

The Bodhi Tree Legacy: Environmental and Psychological Significance of Bodhi-Pūjā

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Abstract

For millennia, Eastern cultures have venerated nature, with Buddhists particularly revering the Bodhi tree (*Ficus religiosa*) as a symbol of enlightenment and ecological harmony. Despite Western critiques dismissing such practices as unscientific or primitive, the Bodhi tree—requiring minimal resources while offering maximal oxygen—exemplifies its environmental significance. This paper examines Bodhipūjā, a Buddhist ritual honouring the Bodhi tree, arguing that it embodies a sustainable model for ecological and psychological well-being. The weeklong gaze (*animisa locana pūjā*) of the Buddha at the Bodhi tree after enlightenment symbolized gratitude to nature, fostering a legacy of tree preservation in Sri Lanka, where over 20,000 Bodhi trees are protected today. The study focuses on the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their relevance to Buddhist teachings, with a particular emphasis on Bodhipūjā. In addition, Bodhipūjā serves as a psychotherapeutic tool, decreasing stress and fostering social harmony. Some

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critics reduced the role of ecological trusteeship and the mental health of the ritual. By integrating qualitative methodology and textual analysis, ethnographic insights methods, this paper argues that Buddhist environmental ethics—rooted in non-exploitation and gratitude—offer a transformative framework for addressing contemporary crises, such as climate change and psychological distress.

Keywords: *Bodhi tree, Bodhipūjā, Buddhist environmentalism, psychological well-being, sustainability*

Introduction

For thousands of years, Eastern nations have been paying homage to trees, mountains, rivers, forces of nature, and the earth. Meanwhile, Buddhists continue paying homage to the tree, which is called Bodhi.¹ Probably for the psychophysical well-being of sentient beings and the sustainability of the material world in which they are living. This act of veneration of the Bodhi tree by Buddhists was not pleasing to so-called developed nations, who looked at Eastern people as primitive, tribal, uncivilized, and perhaps as stupid communities. Looking through their own religious, economic, and cultural viewpoint, some people think this kind of practice is not scientific and logical, and some others hold the opinion that these are traditional beliefs and have no modern value at all in this digital era (Marasinha, 2016).

It should be mentioned that the above-mentioned are not only Europeans and Americans; even certain Asians who were born and raised amidst such practices also, after migrating to the above countries, criticize these practices and compare them with secular musical shows which aim to entertain educated

1. Bodhi tree, Bo tree, peepul tree, pipal tree; Botanical name, *Ficus religiosa*.

but unemployed youths in Sri Lanka. This is evident from the article ‘Bodhipūjā; Collective Representation of Sri Lanka Youth’ written by H. L. Seneviratne and Swarna Wickramaratne (1980). This article, no doubt, fulfils the requirement of the foreign organisation’s objective that provided the funds to or understand? Not clear Buddhist practices, but doesn’t signify the fundamental objectives and historical evolution of Bodhipūjā. Today, interestingly, the environment insists that every human being, irrespective of the country they hold citizenship to, revisit the accuracy and impartiality of their criticism towards the faith and devotion of Buddhists towards the environment and the meaning of their religious practices.

Since the beginning of 2020, the Coronavirus outbreak has become the most alarming threat to human life worldwide. This kind of pandemic will be stopped at one point, perhaps with the invention of a vaccine for the virus. Nevertheless, throughout the last two decades, the focal point of many global forums has been the fast degradation of the environment and the subsequent impacts and challenges that the world encounters. Therefore, I was tempted to take this issue for examination and put it forward for discussion when I saw recent considerations of world leaders, particularly the development goals of the United Nations Organization, which had been declared over the last 20 years. Accordingly, surpassing issues like civil wars and many other human hardships, world leaders, international organizations, and intellectuals have started to talk about nature-related issues such as climate change, sea-level rise, and global warming. This is evident from the recently declared goals of the UN, as the biggest international organization of countries.

In the past, the UN had paid attention to crises in certain nations, communities, and geographical regions. However, since the beginning of the present millennium, the UN has started to address global issues rather than regional issues. This shows the recently declared two sets of goals of the UN: (i) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and (ii) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). United Nations Millennium Declaration, signed in September 2000, commits world leaders to combat (i) poverty, (ii) hunger, (iii) disease, (iv) illiteracy, (v) environmental degradation, and (vi) discrimination against women. According to published reports, the UN aimed to achieve the above goals by 2015.

After 17 years, in 2017, replacing the above goals, the UN Organization introduced a new set of goals which is called Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which contains the issues such as (i) poverty, (ii) hunger, (iii) health, (iv) education, (v) gender equality, (vi) water and sanitation, (vii) clean energy, (viii) economic growth, (ix) infrastructure, (x) human settlements, (xi) climate change, (xii) marine resources, (xiii) echo-system, (xiv) justice for all, and (xv) global partnership.

