

A Study of Buddha's Doctrine, Sri Lankan Buddhist Culture, and Music

Udayasiri Vidanapathirana¹



Abstract

This qualitative study examines the intricate relationship between Buddha's Doctrine, Sri Lankan Buddhist culture, and music, addressing the research problem of how music, often regarded as a sensory desire and an obstacle to enlightenment in Buddhist teachings, has been integrated into Sri Lankan Buddhist rituals. This study aims to explore the thematic relationship between Buddha's doctrine, Sri Lankan Buddhist culture, and music. Buddha's Doctrine, the teachings preached by Gautama Buddha, is a religion centered on reverence (*Shraddha*) and policy (*prathipaththi*), with its central purpose being Nirvana (*enlightenment*). Sri Lankan Buddhist culture is a unique form of faith, worship, and ceremonies that have developed within Sri Lankan society, in alignment with the fundamental teachings and goals of Buddha's doctrine. The primary objective of this culture is to fulfill worldly aspirations by fostering devotion and faith. The methodology involves analyzing core Buddhist teachings, such as the Noble Eightfold Path (*Arya Ashtangika Marga*), the doctrine of the four noble truths (*Chathurarya Sathya*), Dependent Origination (*Patichcha Samuppada Dhamma*), and Aarya Vinaya (*Noble Discipline*). Music, which is enjoyed through the auditory senses, stems from a desire for sound and is considered an obstacle to attaining Nirvana. In Sri Lankan Buddhist culture, rituals and offerings are designed to fulfill the secular aspirations of Buddhist devotees and to foster a path of reverence. Music has become an integral part of these rituals, animating and enriching them. Thus, through the analysis of the objectives of Buddha's doctrine, his teaching and spirituality, it is concluded that while the desire for sound (*or taste*) through music is not inherent to Buddha's doctrine, the need for music as an art form has been established in Sri Lankan Buddhist culture. Therefore, this study aims to dispel societal misconceptions about the nature of the relationship between Buddha's Doctrine and music in Sri Lankan Buddhist culture, contributing to the socialization of new knowledge.

Keywords

Buddha's Doctrine, Buddhist Culture, Music, Sri Lanka

¹ Department of Ethnomusicology, University of the Visual and Performing Arts, Sri Lanka. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-2783-3208> Email: udayawi67@gmail.com



Introduction

Buddha's doctrine is an atheistic spiritual tradition that offers a path to alleviate suffering through ethical practice, discipline, and meditation. It guides individuals step by step from the suffering of the samsaric journey to nirvana. Through reverence, discipline, and meditation, the senses are controlled, leading to enlightenment and wisdom (Marasinghe, 2019).

According to the ancient chronicles *Deepavamsa* and *Mahavamsa*, the Buddha visited Sri Lanka three times in the 6th century BCE (Devashita, 2014; Gnanananda Thero, 2018; & Sumangala Thero, 2014). These visits marked the beginning of Buddhism in the country. By the 3rd century BCE, before the arrival of the monk Mahinda, various indigenous tribes and Sinhala cultures in Sri Lanka had begun to intertwine with Buddhism. Over time, the religious, social, and cultural practices of these groups, along with influences from Mahayana Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity, adapted Buddhism to more secular purposes.

This blend of practices is referred to as "Soul Religion" (Atma Dharma) by scholars Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988), and they describe it as a set of superstitions that a true Buddhist may or may not believe in. This form of Buddhism, influenced by Mahayana practices, is also known as popular Buddhism (Gombrich, 1991). It is considered syncretic when Sinhala Buddhists incorporate Hindu deities into their worship. While the deities' role in Sinhala Buddhism is debated, their associated customs and traditions have become part of Sinhala Buddhist culture, similar to the concept of God (Gombrich, 1991).

The phrase 'Budu Saranai Devi Pihitai,' often used by Sinhala Buddhists, exemplifies the blend of transcendental and secular beliefs. Buddha's pure doctrine denies the existence of a God and a soul, promoting instead a code of ethics to be followed rather than a faith to be believed in (Coomaraswamy, 1959). The influence of Hinduism is evident in practices like offering food to the Buddha, hanging colorful cloths on the Bodhi tree, wearing garlands, lighting incense, bathing the Bodhi tree, and chanting prayers. "Buddha is not to hear the words or accept any food" (Gombrich, 1991, p. 144). These acts (armisa pooja), while not necessary for the Buddha, have become part of the socio-cultural fabric of Sri Lankan Buddhist culture. These unique religious and socio-cultural practices have been part of Sri Lankan Buddhist culture since ancient times, blending various elements into a distinctive tradition.

