the Pāli canon and two *Mallikovāda Sutta* manuscripts [Or.6600(28)II and III] in the Hugh Nevill collection. Even though the printed edition and the manuscripts have the same title (“*Mallikovāda Sutta*”) their contents differ. The importance of the late nineteenth century printed edition lies in the fact that it contains materials used in the two-pulpit preaching. The information it contains on the two-pulpit preaching was perhaps taken from manuscripts found in the Hugh Nevill collection and other similar manuscripts found in Sri Lankan monastic libraries. Thus, though the printed edition itself dates from the late nineteenth century, the materials it contains on the two-pulpit preaching are earlier. Because of its possible relationship to the Hugh Nevill collection and its accessibility for scholars as a reference guide, I have quoted it throughout this paper. In addition, in some sections, I have also given the relevant parts from the original manuscripts in the Hugh Nevill collection and they are cited here in their “Or” numbers.

In addition to the above mentioned sources, there are several accounts of the two-pulpit preaching given by Europeans who visited Sri Lanka in the late nineteenth century that are useful in understanding the nature of ritual performance. The accounts of Reginald Stephen COPLESTON (1845-1925), Thomas William RHYS DAVIDS (1843-1922), and J. F. DICKSON strongly suggest the existence of the two-pulpit preaching ritual in Sri Lanka in the nineteenth century, and provide ample evidence for verifying

14 An almost identical version of the *Mātr Upamāva* which compares Buddha to a mother, has been translated and analyzed by Richard F. GOMBRICH (1972: 70-78).

both the ritual content and the nature of the ritual itself. Furthermore, their observations are contemporaneous with the printed edition of the *Mallikovāda Sutta*.

Though the two-pulpit preaching may have been performed in many parts of Sri Lanka, it seems to have been most common in the Central Province. Reginald Stephen COPLESTON, Bishop of Colombo, pointed out that the way of preaching *bana* (in particular, the two-pulpit preaching), was characteristic of the ritual practices of the monks of the Siam Nikāya. According to him, monks of two other *nikāyas*, the Amarapura and Rāmañña, differed in preaching style from the monks of the Siyam Nikāya.<sup>15</sup> The Siyam Nikāya existed long before the Amarapura and the Rāmañña, and its practice of the two-pulpit preaching likewise predates that of the other two *nikāyas*:

In the assemblies collected to hear bana from monks of the Siamese branch, two seats are placed, and two readers divide the duty; one of them reading out the text and the other, not when he has finished, but concurrently, word after word or at most phrase after phrase, giving the interpretation. Among the Amarapura and Ramanya one monk both reads and interprets, and consequently only one seat is needed.<sup>16</sup>

This shows that the two-pulpit preaching was a common practice of the monks of the Siam Nikāya, rather than of the Amarapura and Rāmañña. From this, it is possible to argue that since the monks of the Siam Nikāya were the dominant monastic group in the Central Province, the two-pulpit preaching was more common in the Central Province. Several manuscripts in the Hugh Nevill collection mention locations of the two-pulpit preaching rituals. For example, Or.6601(92)f2a records that a the two-pulpit preaching occurred in Kandy. Furthermore, observing a Kandyan ritual context in the twentieth century Sri Lanka and noting the wide use of the *Māṭṭ Upamāva* in the Kandyan region in relation to the two-pulpit preaching, an influential scholar has commented:

15 In 1803, while the Amarapura Nikāya was found with the *upasampadā* ceremony at Balapitiya, the Rāmañña Nikāya was founded on June 12th, 1864 with the *upasampadā* ceremony held at Mahamōdara in Galle (MALALGODA 1976: 98, 166). Both *nikāyas* received the *upasampadā* from Burmese monks.

16 COPLESTON (1892: 431).



Although the ceremony of the “twin-seat-sermon” is very rare, perhaps obsolescent, I found that the Māṭṭ Upamāva is fairly widely known by heart by elderly monks in the Kandy area ... Other evidence too suggests a Kandyan origin for the Māṭṭ Upamāva. Of the 15 manuscripts of our text listed in Mr. SOMADASA’s catalogue of palm-leaf manuscripts in Ceylonese temple libraries, 12 are in the Central Province, most of them in or very near to Kandy.<sup>17</sup>

T. W. RHYS DAVIDS, who spent many years in Sri Lanka as a civil servant and devoted his entire life to the spread of academic study of Theravāda Buddhism in the West, refers to the two-pulpit preaching and its ceremonial aspects in one of his writings. His account shows that Sri Lankan Buddhists were earnestly involved in religious activities during the rain-retreat (*vassa*). While one can infer from COPLESTON’s account above the prevalence of the two-pulpit preaching in the Central Province, RHYS DAVIDS’ account seems to suggest that the two-pulpit preaching ceremony was also found in the coastal area of the low country. RHYS DAVIDS mentions palm trees which are a common feature in coastal Sri Lanka. Among the manuscripts, Or.6603(178)III f7b6-8 mentions Matara – a coastal area – as a place where the two-pulpit preaching was held:

As there are no regular religious services at any other time, the peasantry celebrate the reading of *bana* (or the Word) at *was* time as their great religious festival. They put up under the palm-trees a platform, roofed, but quite open at the sides, and ornamented with bright clothes and flowers; and round it they sit in the moonlight on the ground, and listen through the night with great satisfaction, if not with great intelligence to the sacred words repeated by relays of shaven monks.<sup>18</sup>

In this account, “sacred words repeated by relays of shaven monks” could refer to the two-pulpit preaching, since RHYS DAVIDS’ use of the term “relays” seems close to COPLESTON’s own description: “one of them reading out the text and the other, not when he has finished, but concurrently, word after word or at most phrase after phrase, giving the interpretation.” In this case, “relays” and “concurrently” seem to suggest a similar phenomenon, which one can observe in the two-pulpit preaching. COPLESTON’s description of the two-preachers’ performance at the preaching ritual as a “concurrently” done ritual exercise and RHYS

17 GOMBRICH (1972: 70-1).

18 RHYS DAVIDS (1894: 57-8).



DAVIDS' characterization as "relays of shaven monks" point to a feature where the two preachers function as marathoners.

RHYS DAVIDS also mentions texts which were popular among enthusiastic listeners as instructive:

The greatest favourite at these readings of *bana* is the "Jātaka" book, which contains so many of the old fables and stories common to the Aryan peoples, sanctified now, and preserved by the leading hero in each, whether man, or fairy, or animal, being looked upon as an incarnation of the Buddha in one of his previous births. To these wonderful stories the simple peasantry, dressed in their best and brightest, listen all the night long with unaffected delight; chatting pleasantly now and again with their neighbours; and indulging all the while in the mild narcotic of the betel leaf, their stories of which (and of its never failing adjuncts, chunam, that is, white lime, and the areka nut), afford a constant occasion for acts of polite good fellowship.

RHYS DAVIDS further highlights the purpose of listening to *baṇa* and the influence it had on people. He sees its influence as a positive one, leading to harmonious relationships. Significantly, he calls the monks "preachers":

The first spirit of Buddhism may have passed away as completely as the old reason for *was*; neither hearers nor preachers may have that deep sense of evil in the world and in themselves, nor that high resolve to battle with and overcome it, which animated some of the early Buddhists; and they all think themselves to be earning "merit" by their easy service. But there is at least at these festivals a genuine feeling of human kindness, in harmony alike with the teachings of Gautama, and with the gentle beauty of those moonlight scenes.

J. F. DICKSON records the common practice of "*rātri baṇa*" (night preaching), which lasts through an entire night:

On these occasions, the people from the neighbouring villages, dressed in their holiday attire, attend in great numbers. The priest invites another priest to join him, as two are required for this service. After their evening meal, each is presented with a robe which he puts on, and they are then conducted under a canopy, with music and flags, from their lodgings to the preaching hall, in the middle of which two pulpits are prepared for them. The pulpit is made of four upright posts supporting a platform about four feet square, and a canopy above. The platform is hip-high from the ground. Cushions are placed on the platform ... The priests take their places in front of the pulpits, holding their hand-screens before their faces, while the people

make obeisance and say, “sādhū! sādhū! sādhū!” ... They are then lifted into their pulpits, on which they sit cross-legged.<sup>19</sup>

What DICKSON states about two preachers seems to be similar to the two activities performed by one preacher, as described in the account by Robert KNOX.

One priest has with him a copy of a portion of the Sutta Piṭakam, from which he reads, while the other expounds it to the people in Sinhalese. The reader recites the Three Refuges and the Five Commandments, which the people repeat after him, and he then summons the gods to attend and hear the words of the Buddha ... The expounder or preacher then says, “Namo tassa ...” and recites some stanzas in praise of the Three Jewels. He either selects stanzas from Buddhaghosa’s or other Commentaries, or sometimes he recites stanzas of his own composition. The reader then reads a few stanzas, and the preacher explains them sentence by sentence in Sinhalese, but in learned language which only a few understand.<sup>20</sup>

This account records ritual activities surrounding the two-pulpit preaching as it existed at the latter part of the nineteenth century. It highlights the devotional participation of the Buddhist laity in the performance of the two-pulpit preaching which was held as the climax of the three-month-long *vassa* ceremony in which Buddhist clergy and laity work harmoniously in the growth of their spirituality. Relevant to the study of the two-pulpit preaching is that the late ninth century observations of COPLESTON, RHYS DAVIDS, and DICKSON are contemporaneous with the printing of the two-pulpit preaching manual – the *Mallikovāda Sutta*.

