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**THE GROWTH OF
BUDDHIST MONASTIC INSTITUTIONS
IN SRI LANKA FROM
BRĀHMĪ INSCRIPTIONS**

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OF SRI LANKA

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**THIS VOLUME ON THE GROWTH OF BUDDHIST
MONASTIC INSTITUTIONS IN SRI LANKA
FROM BRĀHMĪ INSCRIPTIONS IS DEDICATED
TO
THE MEMORY OF MY MOTHER AND FATHER**

ABSTRACT

The propagation of Buddhism in Sri Lanka in the third century B.C. as witnessed by the lithic records and the chronicles was due to the efforts of the Buddhist monks who spread Theravāda or the orthodox tradition of the religion in the first few centuries. Its spread went parallel with the growth of monastic institutions in the island.

At first the patronage extended by the kings and the people towards the Buddhist monks was to safe-guard the religion. They were endowed with dwellings and requisites for their maintenance. To make them self-sufficient the monks were endowed with permanent and valuable gifts consisting of land, tanks, revenue from taxes and so forth. When these endowments were made, the monks became land-holders and gained a role of leadership in society. On the one hand, the relationship with the masses made the *Saṅgha* an institution which dominated society in its own way. On the other, it became a major factor to check the royal power.

The monks generally regarded themselves as having a two-fold task; striving for their own salvation and preaching the Dhamma to lead others to find their salvation. It was the scholar and the preacher in them that were useful to society.

Buddhism was flourishing in the entire island by the second century A.D. Even before that dissensions among members of the *Saṅgha* were visible in the premiere establishments such as Mahāvihāra and Abhayagirivihāra. Some individuals struggled for power and tried to gain favours from the kings. By about the third century A.D. new trends of thought in Buddhism, coming from the subcontinent of India, were making headway in the island. By contact with these new movements, the monks of the Abhayagirivihāra were becoming liberal in their views. The new schools of thought such as Vaitulyavāda, described as heresies in the chronicles, divided them into sects. These schools of new thought had the backing of some kings though the Mahāvihāra vehemently opposed them.

By about the fourth century, there were three fraternities, namely, Mahāvihāra, Abhayagiri and Jetavana. The inscriptions and the chronicles bear clear evidence to the manifestation of Mahāyāna ideals such as the Bodhisattva worship. The sixth and seventh century inscriptions attach great importance to the merit-making rituals that accompanied them. Here we find the *Saṅgha* in the role of the priest invoking blessings on the masses and becoming an indispensable figure in society.

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | | |
|--------------|---|---|
| Ch. | - | Chapter |
| ed. | - | edited |
| C.J.Sc.G. | - | Ceylon Journal of Science, G. |
| E.Z. | - | Epigraphia Zeylanica |
| J.R.A.S.C.B. | - | Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch |
| J.R.A.S.G.B. | - | Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Great Britain and Ireland |
| P. | - | Pali |
| Pt. | - | Part |
| P.T.S. | - | Pali Text Society |
| S.B.E. | - | Sacred Books of the East |
| S.H.B. | - | Simon Hewavitarane Bequest Series |
| Skt. | - | Sanskrit |
| tr. | - | translated |
| Vol. | - | Volume |

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