Table 1
Core Elements and Objectives of Buddha's Doctrine and Sri Lankan Buddhist Culture

Buddha's Doctrine	Sri Lankan Buddhist Culture
Religion, Discipline, Meditation	A religious form loosely arranged from Buddhism.
Lokottara (Transcendental) Objectives: The Four Ways leading to enlightenment <i>(sathara maarga phala)</i> (Attainments leading to enlightenment; i.e., Nirvana)	Worldly Objectives: Survival and longing:
Reverence- (certainty resulting from understanding)	Devotion (loyalty, faith, devotion, attachment)
Adherence (walking on the path of the dharma).	Faith (superstitions, beliefs, etc.)
Wisdom	Intelligence
Prathipaththi Pooja. (Acting according to the Dharma)	Aamisa Puja (Various Pujas, Festivals, Rituals)
Atheism (exclusion from godliness)	Theism (belief in God)

Research Questions

1. Can the use of art such as music be seen in Buddha's doctrine or in Sri Lankan Buddhist culture?
2. Was Buddha's doctrine in need of an art such as music, or was it Sri Lankan Buddhist culture that needed it?

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design, as it is based on gathering qualitative data that does not have statistical value. Both primary and secondary literary sources related to Buddha's doctrine and Sri Lankan Buddhist culture were used.



The main concepts in this study are Sri Lankan Buddhist culture and music. Buddha's doctrine and Sri Lankan Buddhist culture serve as the conceptual context through which musical tradition is examined. Music is the central phenomenon under investigation, explored through the lens of Buddhist doctrine and Sri Lankan Buddhist cultural practices.

Data Analysis

Buddha's Doctrine and Music

According to the four great teachings preached by the Buddha in the Great Parinibbana Sutra, it is stated: “The word should not be accepted, should not be denied, should not be accepted and should not be denied. If those verses should be recited in the discipline, they should be compared. If they do not compare with the discipline (vinaya), then it is not the Word of the Buddha. If it does compare, then it should be taken as the Word of the Buddha” (Maitraya Thero, 1976, p. 195). Thus, it is clear from the Buddha's discourse that a statement related to Buddha's doctrine should be accepted as the Word of the Buddha only if it is compatible with the dharma and discipline, after careful examination. This investigation is also interpreted in accordance with the “Word of the Buddha” and based on the dharma and its discipline. Accordingly, some of the sermons preached by the Buddha, such as the Noble Eightfold Path (Arya Ashtangika Margaya), the Three Marks of Existence (Trilakshana), the Four Noble Truths (Chaturarya Satya), and the teachings on Dependent Origination (Paticchasamuppada), along with the discipline, are also considered as foci for the study.

The Noble Eightfold Path (Arya Ashtangika Marga)

The Buddha has preached in the “Maha Salayatana” Sutra how the Noble Eightfold Path helps to achieve enlightenment (nirvana). “A person who follows the Eightfold Path, which includes Right View (Samma Ditthi), Right Intention (Samma Sankappa), Right Speech (Samma Vacha), Right Action (Samma Kammantha), Right Livelihood (Samma Aajiva), Right Effort (Samma Vayama), Right Mindfulness (Samma Sati), and Right Concentration (Samma Samadhi) will overcome desire (raaga), anger (dwesha), and ignorance (moha). By realizing the three marks of existence (thrillkshana), impermanence (anitya), suffering (dukkha), and non-self (anatma), such a person attains Nirvana. This is the fundamental teaching and goal of Buddha's doctrine” (Rahula Thero, 2014, p. 117). Although music can be used in ceremonies, customs, and pujas included in Sri Lankan Buddhist culture, it is clear that they are not related to the Noble Path to Nirvana in Buddha's doctrine. With the spread of Buddha's doctrine in



India and elsewhere, one of the major problems faced was the validation of humans' role in the world and the need to meet the social or religious needs of those who do not renounce (Bond, 1992). The culture of worship (aamisa pooja) was incorporated into Buddha's doctrine due to this contextual conflict. Thus, one can argue that although there is no space or approach in Buddha's doctrine to make any connection between the path to Nirvana and music, one can strategically enter this path using music. Nevertheless, the person must accomplish the four tasks and follow the necessary practices: understanding that suffering and its nature are true, that it arises from the cravings of lust, and that action must be taken to eliminate it, realizing that nirvana (enlightenment) is the absolute truth, and following the path to nirvana (Rahula Thero, 2014).