## PART TWO

### Ritual Performance: Thematic Structure and Dynamics

#### *Preliminaries*

Preparations for holding an *āsana dekē baṇa* are quite extensive and elaborate. After the sponsors have selected a temple or public place as the location for the ceremony, they have to spend weeks on its construction and decoration and on the preparation of essential things for the ritual. It is a traditional custom that devotees decorate the entire preaching hall (*baṇa*

19 DICKSON (1884: 224-5).

20 DICKSON (1884: 224-5).

*maṇḍuva*) with festive decorations such as canopies and ornamentations. In 1884, J. F. DICKSON recorded: “The pulpits and the hall are tastefully decorated with flags, palms, ferns, and flowers.”<sup>21</sup> A two-pulpit preaching manuscript<sup>22</sup> adds a poetic dimension to the description:

White canopies are tied like the full-moon which shines in the middle of the sky. Oil lamps which are lighted to remove darkness are like the shining stars in the background. *Punkalas* are set at the door-ways which are decorated with garlands of flowers and *vagurāli*.<sup>23</sup>

All these passages describe the way that the preaching hall and its surroundings were decorated as an offering (*pūjā*) to the Buddha.

In the middle of the preaching hall, two pulpits known as *vajrāsana* (Sin. *vidurasana*) are set up for the two preachers.<sup>24</sup> According to the traditional custom, one pulpit faces east while the second pulpit is positioned to the right of the first seat but facing north.<sup>25</sup> However, in some ceremonies, these directions have not been observed, and the two pulpits are placed next to each other in the middle of the *maṇḍapa* facing the audience. While the *padabhañña* (expounder) sits on the pulpit facing east, the *sarabhañña* (reciter) sits on the one facing north. This particular seating arrangement seems to have both symbolic and mythological importance in the ritual. The way the two pulpits are ritually positioned in the *āsana dekē baṇa* has been influenced by the traditional account of the First Council at Rājagaha as recorded in Pāli literature. In the First Council, the two pulpits – *dhammāsana* (preacher’s pulpit) and *therāsana* (elder’s pulpit) – were constructed in the same manner. In the middle of the *maṇḍapa* where the *saṃgīti* was held, the *dhammāsana* (Skt. *dharmāsana*) was set up facing east; in the south of it, the *therāsana* was constructed facing north.<sup>26</sup> It is worth noting here that in this *Samantapāsādikā* account the *dhammāsana* is

21 DICKSON (1884: 224).

22 For similar descriptions see Or.6601(92)f2a (SOMADASA 1987: 381).

23 *Mallikōvāda Sūtraya* Or.6601(92)f1a; Or.6603(178)III f9a2; Or.6603(178)Vf35a6-f35b1.

24 Or.6601(92)f2a; DICKSON (1884: 224); CHANDRARATNA (1994: xi).

25 CHANDRARATNA (1994: xi); DICKSON (1884: 224).

26 *dakkhiṇabhāgaṃ nissāya uttarābhimukhaṃ therāsaṇaṃ maṇḍapamajjhe puratthābhimukhaṃ buddhassa bhagavato āsanārahaṃ dhammāsaṇaṃ* (STRONG 1891: 89; TAKAKUSU & NAGAI 1924: 11).

said to be worthy of the Buddha's own pulpit. This seems to be a conscious attempt to recreate and reimagine the presence of the Buddha in his absence through the rehearsal of the Buddha's words.

In this account of the First Council one can note a conscious effort to map the sacred space in relation to the relative significance of the two preachers, as well as the place itself on which ceremonial objects are placed (e.g., pulpits); they are also marked and placed in relation to the Buddha and his original experience. Just as the Buddha attained *sammāsambodhi* facing east, so too in the early reports of the First Council, and in the two-pulpit preaching, the most significant pulpit, *dhammāsana*, faces east. To a certain extent, this can be seen as an attempt to recreate the original enlightenment experience of the Buddha. As the Buddha's words were rehearsed by Upāli and Ānanda sitting down in the *dhammāsana* at the First Council, in the two-pulpit preaching, the Buddha's words are rehearsed in the vernacular by the *padabhañña* sitting in the pulpit which faces east. Just as Mahākassapa was the chairman of the First Council by playing the role of interrogator, the *sarabhañña* raises questions and directs the *padabhañña* to the explanations of the Pāli canonical text used in the ceremony. In addition, the setting up of the two pulpits in the middle of the *maṇḍapa* demonstrates the centrality of the activity, as well as the emphasis that the focus of the audience should be on the two preachers and what they preach.

The significance of the east is not limited only to the two-pulpit preaching; east is a direction of significance to Buddhists on other occasions. For instance, in constructing images of the Buddha in Buddhist shrines, the artist always creates the major Buddha statue so that it faces east. In Sri Lanka, when people build houses and temples, they tend to follow directional arrangements, and prefer to have their homes facing east.

In addition to the arrangement of the pulpits, the preaching hall is divided into two sections to accommodate the audience: on one side men, on the other side women; both groups sit on the floor on mats. Between the pulpits and audience there is some empty space, which is reserved for an elderly person who responds to the preachers (P. *paṭivacana dāyaka*; Sin. *pratiuttara dennā*). DICKSON refers to this person as "clerk who makes the responses".<sup>27</sup> The presence of a lay respondent is a specific feature in all types of preaching rituals. The absence of such a *paṭivacana dāyaka* in *paritta* recitation ceremonies points out that *paritta* is not a form of

27 DICKSON (1884: 214).

preaching but mere recitation for protection. In the preaching rituals, it is customary to select one knowledgeable lay elder from the audience to perform the role of respondent. Somewhat derogatorily, he is identified as *eheyā*, which in English could be rendered as “yes-man” because he says “Yes, Sir” after any important statement made by the preacher. This person not only approves what the preachers say, he also acts as a mediator between the preachers and audience. His performative role is that of a spokesperson on behalf of the laity. DICKSON wrote: “after each sentence the respondent answers in Sinhalese ‘*Āma bhante*’ [It is so, Lord]. Or, if he does not quite understand, he sometimes replies, ‘Pardon me, lord, I do not quite understand’, or any of the listeners can ask him to say that they do not understand; and the priest proceeds to explain the meaning more fully.”<sup>28</sup> Helping the preacher to elaborate on the message and directing a particular sermon to a particular audience by raising questions and expressing the needs of the community, the elderly devotee maintains the rapport between the preacher and audience.

At the scheduled time, the two preachers are conducted to the preaching hall with traditional demonstrations of honor, respect and customs (*garusirit*). Once the two arrive at the preaching hall, they stand in front of the main seat (*dhammāsana*) where the *padabhañña* sits, holding their hand-fans (*vaṭāpata*) before their faces and facing the audience. The devotees make obeisance to them and cry “*sādhū! sādhū! sādhū!*” which means “excellent or well done”. Then the preachers bless the audience by chanting the following three Pāli verses:

*icchitaṃ patthitaṃ tuyhaṃ sabbameva samijjhatu  
pūrentu cittaśaṅkappā maṇijotiraso yathā. //*  
*icchitaṃ patthitaṃ tuyhaṃ sabbameva samijjhatu  
pūrentu cittaśaṅkappā cando pannarasī yathā. //*  
*icchitaṃ patthitaṃ tuyhaṃ khippameva samijjhatu  
sabbe pūrentu śaṅkappā cando pannarasī yathā. //*<sup>29</sup>

May all your hopes and wishes succeed. May your aspirations be fulfilled as if by the wish-fulfilling gem. May all your hopes and wishes succeed. May your aspirations be fulfilled like the moon on the full-moon day. May your hopes and wishes quickly succeed. May all your aspirations be completely fulfilled like the moon on the full-moon day.

28 DICKSON (1884: 214).

29 DICKSON (1884: 209, 225, 232); CHANDRARATNA (1994: xi).



After the two preachers have given blessings, they are lifted to their seats where they sit cross-legged until morning.<sup>30</sup> After they have taken their seats, as a custom, the two seats are covered with a piece of white cloth (like a curtain), so that only their faces appear above the curtain.