It is clear that under the above development scheme, the UN seems to have focused considerable attention on environment-related problems, considering that nature can cause much more harm to the world than poverty, hunger, and diseases, among other issues. Recently, the heat of the bushfires in the Amazon and Australia, the melting of glaciers in the Andes and Greenland, record CO₂ emissions, and numerous other global calamities have compelled developed nations to prioritize finding solutions to the alarming issue of climate change in almost all global forums.

Until the recent past, the word sustainable was limited to dictionaries. Development, industrialization, political stability, and economic growth were the targeted goals of so-called developed countries. Issues such as deforestation, overfishing, overuse of natural and mineral resources, and greenhouse gas emissions were either neglected or deliberately suppressed, given the pursuit of financial and economic benefits. Perhaps, developed nations might have thought they could keep their own countries clean, healthy, and cool, as well as free of natural disasters that people in other parts of the globe already encounter. But today, environmental disasters are alarming the entire world, irrespective of their social, political, and economic status.

The Ecological and Spiritual Significance of Trees

Today, the world has identified planting more and more trees as one of the most effective and indispensable solutions to protect the environment and the earth and slow down the forthcoming inevitable natural disasters. As we know, besides producing oxygen and reducing carbon dioxide, trees provide remarkable socio-economic and environmental benefits. Trees are usually seen as the lungs of the planet Earth. Trees can extend the life of the planet and the beings living on it. Trees absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and produce carbohydrates, which are useful for the growth of the planet (Luley & Nowak, 2004). Trees keep the world alive by producing food for all beings. Therefore, we cannot think of a world without trees and plants.

In the world, people grow plants and trees, most probably considering their commercial or aesthetic value, and cut them down whenever they are overgrown or reach the expected level. However, the Bodhi tree, because of its religious value and lack

of commercial value, has been able to survive in the world until its natural destruction. Among many other trees in the world, the Bodhi tree inherits the ability to grow and sustain itself in many parts of the world (Whistler, 2000). It is also a kind of tree that does not require human intervention for its growth and diffusion. Botanically, it is identified as an environmental or naturalised weed that can sustain and diffuse easily. The Bodhi tree has also been identified as a tree that consumes a minimum amount of groundwater for its existence. In Sri Lanka, there are two famous Bodhi trees subject to veneration for centuries, one in Isurumuniya and the other in Tantirimale, which live on granite rocks without connecting with the soil on the ground. Nevertheless, botanically, this tree has been identified as one of the few trees that can generate the maximum amount of oxygen that is necessary for the prevalence of life on Earth.

Considering the vital necessity of vegetation, in the recent past, there were several mega-scale successful tree-planting projects in different countries of the world. Interestingly, many of them have been initiated by individual volunteers who have compassionate thoughts toward the animate and inanimate world. Government or organizational-level tree-planting projects probably require a huge sum of funds but produce fewer results. It is said in UN reports that to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, annual investment requirements across all sectors have been estimated at around \$5-7 trillion.² It is also reported that though the UN provides a lot of money to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the result is not satisfactory. The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019 states, “Notwithstanding that progress, this report identifies many areas

2. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>.

that need urgent collective attention. The natural environment is deteriorating at an alarming rate: sea levels are rising; ocean acidification is accelerating; the past four years have been the warmest on record; one million plant and animal species are at risk of extinction, and land degradation continues unchecked” (United Nations, 2019).³

As evidenced in the past decades, most successful environmental campaigns have not originated from the government level and are not merely based on financial investments. Few such successful projects are heard from China. “In the late 1980s and early 1990s, environmental awareness in China grew rapidly. The first flush of environmentalism crystallized in the form of environmental NGOs. The founding of Friends of Nature in 1993 was a groundbreaking event in this regard” (Sun, 2016, p. X).

Buddhist Teachings and Environmental Conservation

Here, it is not intended to seriously examine the gravity of environmental disasters or the causes behind them. By this, it is expected to examine a particular Buddhist offering called Bodhipūjā and its ecological and psychological (would be better) significance, which has a direct bearing on the environment and the life of sentient beings. As it is confirmed through textual and archaeological evidence, the Bodhisattva appeared around 2600 years ago in the North-Eastern region of India and became the enlightened one who is also called the Buddha. The objective of the Buddha was to realize the truth of the world, specifically

3. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2019>.

the cause of the suffering of beings. According to his words recorded in the Pali canonical texts, he had been searching for an innumerable period of many eons, the root cause that creates almost all human-related sufferings. In his last birth, as the son of King Suddhodana, he abandoned all the luxuries of royal life and decided to renounce and practice as an ascetic. His journey leading to enlightenment ended with the realization of truth under the Bodhi Tree, which, even after 2600 years, is still venerated by Buddhists as a sacred monument of worship.

