

## Buddhist Discipline reflected from *Sigiri* Poetry

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### Introduction

*Sigiriya*, the ancient rock fortress that king *Kashyapa* constructed as his royal residence in the second half of fifth century, is known as a place that shows the uniqueness of knowledge in architecture, skills in frescoes and composing poems of ancient Sri Lankans. There are inscriptions and texts like *Dhampiya Atuwa Getapadha*, *Sikhawalanda*, *Sikhawalanda Winisa* and *Siyabaslakara* that can be understood about the academic background shaped by Buddhist monks in *Anuradhapura* era. Though *Siyabaslakara* which was an adaptive translation of Sanskrit *Kaavyadarsha* gives much information about Sinhala literature of the relevant era, there are no visible evidences on poetries written in Sinhala language, except one or two inscriptions that show a primary shape of a poem written in third century BC. So that the only evidence researches have to prove the fact that there was keenness among folks in the society to compose poems at the era discussed is the Mirror Wall of *Sigiriya*. This mirror wall is painted with inscriptions and poems dated from the eighth century written by the visitors of *Sigiriya*, proving that *Sigiriya* was a tourist destination more than a thousand years ago. Most of these poems have been written celebrating the beauty of females depicted in frescoes, the unique wall paintings, and there are poems about the fortress and the palace, the statue of lion, the beauty of surroundings and so on too. Though it seems that worldly themes have been subjected to *Sigiri* poets, deeply considering most of these poems, it can be identified the light of Buddhism that is reflected through them. This research therefore attempted to investigate the reflections of Buddhist discipline that is revealed from *Sigiri* poetry.

### Research Objectives

The main objective of this research is to investigate the reflections of Buddhist discipline that is revealed from *Sigiri* poetry. Investigating the facts affected for this light of Buddhism that is reflected through *Sigiri* poetry in an era with the impact of Hinduism too, proving the fact that

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*Sigiri* poets are learned people with an understanding on religion and literature, and highlighting the Buddhist conceptions that *Sigiri* poets have captured are sub-objectives.

### **Research Methodology**

Under the qualitative method, library sources and internet were used and data collected through primary and secondary sources were used to the research according to the data analyzing methodology.

### **Research Problem**

The research problem is how Buddhist disciplines are reflected from *Sigiri* poetry.

### **Research Literature Review**

Editions and interpretations of *Sigiri* poetry mainly including *Sigiri Gi* the work of *Nandasena Mudiyanse*, highlight Buddhist conceptions included in selected *Sigiri* poems. *Rohini Paranawithana*, discusses in her work *Gi Kawya Meemansa* on the light of Buddhism *Sigiri* poetry have even in poems with worldly themes and points out the influence *Sigiri* poets have got from literary texts of relevant and previous eras. In this research, in addition to investigate the reflections of Buddhist discipline that is revealed from *Sigiri* poetry, the facts affected for light of Buddhism reflected through *Sigiri* poetry in this era with the impact of Hinduism, facts showing up that *Sigiri* poets are learned people with an acceptable understanding on religion and literature, and the Buddhist conceptions that *Sigiri* poets have captured also are discussed.

### **Research Framework**

Although there are about eight main literary periods divided in Sri Lankan history, amongst them *Anuradhapura* period is selected to investigate about Buddhist discipline reflected from the literature and though there are several considerable texts and inscriptions that reveal the light of Buddhism in relevant era discussed, *Sigiri* Poetry is selected for this research among them.

### **Research Discussion**

There were impact of Sanskrit language and literature, Hinduism and so on in *Anuradhapura* period. Nevertheless, studying texts like *Mahabharatha* and *Ramayana* which are including

Hindu religious concepts was prohibited for Buddhist monks later and it was considered that leading people to a Buddhist path is the main responsibility of Buddhist monks. So that consciousness of people was shaped according to the Buddhism. This can be seen through *Sigiri* poetry. Though themes subjected to poems, mainly celebrating the beauty of females depicted in frescoes, expressing poets' love to those females considering them as living people, expressing the anger and sorrow and blaming those females for not expressing their love and so on seem to be worldly, all these poems have been written with a well-disciplined sense. Poets have not trended to write impolite or indecent poems, because of the Buddhist discipline they had.