### *Performative Background*

Ancient Buddhist *dharmadesanā* style had two aspects: the intoning of a scriptural text as a form of “recitation”, and the presentation of the meaning (*artha*) of the scripture through detailed explanations in which narratives, metaphors, similes and anecdotes were found. The two preachers who performed these two religious roles were known as the *sarabhañña* (the reciter) and the *padabhañña* (the expounder).<sup>31</sup> In the PTS *Pāli-English Dictionary* *padabhañña* is defined as the activity of reading in Pāli according to the divisions of words and meaning (*padabhāgā nāma pada vasena atthassa āgamana vasena pāliyā bhaṇanam*).<sup>32</sup> Though Pāli commentaries mention *sarabhāṇaka* (*sarabhañña*) and *padabhāṇaka* (*padabhañña*), Adikaram has stated that they “have no connection with the Bhāṇakas.”<sup>33</sup> The *sarabhañña* chants portions of the scripture (*dharmapāṭha*) beautifully in a musical tone according to a recognized meter; the *padabhañña* provides a word for word explanation of the chanting. When the preaching activity is understood as excellence in both content (*sārtha*) and form (*savyañjana*), the role which the *sarabhañña* plays becomes extremely important. The *sarabhañña* is responsible for making the ritual rich in form (*savyañjana*), while excellence in content is achieved through the expounding ability of the *padabhañña*. At times, one person may have performed both activities; on other occasions, however, two persons seem to have simultaneously performed the two roles of the *desanā*. In some Buddhist texts, these two roles, *sarabhañña* and *padabhañña*, have been extended into three *desanā* styles. In this threefold division, (1) the *osāraṇa* involves the reading of the *desanāpāṭha* in Pāli, (2) the *kathana* is the act of presenting the meaning of each *dharmapāṭha*, and (3) the *sarabhañña* performs the act of chanting the *dharmapāṭha* in a beautiful and melodious voice. However, the division of the *osāraṇa* and *kathana* seem to be an extension

30 DICKSON (1884: 225).

31 RHYS DAVIDS and STEDE (1986: 697); Vin. I.196, II.108, 300, 316.

32 RHYS DAVIDS and STEDE (1986: 697: 408); DhA.II.95.

33 ADHIKARAM (1946: 24-5).



of the preaching role of the *padabhañña* and thus not a fully distinct third style. I wonder whether even RAHULA Thera (1907-1997) has misunderstood these three roles since he has mentioned a case where three preachers perform preaching duties.<sup>34</sup> On the basis of the existence of these two *desanā* roles – *sarabhañña* and *padabhañña* – in the early tradition, I argue here that they provided the basic performative role models followed and emulated by the two preachers in the two-pulpit preaching. In the two-pulpit preaching, performing alternately, the *sarabhañña* reads out the *dharmapāṭa* from the original Pāli manuscript, while the *padabhañña* provides detailed explanations with innovative interpretations of his own as a Sinhala commentary on the sermon. The presence of these performative roles perhaps led Professor SARACHCHANDRA to remark that the two-pulpit preaching has “something of the dramatic” in the way it is ritually performed in Sri Lanka.<sup>35</sup>

#### *Sārtha and Savyañjana: Namaskāragāthās in the Two-pulpit Preaching*

As is any other religious or secular “tradition”, the Sri Lankan *baṇa* tradition, is polyvalent and multivalent both in content and form through the inclusion of ritual elements whose many meanings are embedded in it. The two-pulpit preaching is a polyvalent Buddhist ritual which includes creative and artistic performances by Buddhist monks – a sacred ceremony which combines the artistic hearts of pious Sinhala Buddhists with the doctrinal presentations of Buddhist monks. Because of its rich content as well as its presentation, the two-pulpit preaching can be included in the category of a “dense” tradition with polyvalent meanings and nuances.<sup>36</sup>

The centrality of the act of taking the Three Refuges in Theravāda and its importance in the two-pulpit preaching can be seen from John Ross CARTER’s following observation:

The study of the life of the Buddha, the Four Noble Truths, dependent origination, *kamma*, the monastic institution, and on and on, indeed is important. However, such study would remain incomplete in an attempt to understand what has been momentous for the history of a religious community, which has participated in and

34 RAHULA (1956: 267-268).

35 SARACHCHANDRA (1952: 23).

36 CARRITHERS (1983: 14).

has perpetuated an impressive religious tradition, without an understanding of what Buddhists have discerned in the notion of refuge (*saraṇa*).<sup>37</sup>

In the two-pulpit preaching, the *padabhaṇṇa* chants several *namaskāra-gāthās* (verses praising the Three Refuges) in a melodious voice,<sup>38</sup> which can be taken as an act of taking refuge in *tisaraṇa*. The *Purāṇa Sinhala Baṇapota* advises to take the Three Refuges in either the Pāli or Sinhala language. This gives the impression that the language used in the formula of taking refuge does not make a difference. This kind of open attitude to the Sinhala language perhaps may have encouraged some Sinhala writers such as Vidyācakravartī to write the *Butsaraṇa*, highlighting the importance of the act of taking refuge in the Buddha. To understand the importance which Sinhala culture has given to the act of taking refuge, one should consider the composition of two *saraṇa* texts – the *Dahamsaraṇa* and the *Sangasarāṇa*.

The *Purāṇa Sinhala Baṇapota* states that the Three Refuges are like a big ship crossing over the suffering of the ocean of *samsāra* and a road on the journey through the forest of suffering (*samsāra*) to *nirvāṇa*.<sup>39</sup> The inclusion of an extensive number of poems which extol the virtues of the Three Refuges is an important aspect of the two-pulpit preaching. The *Mallikovāda Sutta* includes twenty-eight sets of three verses while the *Yugāsana Dharma Dēsanāva* contains thirty-one sets. The three verses of each set extol the virtues of the Three Refuges:

*Verse One to Three*

I pay homage to the Buddha, the teacher of the world, the hero, the conqueror, the unequaled person, the unobstructed one, the knower, the essence of precious things, and the ocean of virtues. I pay homage to the teachings of the Buddha, which are pure of defilement, subtle, great, deep, hard to see, noble, and to the doctrine which destroys demerit. I pay homage to the son(s) of the Buddha, the community whose senses are tranquil, whose precepts are pure, whose wealth is religious austerity, whose practice is correct.<sup>40</sup>

37 CARTER (1993: 70).

38 DICKSON (1884: 225); CHANDRARATNA (1994: xii).

39 RATANAPĀLA THERA (1929: 6).

40 *buddhaṃ loka garuṃ-jinaṃ appaṭi puggalaṃ  
akkhilaṃ ñeyyo dadhiṃ sāraṃ-namāmi guṇa sāgaraṃ. //*  
*nimmalaṃ nipunaṃ aggaṃ-gambhīraṃ duddasaṃ varaṃ  
dhammaṃ pāpānudaṃ dāpi-namāmi jina desitaṃ. //*  
*santindriyaṃ gaṇaṃ cāpi-suddhaṃ sīlaṃ tapo dhanam*

The inclusion of the *namaskāragāthās* in the two-pulpit preaching shows that the notion of Three Refuges had become a central concept of Buddhism in late medieval Sri Lanka. Seeing its importance in Sinhala Buddhism, CARTER observes: “[G]oing for refuge is not merely a ritual that a Buddhist does or a bit of liturgy that some people perform.”<sup>41</sup> It is an age-old custom among Sinhala Buddhist writers to start a text on Buddhism with a few verses or a prose statement extolling the Three Refuges.

In examining these *namaskāragāthās*, it becomes clear that in the Theravāda ritual context, the traditional stereotypical formula of paying respect to the Buddha – *namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa* (Salutation to the Blessed One, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Awakened One!) – has been transformed, extended and localized. Rather than using the typical Pāli formula alone, being inspired by the doctrine of the Three Refuges contained in the vast canon of Buddhist literature, Sinhala Buddhist devotees have composed *namaskāragāthās* which attract the attention of listeners.<sup>42</sup>

The aesthetic value and the ritual importance of *namaskāragāthās* can be examined and justified by directing attention to the way in which both “content” and “form” function in a Buddhist liturgy. In Buddhist religious discourse, the approximate corresponding terms for content and form are *sārtha* (P. *sāttha*) and *savyañjana* (P. *sabyañjana*).<sup>43</sup> In the Buddhist preaching tradition, at times, there seems to be a preoccupation with *sārtha* and *savyañjana*. However, in the ritual enactment, preachers would not recommend the sacrifice of *sārtha* for the sake of *savyañjana*, or vice versa. Since a preaching rich in both content and form is considered a good sermon, equal emphasis is laid on both aspects; the two-pulpit preaching should maintain a balance between *sārtha* and *savyañjana* for the sake of the efficacy of Buddha’s message. A *dhammadesanā* should contain both *sārtha* and *savyañjana* since the Buddha himself taught a doctrine which is charming in the beginning, in the middle and in the end. Based on this traditional understanding, the two-pulpit preaching attempts to harmonize

*sāmīci paṭipannaṃ tam-namāmi munino sutam //*  
*Mallikōvāda Sūtraya* (1894: 3); CHANDRARATNA (1994: 15).

41 CARTER (1993: 60).

42 For similar literary genres, see manuscripts such as *Namaskāra Padārthaya* [Or.6599(2)].

43 For Buddhaghoṣa’s definitions on these two terms, see DEEGALLE (1995: 34-6).

the two aspects by emphasizing primarily the form in the early parts of the ritual, while focusing on the presentation of the content in the later parts. The following *namaskāragāthās* demonstrate that the production of aesthetic effect (form) has taken priority over the conveying the content. However, this generalization is not by any means exclusive, because even when there is an emphasis on one, the other feature can manifest as a secondary motive.

