

### 3.1 Library in Buddhism: History, Philosophy and Culture

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#### Introduction

Libraries have to do with information and knowledge. They are meant to store and preserve information for generating knowledge. Beyond that, libraries say much about the tradition, culture, society and the people who keep and maintain them. Buddhism which has knowledge as an integral part of its soteriological scheme has been keen on preserving and disseminating knowledge from its inception in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE in India. The library of Siri Vajiraramaya, Bambalapitiya, which completes a hundred years of its fruitful existence, is a continuation of this great Buddhist tradition of preservation and dissemination of knowledge to the world. I dedicate this small piece of writing to the glory of this great reservoir of knowledge.

In this discussion I will first try to trace the concept of knowledge and the efforts at preserving knowledge in early Buddhist tradition as precursors of what subsequently evolved to be libraries in Buddhism, and secondly, I will try to highlight the thinking and philosophy behind the Buddhist attitude and behavior toward libraries and the culture that was developed around libraries in locations, particularly in Sri Lanka, where Buddhism spread.

#### History

The salvific path taught by the Buddha was unique in some very important respects from what was found in the ancient Indian society during the time of the Buddha. While he presented a clearly laid out path for freedom from suffering, he expected his followers to be well acquainted with it so that they could practice it successfully, thus making teaching and learning the Dhamma an essential aspect of the Buddhist practice. The practice in gradual steps has been articulated by the Buddha in the following words:

Here one who has faith [in a teacher] visits him; when he visits him, he pays respect to him; when he pays respect to him, he gives ear; one who gives ear hears the Dhamma; having heard the Dhamma, he memorises it; he examines the meaning of the teachings he has memorised; ...<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Idha bhikkhave saddhājāto upasaṅkamati, upasaṅkamanto payirupāsati, payirupāsanto sotaṃ odahati, ohitasoto dhammaṃ sunāti, sutvā dhammaṃ dhāreti, dhatānaṃ dhammānaṃ atthaṃ upaparikkhati... Kitagirisutta, *Majjhima-nikaya* 71 (Pali Text Society edition I p.480). Translation from Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi (2001), *Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, pp. 582-3.

As articulated in this statement listening to the Dhamma and holding it in memory were preconditions of practicing the Dhamma. This soteriological scheme provided the rationale and basis for the emergence and continued existence of libraries in the Buddhist tradition.

At the beginning of the Sasana, naturally it was the Buddha who did the teaching. When, however, there were disciples who were knowledgeable in the Dhamma he expected such followers to spread the message of the Dhamma to as many people as possible. In the Vinaya (Mahavagga) it is mentioned that the Buddha instructed his first sixty monastic disciples who had attained arahant hood and knew the Dhamma well to travel in different directions to spread the message of the Dhamma. The process of spreading the Dhamma involved teaching the Dhamma - *dhamma-desanā*, listening to it and keeping it in mind – *dhamma-savana* and *dhamma-dhāraṇa*, as prerequisites of practicing the Dhamma. This beginning part of the process of practice was referred to as ‘acquiring comprehensively’ – *pariyatti*, or learning and memorizing or keeping in mind what is heard. It was followed by practice (*paṭipatti*) of what is heard and kept in memory leading, finally, to realization (*paṭivedha*).

Teaching the salvific process beginning with learning was the main preoccupation of the Buddha and his disciples who had attained enlightenment. Early Buddhist records show that the monastic disciples of the Buddha, both male and female, took this task seriously. It is with reference to this that we have to understand the existence during the time of the Buddha of many bhikkhus and bhikkhunis who excelled in teaching the Dhamma and keeping it in their memory. Among his male monastic disciples Ananda Thera was the foremost among those who were learned (*bahussuta*) in addition to being the foremost among those with good memory and quick grasp of the Dhamma. In the tradition he was aptly described as ‘the treasurer of the Dhamma’ (*dhamma-bhaṇḍāgārika*) for, according to his own admission, he learned 84,000 units of the Dhamma out of which 82,000 was received directly from the Buddha and 2000 from the fellow bhikkhus. He was virtually a walking library that lived with the Buddha. Along with Upali Thera who mastered the Vinaya, the two Theras functioned as the main resource persons at the first council as we will see shortly. Among other monastic disciples who had related skills were Puṇṇa Mantāniputta Thera who excelled in teaching the Dhamma, Mahakaccāna Thera who excelled among those who explained in detail what was stated in brief. Among the female monastic disciples Dhammadinnā Theri was foremost among the speakers of the Dhamma whereas her counterpart among the lay male followers (*upāsaka*) was the householder Citta of Macchikāsaṇḍa. Among the lay female followers (*upāsikā*) Khujjuttarā was the foremost among the learned. All these disciples could be considered repositories of Dhamma knowledge, libraries in that sense, i.e. ‘human libraries’ who lived during the time of the Buddha. Discourses such as *Sangiti-sutta* (Digha-nikaya 33)