It should be clear from the above facts that this truth cannot be understood and nirvana cannot be attained except by entering into that path, practicing, and following it. There is no need for music on this path, which must be understood and followed by oneself to achieve Nibbana. By following the above steps, it is possible to suppress desire (raga), malice (dwesha), and ignorance (moha). Therefore, it should be said that a subject such as music does not prevent the creation of raga (desire) thoughts, so it does not suppress the intention of raga (desire) but rather gives an impetus to its growth. Desire is born due to the increase in sound cravings, which disturbs the path. Nibbana will be attained by those who understand and see. Here, it is always necessary to see and to know, not to believe or worship. This is not belief in devotion but wise sight (gnana dassana) (Rahula Thero, 2014). To embrace this realistic philosophy of knowledge (from the truth), the doctrine of the trinity of impermanence (anithya), suffering (dukkha), and non-self (anaathma) has been preached. Thus, the path to liberation (vimukthi) in Buddha's doctrine is a practice to be followed by the individual herself. It cannot be achieved through offering prayers, worshipping, or frequently reciting hymns, poems, or songs. According to the Buddha's teachings in the Samyukta Nikaya Loka Sutra, it is said that the world of dhamma (loka) has a fragile nature. The eye dies, the images die, eye consciousness (chakku vinnana) dies, eye contact (chakku samphassa) dies, and the pleasures and sufferings that arise from it also die. This is called Loka (Lankananda Thero, 1982). Thus, it is emphasized that all things (dharma) such as images, sounds, smells, tastes, and touch, which are external to the organs such as the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body, are all known as the world (loka), and they are subject to being broken and changing in nature. Impermanence is indeed the nature of the world. Since the doctrine of impermanence encompasses all living and non-living objects and actions in the world, it is clear that Buddha's doctrine, with such teachings, does not require



or favor an art like music. This is because the appeal of music and its subject matter are also subject to this doctrine of impermanence.

Four Noble Truths (Chathurarya Sathya)

The Four Noble Truths in Buddhism are: Truth of Suffering (Dukkha), Truth of the Cause of Suffering (Samudaya), Truth of the End of Suffering (Nirodha), and Truth of the Path to the End of Suffering (Magga). In the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, the Buddha declared that these truths are unchanging and eternal, remaining constant throughout the world (Lankananda Thero, 1982). In the Kotigama Sūtra of the Sacca Saṅkhyā Sect, it is taught that our failure to understand the Four Noble Truths, as realized by the Buddha, leads to prolonged wandering in saṃsāra (Lankananda Thero, 1982). That is why, according to Buddha's doctrine, life is inherently filled with suffering (dukkha), which is one of the Four Noble Truths. People can indeed experience temporary satisfaction through activities that bring happiness, joy, and enjoyment. However, this satisfaction is fleeting and subject to change. This truth, as taught in Buddha's doctrine, has contributed to a perceived disconnect between Buddha's doctrine and music. The elements of earth (patavi), water (apo), fire (thejo), and air (vayo), along with the sensory objects that interact with the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body such as sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations are all classified under the category of "rūpa" (form) (Rahula Thero, 2014, p. 30).

Music, which is the focus of our research, is related to the sounds perceived by the ear. The pleasures, enjoyment, and desires arising from sensory experiences lead to sorrow. Since art forms such as music are associated with these same sensory experiences, they can become obstacles to achieving Nirvana (enlightenment), which is the ultimate goal of Buddha's doctrine. Lust arising from the desire for taste and the resulting attachment can lead to cravings and infatuation. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that there is no room for unity, kinship, or connection between the Buddhist concepts of suppressing craving/desire, malice, and infatuation and the practice of music.

The Samyutta Nikaya Kotigama Sūtra states that being free from desires and cravings, achieved by removing the "bhava" fetter, can stop rebirth and lead to liberation (Lankananda Thero, 1982). This also applies to cravings caused by sounds or auditory stimuli. Since music produces the taste of sound and tone, it is clear that among the five and six types of sensory experiences described in Buddha's doctrine, sadness arises from contact with the sound through the ear. It is directly related to music. An art form such as music is directly connected to the auditory

sense, and through this, after the sound reaches the mind, it activates emotions in the mind. According to Buddha's doctrine, if both the ears and the mind primarily produce sorrow, then the above process is definitely in a state of sadness. That is why Buddha's doctrine teaches that even with an art such as music, sorrow arises. Although one could argue that taste, pleasure, and enjoyment of such an art bring peace and satisfaction to a person's spirituality and mind, the Buddha presents the concept of suffering, realizing the reality of life. It is all about the fact that this life is just a temporary taste, a mood, a thought. The concept of suffering is such a deeply realistic explanation. It is a universal truth and a fact. By enjoying music, the mind captures desire, passion, and taste. They are again associated with lust, as the taste remains in the mind. Therefore, since the concept of impermanence in Buddha's doctrine is incompatible with an art such as music, it should be clear that music is inherently negated when following the teachings of Buddha's doctrine.