As can be seen in the following three *namaskāragāthās*, the aim of the composer is to produce a musical effect through beautiful sounds. The repeated employment of consonant sounds (*vyañjana*) produces a language rich with *anuprāsa* (alliteration), sound embellishments, rhymes and rhythms, which attracts the listeners' ears and prepares them for listening to the sermon. Since the proper employment of consonant sounds in either prose or verse produces sound embellishments, the *alaṅkāras* have been an important part of Buddhist literary works. The following is an illustration of Pāli poetry used as *namaskāragāthās* in the two-pulpit preaching to produce the aesthetic effect on the listeners:

*sāra sāra guṇa dhāra dhāra dhiti vīra vīra suvi sāradaṃ  
rūpa rūpa tala ādi ādi tapa teja teja vara sobhanaṃ  
deva deva sura nāga nāga sura keḷi keḷi makutaśanaṃ  
loka loka guru rāja rāja siri pāda pāda paṇamāmahaṃ<sup>44</sup>  
dīpa dīpa pada pāda pāda hita bhūta bhūta nikarākaraṃ  
māra māra para rāja rāja sura moli moli sanarāmaraṃ  
mogha mogha tapa teja teja vara moli moli sanarāmaraṃ  
moha moha mada vīta vīta mala dhamma dhamma paṇamāmahaṃ  
ogha ogha mati nāṇa nāṇa suvi nīta nīta vima lappabhaṃ  
dhīra dhīra dhara nātha nātha suta soma soma sugatatrajaṃ  
rāja rāja nija bhāva bhāva sana rāma rāma sugatorasaṃ  
jāti jāti bhava dukkha dukkha hata saṅgha saṅgha paṇamāmahaṃ<sup>45</sup>*

The aesthetic effect is achieved through the continuous repetition of the same word twice in one line and the use of at least three such words in each line (for example, in the first line, *sāra sāra*, *dhāra dhāra*, and *vīra vīra*). When these terms are repeated one after the other by inserting words such

44 *Mallikōvāda Sūtraya* (1894: 5); CHANDRARATNA (1994: 17); Or.6603(178)III f4a2 has a slight variation in line two and three; *tapa* and *vara sobhanaṃ* in line two becomes *dhiti* and *guṇa bhumigaṃ*; in line three, *sura* becomes *nara*.

45 *Mallikōvāda Sūtraya* (1894: 5).

as *pada*, *hita* and *nikara* in between those repetitive pairs as in the second verse, a pause is created. Thus, before the end of each line, there are three pauses right after the repetition of a particular word. This pattern is found in all lines in these three verses. Another characteristic feature is that all of them have a rhyme at the end of each verse (in the first verse, *dam*, *naṃ*, *naṃ*, *haṃ*; in the second verse, *raṃ*, *raṃ*, *raṃ*, *haṃ*; in the third verse, *bhaṃ*, *jaṃ*, *saṃ*, *haṃ*). Though there is no rhyme in the rest of the poem, alliteration is common. The use of consonants (*vyañjana*) to produce *anuprāsa* is evident in particular in the first line of the first verse: *ra* is used seven times; *sā* is used three times; furthermore, similar consonants have been frequently used with vowel sounds such as *ā* (*sā*, *dhā*, *nā*, *rā*, *pā*, *mā*, *bhā*, *jā*), *ī* (*vī*, *dī*, *dhī*), *ū* (*rū*, *bhū*), *e* (*te*, *de*, *ke*), and *o* (*lo*, *mo*, *so*) which serve to produce sound effects.

When comparing Buddhist preaching in general and the two-pulpit preaching in particular with Protestant Christian forms of preaching, a clear contrast is visible between preaching practices. In Protestant Christian preaching, there is a strong emphasis on content (*sārtha*), but less on form (*savyañjana*) in the sense of *vyañjana* as emphasized in Buddhist preaching tradition. In this observation, form is understood as the correct pronunciation of sounds, words, and phrases and the production of pleasant sounds through the use of language in a rhetorical manner. From that perspective, Protestant Christian preaching heavily emphasizes “meaning” and places emphasis on “content”; while the accurate interpretation of particular Biblical words and phrases of the Gospels becomes extremely important, aesthetics of presentation through the production of pleasant sounds and phrases is undermined. Nevertheless, performative aspects of contemporary Christian preaching can be seen, mainly in Afro-American preaching settings.

### The Five Precepts: The Foundation of Moral Behavior

In the two-pulpit preaching, already existing ritual structures such as taking the Three Refuges and the Five Precepts (P. *pañcasīla*) seem to have been perpetuated through ritualistic performance. However, in addition, the preachers have introduced certain innovations by composing poetic requests for the invitation to administer the Five Precepts.

At the beginning of a preaching ceremony, why do Buddhists emphasize the importance of taking the Five Precepts? Is it merely because it is a



custom to do so at any Buddhist religious ceremony? In Theravāda, the administration of the Five Precepts at the beginning of a preaching ceremony symbolizes ethical and moral discipline as the foundation of Buddhist spiritual life.<sup>46</sup> From a Theravāda perspective, everyone needs to be aware of the Five Precepts, since *sīla* (morality) is considered to be the foundation of religious practice. One Sinhala text maintains that one should observe the Five precepts first and then should offer *dāna*.<sup>47</sup> Buddhaghosa, the fifth century Pāli commentator, starts the *Visuddhimagga, The Path of Purification*, by presenting the thesis that “after having established oneself in morality one should train the mind and wisdom” (*sīle patitṭhāya narosa-paṇṇo cittaṃ paṇṇaṃ ca bhāvayaṃ*).<sup>48</sup> Buddhaghosa’s insistence on morality has shaped the Theravāda conception of the spiritual path in Sri Lanka. Thus, any righteous action has to be based first on *sīla* and then must proceed to the practice of other virtues.

In Theravāda, grounding oneself at least in *pañcasīla* is presented as an essential prerequisite for meditational practices.<sup>49</sup> To a certain extent, this emphasis has been taken to such extremes such that some maintain that one cannot meditate without basing oneself on morality. In examining the importance of the Five Precepts in Theravāda, it is worth paying attention to the discussion of *sīla* in Michael CARRITHERS’ *The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka*, which shows that even in modern times the forest monks attach a greater significance to *sīla* in their spiritual practices. CARRITHERS notes that the list of *dāna* (generosity), *sīla* (morality), and *bhāvanā* (meditation) describes “the hierarchy of religious practices, beginning with the lowest and proceeding to the highest meditation” and “[o]nly from the height of moral discipline” is one “able to go on to meditation”. Observing “the axiomatically fundamental place” that forest monks attribute to *sīla*, CARRITHERS has suggested that “the list should be reversed, and the path should begin with meditation and end in generosity.” When this suggestion was made, he noticed “the impatience and even outrage with which the monks heard it, and the unity of view with which it was rejected.”

46 For a discussion on the importance of moral life for Theravāda Buddhists and its relationship with the attainment of *nirvāṇa* see DEEGALLE (1996c).

47 RATANAPĀLA THERA (1929: 11).

48 Buddhaghosa Mahasthavira (1976: 1).

49 BOND (1996: 39-40) quotes CARRITHERS who has explicitly stated the relationship between *sīla* and meditation.



CARRITHERS states that this experience had left “no doubt” in his mind that the “monks place moral purity in the central position,” which he “wished to accord to meditative experience.” He concludes “I was, in effect, attacking the very ground of their way of life.”<sup>50</sup>

Because *sīla* is the foundation, the Five Precepts form an important part of the Eight-fold Path broadly divided into three as *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. In this gradual path, *sīla* is the foundation which aims at the discipline of one’s mental, verbal and physical actions. Emphasizing the importance of the practice of morality, at least the observance of the Five Precepts, has been a common theme in Sinhala Buddhism. Vernacular texts,<sup>51</sup> attempting to make available the understanding of morality to the ordinary public, show that the observance of the Five Precepts is equally possible for both the wise and the ordinary person. The following passage from Dharmasēna Thera’s *Saddharmaratnāvaliya*, a thirteenth century Sinhala text, highlights the importance of observing the precepts by employing a persuasive strategy:

*Sīla*, Moral Conduct, is the most important basis for all blessings both in this world and beyond. Whatever adornments one may wear there is none more beautiful than Moral Conduct. There is no perfume more pervasive, no purer water for washing away the impurities of Defilements, no cooler breeze to calm the heat of passion. There is nothing like Morality to bring one fame. If one requires a ladder to climb to heaven, morality is that ladder. It is the gateway to the city of Enlightenment. Those who seek their own welfare should practice, either the Five Precepts on a daily basis, or the Eight Precepts on full moon days, or, if one has the potential, become a novice and observe the Ten Precepts.<sup>52</sup>

In this case, the importance of observing the Five Precepts, etc., is highlighted through a metaphorical and religious rhetoric suitable for Buddhist preachers whose duty is the cultivation of virtues.

For a preaching ritual to achieve its proposed objectives, the disciplining of listeners’ mental, verbal and physical actions in a positive direction is extremely important. When one understands Theravāda insistence on *sīla* as the foundation of the spiritual path, the incorporation of three beautiful Sinhala verses to invite the preachers to administer the Five Precepts makes

50 CARRITHERS (1983: 19-20).

51 For details on the vernacular literature and “Vernacular Buddhism”, see DEEGALLE (1997d).

52 Dharmasēna Thera (1991: 12).

sense. In the two-pulpit preaching, a lay Buddhist devotee dressed in white rises from the audience, makes an obeisance to the two preachers with an *añjali*, bringing his two palms together to his forehead, and invites the monks to administer the Five Precepts, chanting three beautiful Sinhala poems in a serene and melodious voice:

*Verse One*

Like the morning sun shining with strong rays on the entire earth, the *peḷa* teaching which the King of Sages preached filled fearlessness. Out of devotion, a multitude of deities accepted the teachings with utmost respect by bowing down. The teachings bring welfare in the Three Worlds and grant immortal wealth in the city of the fearless. Eminent monk, we prostrate ourselves before you to request you to administer the Five Precepts for all beings who are gathered here in this assembly.<sup>53</sup>

Note here the usage *peḷa dama* (*peḷa*>root; *dama*>*dhamma*>teaching); it refers to the original meaning of Pāli, not as a language, but as the root text<sup>54</sup> in which the Buddha's teachings were preserved. In this first verse, sentiments are evoked on the importance of *peḷa* for Theravāda Buddhists since it is the medium in which Buddha's teachings are available. The message which comes through *peḷa* is efficacious, enabling heedful listeners to have access to the city of the fearless. The content of the teachings of the Buddha – as keys to spiritual progress – persuades devotees to listen attentively to the preaching. Thus, it motivates the listeners and demands an active involvement from them. In the same manner, the second verse stresses the importance of listening to *baṇa*:

*Verse Two*

To cause desire in heaven and delight the hearts of those who are inside this auspicious preaching hall, which is decorated with flowers like the stars and garlands of pearls, eminent monk, may you please administer the Five Precepts, at an appropriate time, in order to commence the listening to the teachings which the Buddha always preached!<sup>55</sup>

This second verse describes the way the preaching hall was decorated. To the author's eyes, the festivities are similar to the ones in a divine city. The *dhamma* which the Buddha preached, when rehearsed and reenacted in a

53 *Mallikōvāda Sūtraya* (1894: 1); CHANDRARATNA (1994: 1).

