

## **Buddhist Monasticism in Sri Lanka: a Social Approach**

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Architectural remains of Buddhist monasteries when seen in terms of their size and number constitute the most prominent branch of archaeology in Sri Lanka. It cannot be ignored as mere historical and archaeological phenomena when considering the cultural history of the island. It would be appropriate to state that the relationships between rulers laymen and the Buddhist monks along with the environment were the key factors in developing the ideologies for the monastic organizations from the very incept.

It is widely accepted that Buddhist monasteries were established in the third century BC in Sri Lanka. It is also generally accepted that the Buddhist monasteries of the early era had no more than a unit of society for support suggesting that a village community was accustomed to worship and offer alms to the monks in the same monastic unit from very beginning, however this characteristics has rapidly changed in Sri Lanka. The evidence of early Brahmi inscriptions incised below the dirpledges of the rock shelters and other such surviving monastic structures and ground plans of individual units suggest that Buddhism had spread all over the country. In this sense these features demonstrate great deal about the technology, planning mathematics architectural symbolism and social meaning of the Buddhist monasteries of the past. The decade of 1970, records a turning point when there were significant lines of development. First, the critical analysis of literary sources and inscriptional evidence that continued the initial framework. Secondly, the research components as initiated by other disciplines of theoretical studies and other analytical methods in examining the Buddhist monasteries. It might be suggested that such tendencies have been contributed mainly through elements of higher scholarship resulting from possible foreign influence. This deduction is based on the fact that the scholars who have participated in these researches have been attached to European or other foreign educational institutions. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to evaluate the above two lines of development and will finish addressing the theoretical frame work of the social approach of the Buddhist monasteries in Sri Lanka.

**Key words:** *architecture, Buddhist monasteries, social approach*