attributed to Sariputta Thera suggest that the prominent disciples of the Buddha, in addition to Ananda Thera, kept the Dhamma in their memory<sup>2</sup>.

That the Buddha expected all his disciples, not merely the monastic disciples but all four groups of disciples, including the lay male and female disciples, not only to master the Dhamma but also to teach it, articulate it and also defend it against wrong views is clear from the following statement found in the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*. Addressing the Mara who suggested to him that it was time for him to pass away the Buddha said:

“Evil One, I will not attain *parinirvāna* till I have my male monastic disciples [female monastic disciples, male lay followers, female lay followers] who are accomplished , trained, skilled, learned, knowers of the Dhamma, trained in conformity with the Dhamma, correctly trained and following the path of the Dhamma, who will pass on what they have gained from their teacher, teach it, declare it, establish it, expound it, analyse it, make it clear, till they shall be able by means of the Dhamma to refute false teachings that have arisen, and teach the Dhamma of wondrous effect.”<sup>3</sup>

From this statement it is clear that in the Buddhist tradition there was from the beginning a well -established system of education executed by living libraries such as Ananda Thera and other male and female disciples.

The *mahāparinirvāna* –great passing away- of the Buddha marked a decisive moment in the evolution of the Sasana, the religious organization of the Buddha. Not only the Sasana lost its guide or the teacher but also it marked the termination of the source of the Dhamma. Before the passing away of the Buddha, when he was still alive, if anyone had a doubt about the teaching, he could get it clarified from the Buddha. But when the Buddha was no more, it was only what he taught that was left to fulfill the function of the Buddha. Hence the Dhamma had to be preserved and maintained. There was another equally crucial reason why the Dhamma had to be preserved. According to the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*, the Buddha said to his disciples that the Dhamma he taught and the Vinaya he prescribed will be their teacher once he had passed away (D. II p. 154). The Dhamma as the teacher-substitute had to be preserved. In this manner, after the Buddha attained *parinirvāna* the existence of the disciples with knowledge in the Dhamma and the Vinaya became crucial for the continuity of the Order.

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<sup>2</sup> The practice of keeping the texts in memory was not unique to Buddhism. All the other Indian religious traditions, in particular, the Vedic tradition, preserved their texts in memory. In the Indian context, this practice was also applicable not only to religious texts but also to the texts belonging to ‘sciences’ such as medicine, astrology etc.

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Maurice Walshe (2012) *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, Boston: Wisdom Publications, pp. 246-7. *Digha-nikaya* II. Pp. 112-3.

It is under these circumstances that the first council was convened immediately after the parinirvana of the Buddha. As we saw earlier, Ananda Thera and Upali Thera served as the resource persons for the Dhamma and the Vinaya respectively at this meeting. It is recorded in the Samantapāsādikā, the commentary to the Vinaya Piṭaka, how, at the conclusion of the first council, the Dhamma and the Vinaya were assigned to the leading disciples and their pupilage for memorization and up-keeping. Accordingly while Vinaya was assigned to the elder Upali and his pupils, the four major collections of the discourses, Dīghanikāya, Majjhimanikāya, Samyuttanikāya and Anguttaranikāya were assigned respectively to the elders Ananda, Maha Kassapa, (the pupils of Sariputta, for he had already passed away) and Anuruddha. The Dhamma and the Vinaya were maintained and preserved by these great elders and their pupils successively. Those who mastered the texts later came to be known as ‘*bhānaka*’ (reciters), representing in this manner the earliest Buddhist human repositories of knowledge.