There is no concept of gods or souls in Buddha's doctrine. "Buddha's doctrine opposes Brahmanism as a moral system without God and as atheism without nature." (p. 30) This statement by Burnouf is mentioned by Durkheim (1912) in his book. Thus, supernatural forces, divinity, beliefs, prayers, and faith are not relevant to Buddha's doctrine. One must achieve enlightenment, salvation, wisdom, and liberation by following the path or practice taught by the Buddha himself. Therefore, rituals such as offerings and prayers do not apply. There is no God to thank. Not only this, but there is no possible way for the Buddha to listen to their appeals or to give them a position outside of dharma. "The Buddha is dead; he has entered into Nirvana, and he can no longer influence the march of human events" (Durkheim, 1912, p. 32).

According to the Buddha's doctrine, although that is the absolute truth, the use of various religious rituals, singing, and musical playing is common in Buddhist culture. Although only Pali is used in a traditional Bodhi Puja, Sinhala prose and poetry (padya) are used in the Bodhi Puja performed by Panadura Ariyadhamma Thero, and they are sung melodiously. It is able to create both an aesthetic and an emotional appeal (Gombrich & Obeyesekere, 1988). Due to the auditory appeal and lyrical quality of the sound, it is unavoidable for devotees to develop a desire for those sounds. This is contrary to Buddha's doctrine. It does not lead to the realization or subduing of lust, desire, and infatuation, but rather to their growth. Because of these factors, the basic core of Buddha's doctrine, its teachings, meaning, objectives, etc., is forgotten, leading to the growth of defilements rather than their subduing. Buddha's doctrine adheres to the Four Noble Truths (Chaturarya Satya) and ultimately attains wisdom through adherence to dharma and meditation, culminating in the achievement of Nirvana. None of these principles



applies to divinity. Instead, the focus is on escaping or transcending the suffering world through one's own heroic deeds (Durkheim, 1912). Thus, the investigation related to the Four Noble Truths (Chaturarya Satya) also makes it clear that Buddha's doctrine and music are two distinct disciplines.

Dependent Origination (Patichchasamuppada Dharma)

The basis of Buddha's doctrine is Dependent Origination (Patichchasamuppada). In every sermon or teaching preached by the Buddha, the outcome of the doctrine is understood through the lens of Dependent Origination. This is a commentary based on the principle of causation, a doctrine. The purpose of this teaching is to understand how suffering arises in life and how to overcome it. In understanding the doctrine of Dependent Origination (Patichchasamuppada), the Buddha was the first to direct wisdom towards discovering the causes of existence on earth, as well as the causes of aging, death, and all forms of suffering. He realized that it was due to birth that these causes and forms of suffering arise. When he inquired about the causes of birth, he realized that it is due to b-hava (existence or becoming). Bhava (existence or becoming) is caused by u-pādāna (clinging or attachment). Upādāna (clinging or attachment) is caused by cravings. Suffering arises due to these cravings or desires. Pain and suffering are caused by contact (touch). Salāyatana (the six senses) is related to touch (contact). Nāmarūpa (name-and-form) is caused by salāyatana (the six senses). Nāmarūpa (name-and-form) arises from viññāṇa (consciousness). Viññāṇa (consciousness) arises due to saṅkhāra (mental formations or volitional actions). It is understood that saṅkhāra (mental formations or volitional actions) arises due to avijjā (ignorance) (Buddarakkhita thero, 2008). According to this teaching, paying attention to all worldly pleasures is ultimately futile. Thus, music is also included in this. According to Buddha's doctrine, if a Buddhist or any other person is to follow the path to Nirvana, which is considered the absolute truth in Buddha's doctrine, it is necessary to understand the path to liberation and personally implement the steps related to it.

