

## Buddhism and Sri Lankan Agriculture

Buddhism was introduced into Sri Lanka in the third century BCE by *Arahantha Mahinda Thero*, son of Emperor *Ashoka*, during the reign of king *Dewanampiyatissa*. Until then, Sri Lankans didn't have a proper religion and were used to venerate trees, forests, rivers, as well as the sky, thinking of them as gods and goddesses. Hunting was the main source of livelihood for them. But with the influence of Buddhism, a lot of positive changes could be seen in Sri Lankan society. As a result, agriculture became popular among Sri Lankans. So there is a very powerful link between Buddhism and Sri Lankan Agriculture.

The farmers practice two main forms of cultivation namely Chena cultivation and Paddy cultivation. Agricultural rituals based on Buddhism can be seen in both of them.

In Paddy cultivation, important activities like ploughing, seeding, threshing, and harvesting were initiated at auspicious times. Also, our ancestors were used to sing *Nelum Kavi*, *Goyam Kavi* and *Kamath Kavi*, wishing for the blessing of the triple gems, in order to get rid of pain and tiredness. They used harmless methods such as "*Diya Holmana*" and sprinkling of pirith pan to protect their crops from animals and birds. A section of land from their field which is called "*Kurulu Paluwa*" was left unsown for the birds and insects to enjoy. The first cuttings of rice were a celebration. Sinhalese called it "*Aluth Sahal Mangalle*". Milk rice was cooked with the grains of the first harvest and offered to Lord Buddha and the deities and taken in procession to the temple. Even today, our farmers continue this ritual at sacred places such as Temple of the Tooth Relic and *Sri Maha Bodhiya*.

Buddhism always appreciated kindness and non-violence. In Chena cultivation, farmers made sure to look for and chase away hidden animals before the area is set on fire. Various measures were taken by them to protect their crops from birds and animals. A "*Dandu Vata*" was built around the chena to keep away larger raiding animals and a "*Pambaya*" (scarecrow) and "*Takeya*" (a bell-type metal object) were installed to scare away birds and small animals. All these methods were harmful neither to the environment nor to the animals.

During offseason, farmers engaged in various artistic activities associated with the temple. As a result, creations such as Aukana statue, Buduruwagala, Samadhi statue, Moon stone etc. were born. All the above factors show that there is an inseparable bond between Buddhism and Sri Lankan Agriculture. Although technology has become advanced nowadays, most of our villagers still follow these rituals. As Sri Lankans, we should protect this precious bond and hand it over to future generations.

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