According to the historical records in ancient Sri Lanka, *Varṃsakathā*, the Buddhist literature was transmitted by memory up to the beginning of the common-era, and finally was committed to writing during the reign of Vaṭṭagamini Abhaya, marking the beginning of the written texts in Sri Lankan Buddhism (Mahavamsa 33: 102, 103)<sup>4</sup>. Although this event marking the shift from oral to the textual practice is a decisive moment in the history of Buddhism, with the emphasis laid on the need for the knowledge in the Dhamma and the Vinaya and the positive attitude to the memorization and preservation of texts, the appearance of the actual texts in physical sense was only a natural development. In other words, when the need for writing down the texts arose prompted by the adverse conditions that prevailed during the time of Vaṭṭagamini Abhaya that threatened the life of the monks including those who memorized the texts there was no need to justify this act specifically.

It is interesting to note that by the time of committing the word of the Buddha to writing there were within the monastic community of the island two groups, namely, ‘the preachers of the Dhamma’ (*dhamma-kathika*) and those who wore rag robes (*pansukūlika*) who identified broadly with learning (*gantha-dhura*, yoke of books), and insight meditation (*vipassanā-dhura*, yoke of insight), respectively. As Adikaram has discussed in detail<sup>5</sup>, there had arisen among the Sangha who gathered after the long-

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<sup>4</sup> *Piṭakattayapāliṅga – tassā atthakathampi ca  
Mukhapāṭhena ānesuṃ – pubbe bhikkhu mahāmati  
Hānir̥ṃ disvāna sattānaṃ – tadā bhikkhu samāgatā  
Ciraṭṭhitatthaṃ dhammassa – potthakesu likhāpayuṃ*

“The text of the three pitakas and atthakatha thereon did the most wise bhikkhus hand down in former times orally, but since they saw that the people were falling away (from religion) the bhikkhus came together, and in order that the true doctrine might endure, they wrote them in books.” Geiger, W. *The Mahavamsa* (1950) London: Pali Text Society, p.237.

<sup>5</sup> E.W. Adikaram (1946/1994) *Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon*.

lasted famine prior to the second term of the reign of Vaṭṭagamini Abhaya (103-77 BCE) a debate as to what was more fundamental or 'root'<sup>6</sup> to the Sasana, learning (*pariyatti*) or practice (*paṭipatti*). It is said that those who represented the practice of insight quoted in support of their view, discourses that assert the attainment of paths and fruits (*magga* and *phala*) as the essence of the Sasana. In response to this, those who represented learning argued that without learning practice will be impossible. To this the rag-robe-wearers, it seemed, did not have an adequate rebuttal. So, it was decided that learning represented by the preachers of the Dhamma (later evolved to be 'those who lived in village' -*gāmvāsī*) won over those who represented the practice of insight, the wearers of rag robes (later evolved to be forest-dwellers -*araññavāsī*). Although in Adikaram's view this happening was lamentable from the point of view of the practice, as far as learning and the evolution of libraries in Sri Lanka Theravada tradition is concerned it was a turning point in Sri Lanka monastic tradition.

The next important event in the early Anuradhapura period relevant to libraries is the arrival at Mahavihara of the great Pali commentator Buddhaghosa Thera from India. Although there were commentators such as Buddhadatta Thera who had come to Mahavihara before, Buddhaghosa Thera's arrival was of greater significance because his works marked the definitive establishment of what we know as Theravada today although the interpretational tradition which Buddhaghosa translated into Pali was brought to the island by Arahant Mahinda Thera along with the Buddha sasana and kept it in the language of the island. The Mahavamsa (37: 215-247) contains a detailed account of Buddhaghosa Thera's arrival in the country during the reign of King Mahanama (406-428 CE) and how he obtained canonical and commentarial texts from Sanghapāla Thera, the chief incumbent of Mahavihara, and how he translated the texts into 'the root language, the language of Magadha' (37:244). The most interesting information contained in this account from the perspective of libraries is that Buddhaghosa Thera stayed at 'the mine of books of Durasankara-vihara' (*ganthākare vasanto so – vihāre dūrasankare*' 37: 243). It appears that recent historians have understood 'ganthākara' as the name of the particular vihara where Buddhaghosa Thera stayed while doing his work<sup>7</sup>. The wording of the relevant phrase (quoted above) suggests that ganthākara was in Durasankara-vihara, and the literal meaning of the term 'gantha+ākara' – 'mine of books' - suggests that what is meant is the location of books or the library. If Buddhaghosa Thera was housed

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<sup>6</sup> *'pariyatti nu kho sāsanassa mūlaṃ udāhu paṭipattīti? Manorathapūrani (Anguttaranikaya-Aṭṭhakatha)* (PTS Edition) I p. 92.