If Buddha's doctrine began as a discipline focused on renunciation, it eventually had to address the secular needs of the world's people (Bond, 1992). Buddhist culture represents an alignment with these needs. An example of this is the worship, rituals, beliefs, and ceremonies associated with Sri Lankan Buddhist culture, including spiritual concepts, theocratic concepts, and aesthetic practices, as well as various forms of singing and playing. Indeed, Nirvana cannot be achieved through these practices. Worshipping gods is not a part of Buddha's doctrine, and according to Buddha's doctrine, gods are not considered guides to wisdom. The concept of God



is one thing; the path to salvation is another. For this, one must follow the religious path through dharma teachings, meditation practices, and ethical conduct (Eliot, 1962). It is supported by the doctrine of Dependent Origination (Patichchasamuppada). Therefore, according to this doctrine, it is inevitable that an art such as music will be rejected. "It is the absolute truth taught in Buddha's doctrine that nothing worldly is permanent, that everything is relative and transient, arising due to causes and conditions, and that there is no eternal, unchanging spiritual or external soul" (Rahula Thero, 2014, p. 57). Needless to say, if the world and human beings are impermanent by nature, the same applies to all other areas of life. Therefore, since this transient nature affects all aspects such as food, clothing, festivals, rituals, offerings, ceremonies, and art (music), the happiness derived from these aspects is also a temporary pleasure in the journey to Nirvana. In the path to liberation expounded by Buddha's doctrine, it is essential to completely detach from concepts such as lust (attachment), desire (will), and cravings (desire), including notions of "I" and "mine." As a result, since an art medium like music is a form of worldly pleasure, it obstructs the practice of the aforementioned path to liberation and is therefore inherently negated.

Music is necessary to aesthetically enact myths and the ritual systems they embody. A ritual is defined by a myth. A ritual is something that perpetuates myth. If myths are removed from religion, then rituals should also be removed (Durkheim, 1912). Buddha's doctrine is a path that completely rejects myth. The Buddha also rejected practices such as offerings and cult rituals (Oldenberg, 1882). Thus, rituals and music naturally disappear. It is clear that for anyone seeking to follow the path of liberation, engaging with something like music is an obstacle to attaining Nirvana. Meanwhile, it should be emphasized that although the Buddha imposed disciplinary rules forbidding monks from using music, the teachings, implementation, and nature of Buddha's doctrine inherently negate such practices.

Aarya Vinaya (Noble Discipline)

In Buddhism, the Eight Noble Precepts include the Pali phrase "Nachacha Geetvadita Visuka Dasasana Mala Ganadha Villepana Dharana Mandana Vibhusanattana Veramani Sikakhapadam Samadiyami," which translates to: "I undertake the precept to refrain from dancing, singing, music, and watching entertainments, and from wearing garlands, using perfumes, and beautifying the body with cosmetics" (Silva, 1980, p. 85). In this context, singing and playing are described as actions to be avoided by those who uphold virtue (shila vrata). The term "Visuka Dasasana" mentioned here encompasses all "chakshu gochara" arts, or eye-



catching arts. Additionally, according to the Samannaphala Sutra of the Digha Nikaya, the Buddha excluded practices such as blessings and exorcisms as mere superstitions (Maitraya Thero, 1962). By this teaching, if such religious rituals and exorcisms are rejected, then singing, playing, and related activities should also be rejected. Furthermore, it is noted that the Buddha did not approve of the worship of objects such as the Bodhi tree or similar natural elements. These practices do not align with the path of liberation preached by the Buddha's doctrine (Marasinghe, 2017). Thus, if such practices are not required on the path to liberation, there is no place for singing and playing associated with them.

The singing of songs is addressed in the *Khuddhakhandhaka* of the *Khuddaka Vastu*. According to Buddha's doctrine, "Reverend Sir, here are the five consequences for those who sing Dhamma with a melodious voice: They become attached to that voice, and women are also drawn to it. The concentration and meditative practice of monks who seek such vocal performances are disturbed, leading to a decline in their spiritual focus and ultimately resulting in negative outcomes" (Janananda & Maitraya Thero, 1983, p. 13). The idea is that the number of doses made to both the *laghu* and *guru* syllables should not exceed a certain limit. Buddha explicitly stated that Buddhism should not be expressed lyrically through song, as creating lyricism in this manner is ineffective and does not benefit either the singer or the listeners. Such practices are considered *dukula*, denoting a misstep or improper action that reflects negatively on the conduct and discipline expected of ordained monks (Hettihewa & Jayamanna, 2010). Lyrically presenting Buddhism is inappropriate and inconsistent with the proper conduct expected of monks.