54 Or.6601(28)f2a8 gives as *ema pāli dharmaya* ...

55 *Mallikōvāda Sūtraya* (1894: 1); CHANDRARATNA (1994: 1).

preaching ritual will delight the hearts of listeners by causing them to desire heaven and by showing them the path to it. The third verse asserts that the Five Precepts are the key to the divine city (*diva pura*).

*Verse Three*

In the middle of the ocean, when a ship broke up with seven hundred merchants aboard, they observed the Five Precepts while drinking salt water. Even those merchants were definitely sent to the divine city in a moment. Now, cultivating loving kindness toward us, may you please give us the Five Precepts!<sup>56</sup>

The third verse thus introduces a narrative which the preacher can elaborate on during the course of the sermon. However, this narrative of seven hundred merchants who observed the Five Precepts when their ship was sunk in the ocean is not a *Jātaka* story found in the *Jātaka Pota*. Although the *Jātaka Pota* contains several stories of merchants, none of them have a clear reference to taking the *Five Precepts* when their ships are destroyed. This story seems to have originated in Sri Lanka. The Hugh Nevill collection contains three manuscript copies of the *Pañcasīlānisamsaya Gāna Vāṇija Vastuvak* – Or.6603(122)VIII (18th c.), Or.6603(83)VI, and Or. 6603(203)III – which show the efficacy of observing the Five Precepts.<sup>57</sup>

The request for the administration of the Five Precepts used in the two-pulpit preaching ceremony is distinct from other similar Buddhist invitations because this is the *only* Buddhist ceremony in which Buddhist devotees use *poems* to make the *request for the administration of the Five Precepts*. However, note here that the two-pulpit preaching includes several other sections with poetry such as *Baṇa Ārāḍhanā*. The significance of poetry is that it produces *śabdamādūrya* (pleasant sounds) that attract the attention of the ordinary public and adds dramatic elements to the performance. It is also an attempt to make Buddhist ritual *vyañjanasampanna* (rich in form) as already has been pointed out. After this poetical invitation, the *sarabhañña* (reciter) who is facing North and sitting in the *therāsana* on the right hand side of the *padabhañña* (expounder), – administers the Five Precepts. After the audience has received the Five Precepts, the lay devotee

56 *Mallikōvāda Sūtraya* (1894: 1); CHANDRARATNA (1994: 1).

57 *Ek kaleka satsiyayak velendō nāvu nāgi muhudupīṭa giyāhuya. E nāva sāra-vēgayen satdavasak muhudu māda giya kalhi mahat utpāṭayek pahaḷaviya* (SOMADASA 1989: 191, 126, 247).

who requested the preachers to administer the Five Precepts then invites them to commence the *baṇa* preaching.

### Invitations to *Baṇa*: *Baṇa Ārāḍhanā*

All kinds of Buddhist preaching rituals always occur at the invitation of the listeners who are eager to hear the teachings of the Buddha. The practice of making invitations to *baṇa*, which is a crucial aspect of the Buddhist preaching tradition, can be seen very clearly in the ritual of the two-pulpit preaching, and points back to early canonical Buddhism, where it is stated that even the Buddha started preaching only after the invitation of the deity Sahampati. Even at the time of the composition of the commentary to the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the *Ariyavaṃsa* seems to have been preached upon request when the society experienced the rise of misconduct.<sup>58</sup> This perhaps was an event that took place in Sri Lanka rather than in India.

It is important to examine the significance of the *baṇa ārāḍhanā* in relation to the two-pulpit preaching, in which the request to preach is made twice: once in Sinhala verse and once in poetical prose composed in the *vr̥ttagandhi* style. Why do Buddhist devotees repeat the invitation both in verse and poetical prose in the ritual performance?

### *Verse Invitation*

The lay devotees invite the preachers to commence the preaching by singing eight Sinhala poems. These eight poems move from present events to past events and then back to the present. For example, verses one to three below deal with the actual preaching ritual and the preliminaries associated with it; such as the construction of the preaching hall and its decorations. This first verse describes the way pious devotees have decorated the preaching hall and its surroundings with canopies, flags, flowers, *punkalas* and oil lamps.<sup>59</sup>

#### *Verse Two*

Delighted noble men and women often wander around [in this city] filled with immeasurable prosperity. This famous wonderful Māyāraṭa which is filled with well blossomed flowers and troops is pleasing to the mind. With devotion, the

58 *micchājīvānaṃ ussanatṭhāne ariya-vaṃsake pesetvā ariya-vaṃsaṃ kathāpentī*. STEDE (1971: 524); AA.IV.17; MORI (1989: 200).

59 The First Verse has already been presented in the section on “preliminaries”.

virtuous people of this village and the people who dwell in neighboring villages have constructed this Dhamma assembly.<sup>60</sup>

The second and third verses give a graphic description of the location of the preaching ritual. This particular preaching ritual took place in Māyāraṭa, in one of the three major geographical divisions of ancient Sri Lanka. This specific mention of location suggests that the two-pulpit preaching was a common ritual practice at least in Māyāraṭa. While describing the preaching ritual, these two verses further present the material prosperity of Māyāraṭa and its natural beauty.

*Verse Three*

Indeed, this pleases the mind and body of those whose senses have gone in various directions seeking pleasure. The flags tied on high sticks have little bells which always tinkle. Wasps frequent the group of trees. In the middle of pleasant fields, the preaching hall decorated with flower leaves is like a divine noble assembly.<sup>61</sup>

Note that the second and third verses state explicitly that the preaching ceremony was sponsored by villagers and that the preaching hall had been constructed in the middle of fields. Throughout the ritual, ordinary villagers have devoted their labor for the construction as well as the commencement of the ritual.<sup>62</sup> At least here, the two-pulpit preaching is a village ritual motivated by the peasants. Its association with agriculture and nature is very clear, since these verses mention fields and trees with wasps. Thus, in this particular case, the ritual context is village life while the ritual agents are villagers, both men and women, as the second verse suggests.<sup>63</sup>

60 *Mallikōvāda Sūtraya* (1894: 1); CHANDRARATNA (1994: 2).

61 *Mallikōvāda Sūtraya* (1894: 1); CHANDRARATNA (1994: 2).

62 Or.6600(28)f3b2-4 states explicitly the active participation the villagers: *me gamvāsi boho gananak denā visin noyek utsāha vīrya kirīmen dāruparṇādiya sapayā ... dharma mandirayak nanvā rakta svetādīn visin viyan bandavā maṇḍa[pa] madhyayehi visituru anargha dharmāsanayak panavā*.

63 Or.6603(178)VII also mentions the sponsorship as well as participation of lay village communities in Buddhist preaching rituals. According to it (f42b5) the ritual was held in Budgama. Another manuscript in the same collection (f44a2) mentions a village named Potubandhana and a monk named Baṇḍigoḍenga Yatindra (f44a5) who had invited the preacher to take part in the ritual. It also mentions others, such as the village headman and village devotees who were instrumental in the ritual (f44a6). Another copy (ff44b1) mentions a village named Mānda Gan Pattuva in Vellassa, in Ruhunu, and it was held at the invitation of “Nācca Mēccigē” and of a minister named Goḍe



These two factors suggest that the ritual was sponsored by peasants rather than by a king or minister. On this basis, it is possible to argue that this ritual was directed to the conversion of the minds of the peasants.

Moving away from the description of the preaching ritual, the writer of this verse invitation goes on to present the narrative associated with the Buddha's life in the fourth and fifth verses.

*Verses Four and Five*

He [the Buddha] dwelled ten months in the womb of the noble queen Māyā. He entered into the gold net that was brought by Mahā Brahma. With the power of determination (aspiration *pāṭum*), he walked on lotuses and made a lion-roar. By the power of the noble Three Refuges, may the eminent monks have victory!<sup>64</sup>

By breaking the power of the daughters of Māra, the sage won the Buddhahood and taught the *dharma* (with three Gems) which destroys suffering. By pleasing the minds of persons, he freed the entire world of beings from the ocean of *samsāra*. The one who is the mine of virtues preached the teaching which has the taste of immortality.<sup>65</sup> With prostrations and delighted hearts, we invite the eminent monks to preach the *dharma* which pleases hearts and minds.<sup>66</sup>

Verses four and five deal with the past by presenting a narrative of the Buddha's biography. The fourth verse narrates the miracle birth of the Buddha, the reception that he received from the deities, his miraculous walk on lotuses and his lion roar that he is the greatest person in the world (*aggohamasmi lokassa*). It primarily highlights the Buddha's heroic birth. The fifth verse narrates two things: the victorious *bodhi* of the Buddha as result of defeating the daughters of Māra and his discovery of the salvific message which culminated in his noble mission as a preacher who liberated many sentient beings from the turmoil of *samsāra*. These present a mini-narrative of Buddha's biography on which the preacher could elaborate during the sermon.