<sup>7</sup> Geiger (Culavamsa, 1953. Pp. 25-26) seems to take it in that manner, and Ranaweera, R.A.A.S. and Ranasinghe, Piyadasa (2013) ("Libraries in Sri Lanka in the Ancient Anuradhapura Period: A historical Survey (250 B.C. – 1017 A.D.)", *Journal of the University Librarians Association of Sri Lanka*, vol.17. Issue.1.) seem to agree with Geiger. Mangala Ilangasimha (2007) (*Savisthara Mahavamsa Anuvadaya*, Colombo 10: S. Godage saha Sahodarayo. P.381) seems to have missed this term,

by the Mahavihara monks at a residence where their library was located it is nothing but appropriate for the work undertaken by him.

Although it is hard to find any other direct reference to libraries either in Mahavihara or in other two great fraternities in the Anuradhapura period, Abhayagiri and Jetavana, or any relevant archeological evidence, judging by the extensive literary activities involving the Buddhist monks of Theravada and the non-Theravada schools of the neighboring country, India, and the Mahayana monks from China, there cannot be any doubt that all these monasteries had maintained great collections of texts. From the Polonnaruva period, there is both literary and archeological evidence, i.e. Potgul Vehera, (monastery of the cave of books) (Mahavamsa 79:82) of the existence of libraries associated with the monasteries. Although we could further survey the entire ancient monastic history of Sri Lanka, what we saw up to this point should suffice to establish the point under discussion as far as Sri Lanka is concerned.

Moving now to the Buddhist India, it is well known that great Buddhist universities such as Nalanda in Rajgir and Valabhi in Western India had great reservoirs of books as an essential part of their system of education. In addition to Nalanda, according to A. K. Warder “under the Pala patronage several other universities flourished in their empire alongside Nalanda: Vikramasila, Uddaṇḍapura, Somapuri, Jagaddala, Vajrasana (at Bodh Gaya), and Trikaṭuka being the most famous.”<sup>8</sup> Of all these great centres of education Nalanda had a great library that occupied three large buildings. According to Tibetan records, these three building were named Ratnasāgara, Ratnodadhi and Ratnarañjaka which had nine stories, and together believed to have had nine million books covering not only Buddhism but many other areas of studies<sup>9</sup>. The Buddhist universities, being true to the sense of ‘university,’ studied and taught a large number of subjects to people of diverse religious creeds coming from all over India and from other countries<sup>10</sup>.

This liberal attitude to knowledge found in Sri Lanka and India was not confined to these two countries alone. It was very much the same wherever Buddhism was practiced be it Southeast Asia, East Asia or Central Asia. Although this does not mean that libraries were only a monopoly of Buddhists in the ancient world, it should prompt us to examine the specific reasons due to which the Buddhists disseminated knowledge and cherished libraries as repositories of knowledge.

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<sup>8</sup> Warder, A.K. (2008) *Indian Buddhism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass) p.442.

<sup>99</sup> *Encyclopaedia of History of Education*, vol.1, ed. Paul Monroe (<https://www.myindiamyglory.com>).

<sup>10</sup> It is a sad story that this university along with the magnificent library was burned in 1193 by Islamic invaders headed by Bhaktiyar Khilji, and it is said that the library kept on burning for three months. Read Wader (2008) pp. 478-487 for a comprehensive discussion of the destruction caused to Buddhism in general and Buddhist universities in particular by Islamic invaders.

## Philosophy

In order to understand the Buddhist philosophy of libraries we may contrast the Buddhist attitude to knowledge with that of Brahmins. The purpose of this contrast is not to pass a judgment on the Brahmanic tradition but simply to highlight the difference. The broad picture of religion in ancient India had by far two aspects, namely, the Brahmanic tradition which was the religion identified with the caste system (varna dharma) and the Sramana tradition which was an umbrella terms covering diverse views, often contradicting with each other but occupying a common ground in rejecting the Brahmanic social system governed by the caste system. Buddhism belonged in the Sramana group, and the Buddha himself and his monastic followers were known as Sramanas.