Many Buddhist concepts are delivered from *Sigiri* poetry, like Impermanence, Merits or Demerits, Karma, Heaven and so on. One poet says the nature of impermanence common to all people in the world is not affected to these females in frescoes. Saying about various diseases people have to face and how the youth is spent and life is decayed; he brings out the Buddhist concept of impermanence.

*“Jeren mirikeyi yowun peleyi kaya wiyayin neka*

*We ji vi niyathin hee yane me hindiyew eneththayun”*

Another poet says that females in frescoes were born very beautiful and lived in a luxurious place like *Sigiriya* because of the merits they have done in their past lives but they cannot move anywhere, so that they have not been left to enjoy the life, because of the demerits they have done or doing merits without an understanding or devotion about their aftermaths. Another poet says that fortress looks like the heaven with all kind of wealth and goddesses, coming out with the idea that well behaved people with merits go to the heaven. This expresses the concept of Merits and Demerits, Karma and aftermaths teaching in Buddhism. Another poet highlights the impermanence of secular life and he wish he could draw attention to suffering and soullessness when he sees females in frescoes.

*“Naham hangu meyi yeheyi mr hamu wuuyen menehi*

*Kere thun lakun athis bata mul piriksayun”*

Another important fact revealed when studying these poems is that most of the *Sigiri* poets are learned people with an understanding on deep conceptions of Buddhism and literature too. Some

scholars skip *Sigiri* graffiti from the history of Sri Lankan classical poetry based on their opinion that composers of these poems are just folks came from all over the country to visit *Sigiriya*. Yet there were both CII and clergy poets composed these poems and some have mentioned their academies affiliated too. There are some *Sigiri* poems that clearly show the light of other texts written earlier or in relevant era. One poet thinks females in frescoes are expressing their sorrow occurred due to the separation of king *Kashyapa*, and advises them saying that being sad for someone not existing is as useless as blind trying to cross the sea laying on the back of a cripple. This example has been used by the author of *Wisuddhimagga* too.

*“Thopa wana wuu himin himak ekak nothabayi*

*Uketali muhunda pihinanu weni anda pilu gele mena”*

Moreover, in *Baalapanditha Sutta* of *Majjima Nikaya*, it says that having a life as a human being is as rare as bose-eyed turtle sees the sky through the hole of yoke. One of the *Sigiri* poets changes this simile a bit and gives the sense that king *Kashyapa* who was a patricide left this world for a destination which is very hard to accomplish that is similar to a crab sees the sky through the hole of yoke. These poems prove that *Sigiri* poets had the light of Buddhist texts of the relevant time.

### **Research Conclusion**

In *Anuradhapura* period, there was the influence of Hinduism and Hindu beliefs came through Sanskrit literature and it is hard to say that they were not spread over the society. Yet Buddhist monks of the relevant time led people to a Buddhist path considering it as their responsibility and did not let any other religious conception to supersede the Buddhist philosophy and discipline. This can be seen clearly when studying *Sigiri* graffiti, which can be considered as the oldest visible evidence that is reflecting the thinking and practice of common people all over the country. Though most of the themes subjected to *Sigiri* graffiti are worldly, it can be clearly identified the reflections of Buddhist discipline through them. Poets have composed poems on secular topics with a well-disciplined way without any impolite or indecent usage of language or ideas. There are many Buddhist concepts used for *Sigiri* poetry, like Impermanence, Merits or Demerits, Karma, Heaven and so on. Moreover, it seems that *Sigiri* poets are learned people with

an understanding on deep conceptions of Buddhism who have studied Buddhist texts existed at that time.

**Keywords:** Sigiriya, Sigiri Poetry, Buddhist Discipline

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