Accordingly, the language used in presenting Buddha's doctrine (*Dhamma*) should not incorporate singing or the musical structuring of *laghu* and *guru* syllables. Additionally, the Buddha was informed that the six monks, known as the Savaga Mahanun, were engaging in various sports and, during this time, were also playing a game by blowing a flute made from leaves. The Buddha responded, "Venerable Sir, there should be no frivolous behavior. If anyone engages in such activities, then their discipline should be corrected according to the Dhamma" (Janananda & Maitraya Thero, 1983, p. 115). The leaf flute mentioned here is the *gok* (frond) leaf flute, a primary musical instrument made by children that produces sound when blown. Therefore, it should be emphasized that the Buddha preached that the use of such a primary musical instrument by monks is considered an uncommitted act and an offense requiring disciplinary action.



Moreover, the Buddha did not approve of chanting in the *ayataka* (oblong) tone (Janananda & Maitraya Thero, 1983). Here, *ayataka* refers to an oblong or elongated sound (Hettihewa & Jayamanna, 2010). This means that syllables classified as *laghu* (short) and *guru* (long) should not be presented beyond their prescribed limits. Introducing a musical quality can distort the true meaning of the Dharma, leading to a loss of correct understanding and potentially diminishing the clarity of the teachings. To avoid such issues, appropriate teachings will be provided.

Additionally, the *Anguttara Nikaya's Tika Nipata* states, "Reverend Sir, the singing of the Ārya Vinaya (Noble Discipline) is considered a lamentation... Reverend Sir, in the context of Ārya Vinaya, dancing is considered an inappropriate act" (Soratha Thero, 1960, pp. 464 - 465). The *Digha Nikaya*, specifically in the *Shilasakandhivarga* section of the *Brahmajala Sutta*, also advises refraining from activities such as dancing, singing, and performing (Maitraya Thero, 1962). "Evameva kho bhikkhave apapaka the sattha ye nachagithavaditavisukadasasana pativiratha. Atha kho eteva bahutara sattha ye nachaageetavaditavisukadasasana apapativiratha-pe-yogo karaniyothi" "Sir, if someone refrains from dancing, singing, and similar activities, he is considered courageous. Conversely, if someone does not refrain from such activities, it requires significant courage" (Lankananda Thero, 1982, pp. 342 - 343). From all these teachings, it is clear that the Buddha rejected the use of song and music.

The primary purpose of art forms such as sculpture, dance, drama, films, and music is to evoke aesthetic pleasure. Engaging with these art forms naturally attracts the human mind to seek and enjoy sensory experiences. This engagement can provoke emotions and stir feelings of desire, which can become obstacles on the path to liberation according to Buddha's doctrine. To achieve liberation, it is unnecessary to rely on divine beliefs, ceremonies, religious rituals, singing, playing, or other forms of art. Buddha's doctrine clearly indicates that such practices obstruct the path to liberation. Indulging in or clinging to any form of art is contrary to Buddha's teachings. The emotional satisfaction and happiness derived from such activities hinder the understanding of the truth needed to escape the cycle of *samsara*. Individuals who are captivated by the allure of the arts may find their minds obscured by ignorance, preventing them from understanding the truth.

Buddha's doctrine, which emerged from a society rich in superstitions, disregards artistic elements as they obstruct understanding of truth and the path to Nirvana (Kulathilaka, 1996). Sarathchandra (1999) argues that Buddha's doctrine does not regard drama and music as means



to purify the mind or direct it towards higher values. While music is strongly associated with Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity, Buddha's doctrine and its practices do not incorporate or require music. Disciplinary rules prohibit such art forms for both monks and laypeople who maintain high virtue. Sarathchandra (1999) suggests that engaging in artistic inspirations is detrimental to achieving the ultimate goal of life, Nirvana or the Path of Liberation.

A person following the path of liberation should focus on developing spiritual qualities such as Sila (moral conduct), Samadhi (meditative concentration), and Wisdom (pragna) through meditation, avoiding the aforementioned activities. Indeed, worldly art forms filled with music evoke emotions and desires that do not support the path to Nirvana. According to Buddha's doctrine, it is clear that art forms such as music are inherently restricted because they interfere with the pursuit of liberation. A careful examination of the Dhamma teachings reveals that Buddha's doctrine rejects music, establishing that Buddha's doctrine and music are fundamentally contradictory disciplines.

Buddhist Culture and Music in Sri Lanka

Three centuries after the Buddha's passing, the Buddha's doctrine began incorporating various ornamental offerings, ceremonies, religious rituals, and art forms influenced by Mahayana Dharma. Despite the Hinayanikas (or Sthaviravada factions) striving to preserve pure practices of Buddha's doctrine, their efforts were hampered by weak leadership. Conversely, Emperor Kanishka of the Kushan Empire, a strong supporter of Mahayana, significantly contributed to the integration of these elements into Buddha's doctrine (Kulathilaka, 1996). Consequently, Buddha's doctrine absorbed various aspects, including Zoroastrian theology and Hellenistic art from the Kushans (Eliot, 1962). Due to their connections with Greek, Roman, and Chinese civilizations, the Kushans incorporated Greek practices, such as the worship of statues and gods, into Buddha's doctrine, turning Mahayana into a conduit for these influences. The first Buddha statue is believed to have been carved by a Greek artist (Kulathilaka, 1996). — Buddhism is a form of later Indian Mahayanaism with a significant blend of Hinduism~ (Eliot, 1962, p. 25).