Bramanism is a theistic tradition which believed that the world was created by Maha Brahma or Ívara. The diversity of the human society was viewed as an integral aspect of the creation, and accordingly, human beings were classified according to their qualities and were assigned with corresponding actions which **were** known as 'one's own duty' (sva-dharma). In the ancient Brahmanic belief the four 'colours' (varna) or the four social groups, Brahmana, Ksatriya, Vaishya and Sudra, were created by God and were assigned with functions not to be violated but to be performed by them without fail. Accordingly, among the exclusive functions reserved for Brahmins, in addition to performing religious duties, were studying and teaching the Vedas and the auxiliary subjects such as medicine, astronomy, grammar etc. While Ksatriyas and Vaisyas were not encouraged to study these subjects though they were not barred from doing so, the last and lowest group, Sudras, were completely prohibited from studying and teaching Vedas in particular. Harsh punishments were given to any Sudra who dared to study these sacred texts. This, in other words, meant that knowledge was made an exclusive privilege of Brahmins.

Buddhism, as a Sramana tradition, totally rejected this hierarchical social scheme and its associated privileges and restrictions. It is imaginable that Buddhism and other Sramana traditions opposed this rigid and harsh social system as a matter of their social conscience which did not tolerate injustices perpetrated on the lowest stratum of society. In addition, there were other reasons for the Buddha to reject this social system. One such reason was the Buddhist understanding of the commonality of the entire human race, that the entire humanity is one single entity without different species, articulated eloquently in such discourses of the Buddha as the *Vāseṭṭha-sutta* (Majjhima-nikaya 98) and the *Madhura-sutta* (Majjhima-nikaya 84). There is another reason, perhaps even more important, for the Buddhist position, namely, that all beings, not only human beings, desire happiness and dislike suffering<sup>11</sup>, and hence the search for happiness is a universal feature found in all beings including, in particular, human beings. It is known well that Buddhism viewed

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<sup>11</sup> "*sukhakāmo dukkhapaṭikūlo*", *Samyutta-nikaya* IV p.172.

suffering, the fundamental problem Buddhism has undertaken to find solution for, is a universal problem. The following statement reveals how the future Buddha, as Prince Siddhartha, perceived the human predicament as affecting the entire world:

Bhikkhus, before my enlightenment, while I was still a Bodhisatta, not yet fully enlightened, it occurred to me: 'Alas, this world has fallen into trouble, in that it is born, ages and dies, it passes away and is reborn, yet it does not understand the escape from this suffering [headed by] ageing-and-death. When now will an escape be discerned from this suffering [headed by] ageing-and-death<sup>12</sup>?

In this statement, the future Buddha thinks about human suffering as a problem affecting the 'world,' not to oneself or to a limited group of people. Now this universal vision entails that the teaching of the Buddha is meant for all those who are subject to suffering. Accordingly, it is nothing but rational and logical that the Buddha taught the Dhamma to all those who needed it without making any restrictions based on caste or any other unhealthy social conventions. The good news was:

Open for them are the doors to the Deathless,  
Let those with ears now show their faith  
(Ariyapariyesana-sutta, Majjhima-nikaya 26)<sup>13</sup>

It is this liberal and universal attitude that was exemplified throughout the Buddhist tradition everywhere it got established. It is due to this openness that the Buddhist monasteries in Buddhist countries always remained centres of education open for all children as well as adults living in the locality belonging to all walks of life and all types social categories. It is due to this very same reason that there were great centres of education such as Nalanda, Valabhi, Jagaddala and the like open for all, Brahmins and non-Brahmins alike. This also should explain as to why in the Indian context we do not hear about great centres of learning of the caliber of Nalanda among the Brahmins. In fact, being true to their varṇa–dharma and sva-dharma (caste and caste-bound duty) it is impossible for Brahmins to open education for all, thus making it impossible for them to evolve a *university*. It is equally impossible for them to have their knowledge in books for the very act of writing a text or putting into papers what one has kept within oneself as one's memory is tantamount to making the content of the book available to the public. As long as one has knowledge in one's memory, it is one's monopoly; and one loses this monopoly the moment one commits it into writing. This also explains why Brahmins were

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<sup>12</sup> *Samyutta-nikaya* (PTS) II. 104. Translation: Bhikkhu Bodhi (2000) *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, Boston: Wisdom Publications. p.537.