Then verses six to eight deal with the present by focusing on the actual preaching ritual in the present:

*Verses Six to Eight*

Gedara Disāpati Mantrīvara. It also mentions a monk named "Sīlakaḍḍhā nola vaḍḍhāgala Yatindra".

64 Or.6601(91)f1b1-3 gives a slight variation: "*diṇṇa miṇi maraṅgaṇā ...*"

65 Another slight variation in Or.6601(91)f2a.

66 *Mallikōvāda Sūtraya* (1894: 2); CHANDRARATNA (1994: 2-3). Or.6601(91)f1b1-3 gives a slight variation.



May the two members of the *saṅgha* who are seated on two pulpits, without refusal but in union, accept (our) offerings and customs! With prostrations, we invite the eminent monks who cultivate compassion to preach the wonderful *baṇa* of the Buddha, inculcating affection and devotion, by reminding us of death for beings, and by causing all beings to listen to the message with affection.

With compassion, may all gods protect and wish prosperity on our eminent monks who sit in the preaching pulpits and teach the good doctrine in order to destroy fires of suffering in all of us today!

Immortals and wasps venerate the lotus feet of the Buddha. The Buddha pleases the faces of virtuous people like the sun makes many beautiful lotuses blossom. The Buddha pleases everyone like the full moon which shines in the sky. Venerable Sirs, please preach the noble *dhamma* that is well-praised by the Buddha.<sup>67</sup>

Verses six to eight mention the two preachers who are present in the preaching hall, and invite them to preach by cultivating compassion. Verse seven invokes deities for the protection of preachers.

In this poetic invitation, except for two verses (3 and 8), which are in ornate language made up of Pāli and Sanskrit words, all the other verses are in simple Sinhala, each containing four *pādas*, but some without rhyme at the end.

In Buddhist preaching, the listeners' invitation to preach (*baṇa ārādhanāva*) has an important ritual function. It expresses the nature of discourse and interaction between religious virtuosi and the people. It also teaches the distinct characteristics of preaching as practiced among Theravāda Buddhists. In comparing this Buddhist practice of making invitations to preach with other preaching traditions, for example with Christian forms of preaching, it becomes clear that the Buddhist laity's public declaration in the form of an invitation distinguishes Buddhist preaching rituals from Christian preaching practices. By contrast, in Christian preaching, such invitations from the listeners are not required at all. For Christian preachers, there is an obligation to propagate the divine word, which leads a preacher to proclaim the word of God in public without any invitation from the listeners.

<sup>67</sup> *Mallikōvāda Sūtraya* (1894: 2); CHANDRARATNA (1994: 3).

*Prose Invitation: Baṇa Ārāadhanā Cūrṇikāva*

*Baṇa ārāadhanā cūrṇikāva* can be translated as “an invitation to preaching composed in an alliterative poetical prose”. It had been composed in *vr̥ttagandhi* style and was used in the two-pulpit preaching. SOMADASA renders it as a “prologue to a sermon in alliterative verbose Sinhalese prose” with “alliterative hybrid Sanskrit”.<sup>68</sup>

Vālivīṭa SORATA Thera defines *cūrṇikā* as a *vr̥ttagandhi*-type prose literary style which has pauses at every five syllables.<sup>69</sup> Since the *vr̥ttagandhi* style bears the shape of a *vr̥tta* (meter), GODAKUMBURA calls the *vr̥ttagandhi* as “rhythmic prose” which contains “the traces of a type of prose, with a mixture of metrical passages” and “with a scent of metrics”. Because the prose contains half-metric sentences, they can be recited like verses in a ritual setting: “This mode of composition was specially for reading out aloud” and “[m]etrical versions were also adopted for narrative purposes, the more so, as such were meant to be read out to gatherings of devotees.”<sup>70</sup> Several such liturgical half-poetic and half-prose invitations (*cūrṇikās*) used in the two-pulpit preaching are found in the Hugh Nevill collection.<sup>71</sup>

SORATA’s observations on the language of the *Daḷadāsīrita*, a fourteenth century Sinhala Chronicle of the Tooth Relic, are relevant here for the examination of the language of the *Baṇa ārāadhanā cūrṇikāva*. Many sentences of the *Daḷadāsīrita* bear the characteristics of *vr̥tta* (meter) and similar metric portions are found in the *baṇa ārāadhanā cūrṇikās*. Because of this language peculiarity, many Sinhala literary critics have singled out the literary composition of the *Daḷadāsīrita*, as a representation of the *vr̥ttagandhi* style. Some have even gone to the extent of stating that it is the first Sinhala text which has such a unique style. This opinion has been disputed by the literary critic, the late Venerable Vālivīṭe SORATA.<sup>72</sup>

68 SOMADASA (1989: 89, 149).

69 Vālivīṭa SORATA Thera (1970: 367).

70 GODAKUMBURA (1976: 17).

71 Or.6599(4)V (early 19th c.), Or.6600(28)I (19th c.), Or.6600(86)II (19th c.), Or.6600(116) (copied by Kiriketuvāve Dharmadhara Bhikṣu in 1858 CE), Or.6601(91) (19th c.), Or.6601(92) (19th c.), Or.6603(87)I (copied by Pudukkulame Appuhāmi in 19th c.), Or.6603(178)III (early 19th c.) and Or.6611(33) (19th c.).

72 Devradadampasaṅgināvan (1970: xlix).

Using the definitions of *utkalikāprāya* and *vr̥ttagandhi* which were put forward in the *Chandomajjharī* (18th c.), SORATA illustrated the writing style of the *Daḷadāsirita*. According to the *Chandomajjharī*, a literary style which is rich with compounds (*samāsa*) and accented letters (*dr̥ḍa akṣara*) is called *utkalikaprāya*, while a literary style which has a half-relationship (*ekadeśasambandha*) with a *vr̥tta* (meter) is identified as *vr̥ttagandhi*. In the introduction to the *Daḷadāsirita*, SORATA Thera defined *utkalikā* as “waves”, and a prose sentence which rises and falls like a wave can be called *utkalikāprāya*. According to him, the *Daḷadāsirita* has many such sentences. Further, it is abundant with long compounds (*samāsa*) which produce liveliness in poetry (*ōjahprāṇa*) and an elaborate style. Though there are no accented letters (*dr̥ḍa akṣara*) in “Pure Sinhala” when Sanskrit words are employed heavily, such accented letters appear in the text.

In addition to metric portions, in the *vr̥ttagandhi* style, several other features are employed to produce *śabdamādhurya* (pleasant sounds), including constant *anuprāsa* (alliteration), and vocabulary which is characteristic of poetry. The *vr̥ttagandhi* style is also characterized by the use of past participles (*pūrvakriyā*), indeclinables (*nipāta*), and verbal nouns (*kṛdanta*). Although the *Chandomajjharī* does not mention long sentences as a characteristic of the *vr̥ttagandhi*, they are also a feature. In the *Daḷadāsirita* as well as in the *baṇa ārāadhanā cūrṇikās*, long sentences with *śabdamādhurya* have been used frequently. Perhaps because of the abundant use of Sanskrit words, some tend to think this is a style more appropriate for the educated. However, this opinion does not exclude the proposition that average people do enjoy listening to the recitations of such prose, and derive religious inspiration from it for their lives.

At the commencement of the two-pulpit preaching ritual performances, lay devotees sing *cūrṇikās* as a formal invitation to preach. In general, *baṇa ārāadhanā cūrṇikās* are recited only in public performances to attract the listeners’ attention to the ritual. All *baṇa ārāadhanā cūrṇikās* start in an elegant style, praising the virtues of the Buddha. The following *cūrṇikāva*, composed in Sinhala alliterative prose, produces very pleasing sounds and voices which are soothing to the listeners’ ears when read aloud in the ritual context. The first part of the invitation extols the virtues of the Buddha:

Hail! Prosperity! The Buddha, the omniscient, the foremost emperor of *dharma*, is a jewel house of brilliant, pure, eminent, holy and excellent good qualities. A multi-

tude of people has associated him by revolving around him who is endowed with two blessed lotus feet. He is like a jewel mansion of many good qualities. He is a refuge to the helpless who have come for refuge, a glass-case and a treasure-trove of kindness.<sup>73</sup>

The invitation goes on to explain the Buddha's art of preaching. In this case, his pleasant voice is emphasized by comparing it to the sweet sound of the cuckoo birds; his ability to know the intentions of the listeners is highlighted; his miraculous preaching ability is stressed; the nature of his teaching, which is rich both in content and form, is asserted. Rather than emphasizing that one should learn the language of the scriptures (for example, Pāli or Sanskrit), his omnilinguality<sup>74</sup> is highlighted by stating that all beings love their own language in learning the teaching:

He has preached a doctrine with a beautiful voice that is delightful to listen to. His preaching is no different from the sweet sound of cuckoo birds, which makes a multitude delighted as if they had drunk honey. He is endowed with eight excellences, proficient in various laws, and expert in knowing various intentions. His teaching is complete in content and form and consists of many miracles of preaching the *dharma*. His preaching makes all beings love their own language in understanding the teaching that is difficult to comprehend.<sup>75</sup>