Sri Lankan Buddhist culture, by the 3rd century BCE, had developed a rich religious and socio-cultural heritage. This cultural evolution was characterized by the blending of Sinhala cultural elements with the established Buddhist tradition. To preserve these distinct practices, ceremonies and rituals were performed incorporating elements such as dance, singing, and sculpture. This fusion led to the creation of a musical culture within Sri Lankan Sinhalese



Buddhist traditions, making singing and other artistic expressions integral to the culture. As a result, Sri Lankan Sinhalese Buddhist culture emerged as a unique blend of practices and expressions.

Many early Sinhalese belief systems were intertwined with customs related to Buddha's doctrine, leading to a seamless fusion of Sinhala and Buddhist cultures (Vimalavansa Thero, 2000). Today, Sinhala Buddhists integrate practices related to Buddha's doctrine with yantra-mantra (exorcisms), deity worship, and rituals for the deceased. Despite Buddha's doctrine's traditional rejection of exorcisms, singing, and music, Hindu influence led to the subtle incorporation of elaborate ceremonies, singing, and music into these practices. As a result, Buddha's doctrine evolved from a path of enlightenment into a faith-based religion. Initially rejecting exorcism, Mahayana Buddhism introduced ceremonial practices resembling exorcisms, often incorporating Hindu religious concepts. The Vedic trinity of Agni, Indra, and Surya in Hinduism was reinterpreted in the context of the Buddha's doctrine as Manju Sri, Avalokiteshvara, and Vajrapani, thereby replacing the Hindu deities Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu with the triad of Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha (Kulathilaka, 1996). These adaptations were likely aimed at preventing the absorption of Buddha's doctrine into Hinduism but led to its transformation into a bhakti tradition.

Following a prolonged contest between Hinduism and Buddha's doctrine from the 4th to the 9th centuries CE, Hinduism ultimately overshadowed it. The disappearance of Buddha's doctrine was influenced by Hindu reactions during the Gupta period, the decline of Mahayanism, and the traditional nature and endurance of Buddha's teachings (Eliot, 1962). This contributed to the development of what became known as Buddhist culture. Some sutras used in *pirith* chanting belong to the Dharani category of Hindu texts. Despite the Buddha's teachings against using musical tones or singing systems for teaching, *pirith* chanting was incorporated into practices related to the Buddha's doctrine as an imitation of the Hindu Vedic singing system (Kulathilaka, 1996).

Although King Parakramabahu's religious policy was officially aligned with Buddha's doctrine, he accepted Hindu practices both in principle and in practice. It is noted that Hindu customs and rituals were strongly embraced and disseminated within the royal palace and throughout the country. The king and other high-ranking officials showed respect for Hindu religious beliefs and incorporated them into their daily lives and governance (Dewerackshitha & Sumangala Thero, 2014). During his reign, the king greatly supported Hindu *yaaga* (exorcism)



ceremonies and actively participated in numerous Hindu festivals (Kulathilaka, 1996). Given the king's and the elite's attitudes, Hindu rituals inevitably blended with Sri Lankan Buddhist culture. Additionally, monks embraced tantric practices and demonstrated a keen interest in studying Sanskrit literature, which served as their medium. Mahayana Dharma was also nurtured through this practice. This paved the way for the incorporation of Hindu religious rituals, beliefs, devotional concepts, and divination into Sri Lankan Buddhist culture under the influence of Mahayana Dharma and state patronage. Consequently, the use of music was also organically integrated into the culture related to Buddha's doctrine. In Sri Lankan Buddhist culture, practices (*armisa pooja*) such as *piritha*, *bodhi puja*, and poetry *bana* involve presenting prose, gatha, and poetry used for pujas (worshipping) and sermons in the form of singing, accompanied by specific musical melodies. People who follow other religious beliefs often use singing to influence spirits, demons, ghosts, and gods, as well as to fulfill worldly aspirations and communicate with the dead. Religion represents a form of communion characterized by rituals, beliefs, and elements of the unknown or incomprehensible. It involves a sense of divinity and belief in the dead. Additionally, religion establishes ways to regulate relationships with these spiritual entities through practices such as addresses, prayers, offerings, and shantikarma (exorcisms) (Durkheim, 1912). Music was an essential part of this.