<sup>13</sup> Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi (2001) *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, Boston: Wisdom Publications. p.262.



reluctant to follow till very recent times what the Buddhists did as far back as the turn of the Common Era at Alu-vihara in Sri Lanka.

## Culture

A library has been an essential aspect of the monastic architecture ever since writing became a practice. A written text was precious and was respected and even paid homage to mainly due to its content. In the Buddhist tradition, texts containing the word of the Buddha, the Sutta, Vinaya and Abhidhamma piṭakas were kept along with the statues of the Buddha which were taken as representing the Buddha and were respected as representing the second of the Triple Gem, the Dhamma. Such texts were referred to as '*poth vahanse*' ('the venerable book') as one would refer to the Buddha or to a living member of the Sangha. This sense of respect necessitated the monks to preserve the texts with utmost care and keep them in safe places without allowing them to be exposed to elements. This practice was common to all Buddhist countries including the Theravada Buddhist countries such as Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos where substantial collections of palm-leaf manuscripts are found. More recently, it is these texts so preserved by monks in these countries that became the basis for the Pali Text Society editions of Tipitaka (three baskets of the Pali canon) started by Rhys Davids in England who got exposed to these texts while he was serving as a member of the British Colonial government in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is the same with the *Critical Pali Dictionary* edited by D. Andersen in Copenhagen, Denmark in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The Buddhist monasteries not only preserved Palm-leaf texts, but also they produced them. The production of Palm-leaf texts required special skills. Finding suitable raw material and preparing them as sheets suitable for writing involved a substantially long and arduous process. A special writing instrument ('*panhinda*' in Sinhala) had to be used for writing, a task, again, not each and every one could do. Finally, a specially prepared black ink had to be applied in order for the inscribed letters to be visible. In ancient times it was quite normal for a scribe, professional or amateur, to go to a place, say, a monastery located far away where texts are found, and spend months copying a text for one's own use or for a library in another monastery.

Due to practical difficulties involved in copying a text on Palm leaves the act of writing was considered a meritorious deed of high yield. In monasteries in Sri Lanka, it was customary to have a blank palm-leaf 'text' for those who could do so to write as a merit-generating act. Sometimes such a blank 'text' which was called '*pus gediya*' or '*his gediya*' (barren fruit or empty fruit) was prepared and given to the members of the Sangha at the occasion of their undertaking to observe the rainy season. The idea was that during this season when monks are usually confined to one place, they had time for copying Dhamma texts. People would usually consider donating a set of well-prepared Palm-leaves to the monastery as a meritorious deed, which one must do at least once in their

life time. Usually a set of prepared palm-leaves was added among the things that were donated to the monastery to transfer merits to a departed relative on the completion of seven days since his or her death. Some time ago, it was customary for some people to prepare by themselves while still they were alive such a set of leaves, called ‘path kattuva” (‘set of leaves’), to be given to the Sangha at the 7<sup>th</sup> day dana after his/her own death<sup>14</sup>. The practices of this nature reveal that the people in Buddhist cultures were aware of the importance of preserving and disseminating knowledge which is a precondition for the existence of libraries.

### **Concluding Remarks**

A library represents knowledge which, in the Buddhist tradition, is threefold, namely, factual knowledge that one receives by learning (*sutamaya ñāṇa*), reflective knowledge gained by thinking and reflection (*cintāmayā ñāṇa*) and knowledge gained by inner development (*bhavanāmayā ñāṇa*). A library contains resources for all these types of knowledge. The ultimate aim of Buddhism is to generate knowledge leading to freedom from suffering. The two other forms of knowledge used with right understanding will support and facilitate the arising of the ultimate knowledge. Since listening to or reading the Dhamma is a condition necessary for the ultimate goal a library can be an integral part of the Buddhist way of life. Further, since Buddhism promotes worldly social and economic advancement as an essential part of the life of its lay followers, a Buddhist library, in addition, may well contain resources for this-worldly development as well.

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<sup>14</sup> I am indebted to Ms. Dipanjali Ellepola, an expert in Palm-leaf culture of Sri Lanka, for sharing her knowledge with me.