In this *cūrṇikāva*, the reference to the eight excellences (*aṣṭāṅga samūpeta*) which the Buddha possessed is a direct indication of the Buddha's preaching style. In understanding the phrase *aṣṭāṅga samūpeta*, Buddhaghosa's comment in the *Janapada Kalyāṇīrūpanandattherīvatthu* seems to be very appropriate. Buddhaghosa mentions four standards of judgment (*catuppa-māṇikā*),<sup>76</sup> and among them, the second standard of judgment is directly relevant in understanding the endowment of eight excellences, which were a characteristic of the Buddha's style of preaching. According to Buddhaghosa, there are only a few people in the world, in whom the sight of the Buddha does not arouse a feeling of satisfaction (*pasāda*). He adds that those who judge by what they hear become satisfied, having heard the reports of the Buddha's virtues through many hundreds of births, and of his voice, endowed with the eight excellences in preaching the *dhamma*

73 Or.6599(4)V; SOMADASA (1987: 20).

74 See GRIFFITHS (1994: 116-118) for a discussion of the Buddha's omnilinguality.

75 Or.6599(4)V; SOMADASA (1987: 20); Or.6601(28)f3b8.

76 NORMAN (1912: 113-4); BURLINGAME (1921: 336-7).

(*aṭṭhāṅga samannāgataṃ dhamma-desanāghosaṃ*).<sup>77</sup> The phrase *aṣṭāṅga samūpeta* in this *cūrṇikāva* refers to the eight excellences in the Buddha's speech which makes the listeners pay attention to his preaching and thereby generate satisfaction (*pasāda*) in their hearts.

Since the eight excellences were an important aspect of the Buddha's preaching, it is worth to discuss them in detail. *The Buddhavaṃsa* refers to the eight excellences in speech in the discussion of the twenty-second Buddha, Kakusandha.<sup>78</sup> Buddhaddatta glosses *aṭṭhaṅgavacanasampanno* as *aṭṭhaṅgasamannāgatasaro satthā*<sup>79</sup> ("teacher's speech is endowed with eight excellences"). With reference to the speech of Brahmā Saṃkumāra, two canonical discourses – *Janavasabha Suttanta* and *Mahā-Govinda Suttanta* – explain the eight excellences as follows:

This was the matter of Brahmā Saṃkumāra's speech. And he spoke it with a voice of eightfold characteristics – in a voice that was fluent, intelligible, sweet, audible, continuous, distinct, deep, and resonant. And whereas, lord Brahmā Saṃkumāra communicated with that assembly by his voice, the sound thereof did not penetrate beyond the assembly.<sup>80</sup> He whose voice has these eight characteristics is said to be Brahmā-voiced.<sup>81</sup>

Like the speech of Brahmā Saṃkumāra, the Buddha's preaching is said to contain these eight excellences. H. C. NORMAN presents the eight excellences in a footnote.<sup>82</sup> According to it, the Buddha's eight excellences of speech are as follows: The Buddha possessed (1) well enunciated (*visatṭho* / *vissatṭho*), (2) extremely intelligible (*suviñeyyo*), (3) audible (*suvaniyo*), (4) soft (*mudu*), (5) full-rounded (*bindhu*), (6) distinct (*assari* / *avisāri*), (7) deep (*gabbhiyo*) and (8) resonant (*ninnadito*) speech. These eight excellences are mentioned in a *baṇa ārāḍhanā cūrṇikāva*.<sup>83</sup>

The last part of this *baṇa ārāḍhanā cūrṇikāva* is extremely important because it gives information about the composition of the audience and

77 NORMAN (1912: 114).

78 MORRIS (1882: 59).

79 HORNER (1946: 257).

80 Also Or.6601(28)f2a4-5 and Or.6611(33) compare the Buddha's voice to Brahma's voice.

81 DAVIDS (1903: 211, 227); *Dialogues of the Buddha* (1977: 245, 265).

82 RHYS DAVIDS (1986: 487); NORMAN (1912: 114).

83 Or.6603 (178)III f7b2-3.



provides an insight into the social position of the sponsors of the two-pulpit preaching rituals:

Venerable Sir, you have followed the lineage of Venerable Śāriputra, Maudgalya, and Mahā Kāśyapa. To accomplish the attainment of the cessation of pain – *nirvāṇa* – for (1) His Majesty, the king of Trisimhala, (2) for all of his ministers, (3) for the *mahāsaṅgha* of two monastic fraternities, (4) for the men and women endowed with faith and wisdom who have gathered here today for the purpose of listening to the good teaching, (5) for our teacher and preceptor, (6) for our parents and teachers, and (7) for you and me, Venerable Sir, may you please preach a doctrine that is appropriate and pleasing to you, selecting from the eighty-four-thousand articles of *dharmas*<sup>84</sup> that the Buddha preached which are contained in the *Sutta*, *Abhidhamma* and *Vinaya* of the Three Baskets.<sup>85</sup>

A similar audience for Sinhala *baṇapot* has already been suggested in my publications in discussing the eight goals of the *Pūjāvaliya*.<sup>86</sup> According to this *cūrṇikāva*, even the king of *Trisimhala* (Sri Lanka) was present in the audience. Another *baṇa ārāadhanā cūrṇikāva* [Or.6601(92)] states that the chief guest at the *baṇa* preaching was King Rājādhirājasimha (1780-1798), and includes a eulogy to him. In the invitations used in the Kandyan period, the king and his ministers are the first people to be mentioned [Or.6601(91)]. This invitation, which states that the king and monastic fraternities were present at the ritual, shows that these prose compositions belonged to the eighteenth century. However, the invitations used after royalty was deposed in 1815 CE, for example, the *ārāadhanāva* in the *Mallikovada Sutta*, do not mention a king.

The spiritual community which gathered to listen to the two-pulpit preaching seems to have been an inclusive one. As mentioned earlier, both men and women seem to have participated in the ritual. In general, though these invitations give a detailed description of the audience, the descriptions are always hierarchical, grouping the members of the audience according to their social status. The way the invitation is structured helps us to see the Buddhist community as a collective body of individuals who desire the attainment of religious goals; from a very worldly point of view, they wish to transfer the merits that were accrued through listening to the Buddha's teachings to their teachers, preceptors, and parents.

84 Or.6601(92)f1b; Or.6603(178)III f6b2; Or.6601(91)f3.

85 Or.6601(91); Or.6599(4)V; SOMADASA (1987: 20).

86 DEEGALLE (1995: 113-20; 1996a: 32-35; 1996b: 56-8; 1997a: 188-92; 1997c: 444-5).

In this two-pulpit preaching invitation, the devotee invites the preacher to preach a sermon pleasant and appropriate to the occasion selecting from the 84,000 *dharmas* of the three *piṭakas*. This belief is in accordance with Theravāda classifications of Buddha's teachings into 84,000 *dharmas*.<sup>87</sup> In addition, the importance of *nirvāṇa* as a soteriological goal emerges in this *baṇa ārāddhanāva cūrṇikāva*. The aspiration to attain *nirvāṇa* is still present as a collective goal of the entire Buddhist community. In that context, listening to *baṇa* was a path and means of securing benefits in the human and divine worlds as well as in attaining *nirvāṇa*. The only significant difference is that they postponed its attainment to a future time in the presence of the future Buddha Maitreya, rather than eliminating all bonds to worldly life in this very life.

#### *Maitreya Varṇanāva*: The Conclusion of the Two-pulpit Preaching

The *Maitreya Varṇanāva* – The Laudatory Account of the Buddha Maitreya (P. Metteyya, Sin. Maitrī, Mete Bōsat) marks the climatic conclusion of the two-pulpit preaching. The Sanskrit term *maitrī* (f) means friendship, friendliness, benevolence and good will. *Mettā* is one of the four perfect states (*brahmavihāra*) in Buddhism. The very name *Maitrī* has been used in the Buddhist tradition to refer to the future Buddha who is going to be the fifth Buddha of the present age. In general, Theravāda canonical understanding is that Maitreya is the only future Buddha. The two-pulpit preaching incorporates the traditional narrative of the future Buddha Maitreya to heighten the possible benefits of participating in preaching-related activities. Using the ideology and sacred narrative of Maitreya, good works of Buddhists are extended to the future. Unlike the early Buddhist goal of attaining *nirvāṇa* in this very life, in practice Sinhala Buddhists postpone the attainment of *nirvāṇa* to a future time when the Buddha Maitreya will appear with the glory of a perfectly awakened Buddha.

Sinhala Buddhists come to know the story of Maitreya through the detailed account of the career of Maitreya found in a Sinhala text called the *Anāgata Vaṃśaya*.<sup>88</sup> Short versions of this story have been adopted in the

87 Although the Pāli canon contains various divisions of *dhamma*, there is still a strong recognition that all the word(s) of the Buddha are single in flavor in the sense that it leads listeners to *nirvāṇa* (Vin.II.239).

