

The Monks and their trading activities in Ancient Sri Lanka From 3rd B.C.E. to the 5th C.E.

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It is a well-known fact that unlike Brāhmaṇism, Buddhism looked favourably upon trade activities. As revealed by epigraphic and literary evidences, the earliest donors and important patrons of the Buddhist establishment of South Asia were caravan merchants and wealthy seafaring traders. Teachings of the Buddhā say that "*pubbahāsi*" (be first to receive the other with a smile) "*pubbabhasi*" (first to talk courteously to the others). Most probably these qualities may have been attracted the visitors to the Sri Lankan harbours. Some donors of the caves, the earliest dwellings of the Buddhist monks, were *nāvikas* (mariners) or *vanijha* (traders).

There are instances where the monks themselves have donated caves to the brotherhood. Most of the monks who have donated the caves belong to a higher rank. The KadurvāvaBrāhmī inscription talks of a cave, dedicated by the elder Datta, a professor of the *Vinaya* (IC 1970.vol. i. no.1207:98). The MulgirigalaBrāhmī inscription speaks of a cave given by the reciter of the *Majjhima Nikāya* to the Saṅgha.

The nuns have also donated caves to the Saṅgha. The two Brāhmī inscriptions of Mihintalē speak of caves given by two nuns. These inscriptions show that these nuns were wealthy enough to donate caves. Nearly twelve caves have been donated by the nuns to the Saṅgha during the period of 3rd B.C.E to the 1st C.E.

The Brāhmī inscriptions belonging to the 3rd and the 1st C.E. reveal, the economic activities, existed during this period. There were different kinds of professionals and most of them have donated the caves to the Saṅgha. I have identified nearly 51 professions which are in the Brāhmī inscriptions.

According to the Buddhist doctrines using money by the monks is considered as a sin. But the monks had to use money to cover their expenses such as the essential requirements for the fellow brotherhood, performances of the rituals and the maintenances of the monastic buildings.

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