Buddhists, in their worship practices, first venerate the Buddha, then the Bodhi tree, followed by offering reverence to Buddha statues. Many also include the worship of gods or deities in their practices. Buddhists often do not see a contradiction in their worship practices, which include reverence for the Buddha, the Bodhi tree, Buddha statues, and sometimes deities or gods. They believe there is nothing wrong with seeking divine protection, as gods protected the Buddha. Consequently, Buddha's doctrine gradually evolved into a religious system incorporating many different elements. Within two to three hundred years after the Buddha's *Parinirvana* (death), he was elevated both physically and spiritually to the status of a superhuman or great being. Later, he became popular as a sacred figure associated with miracles and magnificence. Meanwhile, monks and laypeople offered various interpretations and created popular myths, legends, and ritualistic worship practices to align with the devotees' theological expectations. There was also a growing demand for a singing culture, though these practices are not considered authentic to Buddha's doctrine. This refers to Buddhism introduced to Sri Lanka in the 3rd century BCE (Gunasinghe, 1984). Later, it merged with Sinhala culture and evolved into what is now known as Sri Lankan Buddhist culture. This is how the veneration of deities and the use of God statues entered Buddhist temples. In addition to Hindu temples,



similar practices and the presence of deities are also found in Buddhist temples, where temple priests (Kapuralas) perform rituals and ceremonies. These priests, although engaged in such practices, are also Buddhists (Silva, 1980).

As a result, Hindu religious customs and associated music became intertwined with Sri Lankan Buddhist culture. Because of this background, Sinhala Buddhist society experienced a drastic change in attitude. As a result, the core elements of Buddha's doctrine, its sacredness, purity, reverence, discipline (prathipaththi pooja), and the prescribed way of practice were overshadowed. Instead, ritual worship, devotion (bhakthi), and festival practices (armisa pooja), including singing and dancing, became prominent in the culture. Non-Buddhist practices among Buddhists in different parts of the world often appear to contradict fundamental principles of the Buddha's doctrine. Examples of this include "sound offerings" (shabdha pooja) in the Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana traditions. In the early days, practitioners of Buddha's doctrine customarily practiced worship in silence and calmness. However, over time, it became customary to use instruments like traditional drums or bells (ganta) to gather the crowd. The need to establish and enhance this practice may have made it appear as though sound-based blessings or rituals were a tribute to the Noble Triple Gem (Sivali Thero, 2016). These activities were not conducted to honor the Noble Triple Gem but were intended to meet the secular needs of the people, attract followers to their sect, popularize it, and serve the self-interests of monks.

Indeed, regardless of one's religious sentiments, it's clear that music has a powerful effect on the human mind. Its ability to captivate and engage people is why it remains so beloved by the general public. When it comes to religion, they adapted and utilized music to fit the prevailing mood and context (Sivali Thero, 2016). Sri Lankan monks may have been inspired by these practices as well. Buddhist festivals and rituals, along with the dhamma preaching culture originating from the Aryavamsa sermon, have significantly contributed to the development of Sinhala Buddhist culture (Vimalavansa Thero, 2000). It should be clear that these practices led to a strong connection between Sri Lankan Buddhist culture and music.

Conclusion

The primary goal of Buddha's doctrine is to achieve Nirvana (enlightenment). The Buddha prescribed a path to attain this state, which includes the *Arya Ashtangika Marga* (Noble Eightfold Path), *Chaturarya Satya* (Four Noble Truths), *Patichasamuppadya* (Dependent



Origination), and various meditation practices. Eliminating all cravings and desires is a crucial teaching, including cravings related to auditory experiences. Since the use of music fosters a desire for sound, it is not supported in the sermons, bhikkhu (monastic) discipline, and other teachings preached by the Buddha. This investigation revealed that the purpose and objectives of Buddha's doctrine, as well as its very nature, negate any relationship between Buddha's doctrine and music. Therefore, there is no requirement for music in Buddha's doctrine. Due to the association of Buddha's doctrine with various religious, social, and cultural influences, a unique Buddhist culture emerged in Sri Lanka, leading to a culture of worship and ceremonies (armisa pooja). The need for music arose from its roles in both human survival and social animation. Thus, it can be concluded that the use of music or the perceived need for it did not originate in the Buddha's teachings but rather emerged from Sri Lankan Buddhist culture.

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