88 PIYARATANA (1965: 65-255).

two-pulpit preaching as the *Maitreya Varṇanāva*.<sup>89</sup> In Sri Lanka, several such short versions exist and they vary both in content and form as well as in length. The popularity of Maitreya in Sinhala Buddhism can be measured to a certain extent through the number of extant palm leaf-manuscript copies. While W. A. DE SILVA records seven manuscripts with the title *Maitreya Varṇanāva*, K. D. SOMADASA mentions 108 manuscripts with the same title.<sup>90</sup> In addition, it includes 14 manuscripts of *Anāgatavaṃsadesanā* (Pāli) and 485 manuscripts of *Anāgatavaṃsa* (Sinhala). These manuscripts had been collected from 351 Sri Lankan temple libraries and one collection contained 15 copies of the same manuscript. The following translation of some sections of the *Maitreya Varṇanāva* is from the version found in the *Mallikōvāda Sutta*.<sup>91</sup> A slightly lengthened version is also found in another two-pulpit preaching manuscript.<sup>92</sup> The existence of various versions of the *Maitreya Varṇanāva* (with varied length) demonstrates its flexibility in adopting into varieties of Buddhist rituals.

In highlighting the soteriological significance, as well as the influence of Maitreya on Buddhist societies, Sponberg has written:

[I]n most instances of the tradition Maitreya's role is more that of a teacher or a guide than that of a savior who intervenes on one's behalf. Distinctive and significant, moreover, is the fact that he does not come as a judge who singles out the righteous nor as the leader of an army to smite the wicked. The dominant theme in the messianic aspect of Maitreya's role lies in the fact that he is a precursor and a harbinger, his rebirth validates human aspiration for Buddhahood, even after the death of Śākyamuni, thus, affirming the continuity and legitimacy of the Dharma.<sup>93</sup>

In late medieval Sri Lanka, in the two-pulpit preaching ritual, Maitreya as a powerful spiritual symbol becomes a "realized ontology" with Buddhological justifications; in that context, Maitreya is not "out there", but right here, concerned with spiritual progress in the immediate future. He is the most efficacious spiritual power, who gives immediate access to

89 MEDDEGAMA & HOLT (1993: 21-55) have translated such a short version into English.

90 W. A. DE SILVA (1938); SOMADASA (1959-1964).

91 *Mallikōvāda Sūtraya* (1894: 35-38).

92 CHANDRARATNA (1994: 52-62).

93 SPONBERG (1988: 295).

spiritual knowledge and makes it possible to realize and attain the Theravāda Buddhist ideal. All present spiritual activities culminate with aspirations of seeing him and reaching his presence in the future.

The beginning portion of the *Maitreya Varṇanāva* used in the two-pulpit preaching highlights preaching activities and captures meritorious deeds associated with preaching:

In order to listen to this *sūtranta dharmadeśanā*,<sup>94</sup> for many days, with effort and dedication, these meritorious virtuous people have supplied wood, etc. and have constructed the preaching hall by decorating it with tied canopies and flowers and garlands that are hung inside it. Especially with decorations of groups of *vagurāli*, they have prepared the preaching seats and have lighted the surrounding area with oil lamps. By placing full pitchers which are meant for good luck and having spread the *ladapasmal*, they have decorated this hall. Having invited the preachers with affection, they have paid customary respect for them and have caused the above mentioned *sūtranta dharmadeśanā* to be read and have listened to it with intentions preceded by faith. Those virtuous people who were instrumental in reading this *sūtranta dharmadeśanā* and those who gathered here to listen to it have acquired immeasurable skillful meritorious actions. Except the Buddha Maitreya, others cannot fully state the benefits of those immeasurable skillful meritorious actions. In the future, the Buddha Maitreya will proclaim in the fourfold assembly: “Long ago, at the time when the *sāsana* of the Gautama Buddha prevailed, with devotion these people constructed temples, dining halls, preaching halls, sponsored the preaching of *baṇa* within the duration of threefold nights and performed many meritorious deeds. Thereafter, they have enjoyed this sort and that sort of human and divine prosperity and thus have approached me today.”<sup>95</sup>

When one reflects on the *Maitreya Varṇanāva*, one sees that it emphasizes certain practical concerns of Sinhala society. The entire section of those who will and will not see the Buddha Maitreya serves a purpose in Sinhala Buddhist context. It contributes to Buddhist religiosity and charity by

94 Though in this particular case, the preaching has been based on the *Mallikōvāda Sutta*, the two-pulpit preaching does not have to be limited to this particular *sutta*. In Sri Lanka, the Buddhist discourse selected for the two-pulpit preaching changes according to the preferences of the preachers, sponsors and audience. Evidence shows that Buddhists had a wide range of preferences for possible topics for the two-pulpit preaching. For example, the palm-leaf manuscripts of the Hugh NEVILL collection show that the Buddhist discourses such as *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, *Kālāma Sutta*, *Sāleyya Sutta*, *Ariyavaṃsa Sutta*, and *Kālākārāma Sutta* were often used in the two-pulpit preaching. The choice of a topic seems to be open rather than closed. A great deal of flexibility is an important characteristic of the two-pulpit preaching.

95 *Mallikōvāda Sūtraya* (1894: 35).

encouraging Buddhists to do social work and community activities. To a certain extent, this is useful as a way for monastic institutions to preserve and protect their property. The motivation to engage in socially beneficial activities will be primary in this list:

*Who will and will not see the Buddha Maitreya?*

Those who committed the five grave offenses – killing (1) father, (2) mother, and (3) arahant, (4) causing to bleed from the Buddha's body and (5) causing a cessation in the Buddha *sāsana* – will not indeed see the Buddha Maitreya.

Those who wander around having applied ashes on (the body or forehead)<sup>96</sup> and holding definite wrong views such as there is not this world, no-other world, no *karma*, no fruits of *karma*, no mother, no father, no fruit of the action done; those who ridicule the noble ones; those who were born in *naraka*, *preta*, *asurakāya*, *arūpa*, *asaññātala*; those whose *indriyas* are deformed; those who live in remote provinces (*pratyantajanapada*),<sup>97</sup> *pāsaṇḍas* such as *nigaṇṭhas*; those who ate that which belong to the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha, will not see the Maitreya Buddha.

Those who offer alms to beggars, bhikkhus, and Brahmas will see the Buddha Maitreya. Those who observed the Five Precepts, Eight Precepts, chastity, constructed *thūpas*, planted Bodhi trees, constructed flower alters, fruit altars, gardens, pools, dining halls, constructed wells, set *pin pān*, those who were instrumental in preserving the *Buddhasāsana*, those who donated *maṇḍapas* for preachers, will see the Buddha Maitreya.

*Those who donated preaching pulpits, covers for preaching seats, who gave fans for preachers, those who put canopies in the halls where preaching is given, those who hung flowers on canopies; those who lighted oil-lamps in the preaching hall; those who carried the preachers to preach, those who washed the feet of preachers, and those who have done all the above mentioned customs with due respects and caused the preachers to preach baṇa and listened to it will indeed see the Buddha Maitreya.*

Having aspired to see the Buddha Maitreya, at least, those who offer one flower, one lamp, one fist of rice will indeed see the Buddha Maitreya.<sup>98</sup>

In the *Maitreya Varṇanāva*, it is stated that Maitreya will proclaim that whoever engages in good activities, such as sponsoring preaching, etc., will be presented in the fourfold assembly. Here one discovers an extension of

96 Applying “ashes” on the body seems to be a Śaivaist practice.

97 Specific references to people in remote provinces are found in almost all manuscripts of the *Anāgavaṃsadesanā*. For a discussion on the importance of remote provinces and their relationship to *baṇapot* literature such as the *Pūjāvaliya*, see DEEGALLE (1997a: 206-7).

98 *Mallikōvāda Sūtraya* (1894: 37-38); PIYARATANA (1965: 247-249).



human life to a future existence at the time of Maitreya by justifying the efficacy of good activities.

The prominence given to Maitreya by narrating the *Maitreya Varṇanāva* as the culminating event in the two-pulpit preaching can be better understood in locating it in the context of Sinhala *baṇapot*. Sinhala *baṇapot* illustrate that both monks and lay people of late medieval Sri Lanka aspired to see the Buddha Maitreya and receive *vivarāṇa* from him in order to become fully awakened Buddhas in the future.<sup>99</sup> At the end colophon, the author of the *Pūjāvaliya*, Mayūrapāda Buddhaputra wishes to be a perfectly enlightened Buddha after seeing Maitreya and receiving *vivarāṇa* from him: “May I listen to the *dharmadesanā* of the Bodhisattva Maitreya ... As long as I will become a Buddha so long will I perfect all perfections.”<sup>100</sup>

I have demonstrated that, by emphasizing both content (*artha*) and form (*vyañjana*), the two-pulpit preaching functioned simultaneously as a ritual of innovation as well as a ritual of inspiration for Buddhists during the late Kandyan period. The two preachers who recited and expounded performed the hermeneutical role of interpreting Buddhist teachings in the vernacular while maintaining the integrity of Theravāda Buddhism by emphasizing the equal importance of Pāli. The use of Pāli recitation and the *vr̥ttagandhi* style of Sinhala prose provided a pleasant form (*vyañjana*) for the audience to enjoy while not neglecting content (*artha*), since most of the teachings were explained and elaborated in Sinhala with appropriate examples and illustrations. The performative roles of the two preachers added an aesthetic ritual dimension to the *baṇa* preaching. In this preaching setting, the doctrine of the future Buddha Maitreya provided a strong basis to encourage and persuade Buddhists to adopt virtuous practices. As a result of the union of content and form and recitation and expounding, the growth of the *baṇa* tradition within Sri Lanka culminated in the two-pulpit preaching ritual.

99 For details on “Mahāyāna ideas within Theravāda” with specific reference to the *Pūjāvaliya*, see DEEGALLE (1998).

100 BUDDHAPUTRA THERA (1965: 808).

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