The essence of the Buddha's understanding, which he gained under the Bodhi Tree, is called the Four Noble Truths that speak of (i) the suffering of sentient beings, (ii) the cause of suffering, (iii) the cessation of suffering, and (iv) the path leading to the cessation of suffering. To achieve this objective, the Buddha showed the importance of following the middle path, which lies between the two extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification that had been practiced even by the Buddha during the period of his training as a Boddhisattva before enlightenment. It is useful to reexamine how he revealed his knowledge of enlightenment at the time of his first sermon. He says, "O monks, in me, regarding things unheard before, there arose vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light"⁴. According to this statement, the Buddha gained holistic knowledge of worldly as well as transcendental matters. On this basis, we can understand why he paid homage to the Bodhi Tree. In this regard, on the one hand, he proclaimed his philosophical knowledge verbally, and on the other hand, by paying reverence

4. pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, gñānaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi. Vinaya Pitakaṃ, vol - I 1997, p 10.

to the Bodhi Tree, he displayed how to deal with worldly matters, especially with the environment.

The Buddha, under the Bodhi tree, realized that suffering, or unsatisfactoriness, was the main problem, and craving was the root cause of the problem. So, he expounded on the necessity of eradicating three main causes: greed, hatred, and delusion, to overcome suffering. However, while explaining his groundbreaking wisdom verbally, the Buddha also used nonverbal methods to show that his achievement would be impossible without the support of the environment. Therefore, it seems that taking the Bodhi tree as the immediate and most substantial representation of nature available to him, he paid profound gratitude to nature by looking with non-blinking eyes at the Bodhi tree for seven consecutive days. This doesn't mean that the Buddha was grateful to the Bodhi-tree alone just because of the shade it provided him, rather his act of looking at the unconscious bodhi-tree can be taken into a grant as a token of gratitude towards the whole environment which is indirectly conducive in providing the world fresh air, clean water, and many more environmental rewards and benefits.

Perhaps the Buddha might have thought of the historical tradition of India, which was already paying the utmost respect to nature. The eco-friendly attitude of Indian culture started even before the advent of the Aryan community in India, probably during the pre-Vedic era. Vedic literature reports how primitive or so-called tribal communities were grateful to nature and its functions. Unlike today, at that time, people understood that their entire life system depended on and was governed by nature. So, they personified the sun, moon, rain, wind, and other forces of

nature as gods. Vaishnavites believe even God Vishnu was born beneath the shade of the Bodhi tree, which is also called the Pipal tree, and therefore, they hope this tree can make human life safer and happier. As a result of their faith and respect for the environment, both the environment and the lives of the people were secured and benefited for centuries.

There are other stories as well in Buddhist literature that say trees are the dwellings of tree spirits. Many trees are inhabited or occupied by non-human beings, so cutting down trees was considered an act of displacing tree spirits, and the Buddha discouraged such deeds as unwholesome (Horner, 1969, p. 226). This attitude of the Buddha also contributed to the preservation of trees and forests.

It has been heard that tree worship has been practiced even before in pre-Buddhist Sri Lanka. However, after the introduction of Buddhism, a sapling of the Mahabodhi tree was brought from India and planted in the sacred city of Anuradhapura in 249 BC, which was during the reign of King Devānampiyatissa. Since then, the kingship of Sri Lanka has been bound with the Bodhi tree, and successive kings paid utmost respect, considering this ecological monument a heritage of Sri Lankan kings as well as a symbol of kingship. From then on, plants of the Bodhi, derived from the main Bodhi tree, were carried and planted in every part of the island. As a result, today, there are over 10000 well-established and registered Buddhist monasteries in Sri Lanka alone, and the Bodhi tree has been an indispensable living sacred object. Besides, there are approximately another 10000 Bodhi Trees on roadsides, public places, and in private lands protected and venerated by the people.

Today, we take the incident of Buddha's looking at the Bodhi tree with non-blinking eyes (*animisa locana pūjā*) only as an example to teach people the importance of paying gratitude to those who helped to achieve one's objective. The account found in the Mahāvaggapāli on post-Enlightenment incidents says that Buddha was not so hurried to pay gratitude to the people who supported him. But first of all, he was thankful for nature, and then he searched for human beings who helped him. If the Buddha just wanted to pay gratitude to the people who helped him, he could have immediately gone to meet his relatives, former guides or co-practitioners, namely Ālārakālāma and Uddakarāma, and the five ascetics who were his former companions. It is also significant to note that in his search for listeners, he gave priority to intellectuals,⁵ and when he found those intellectuals whom he aimed to help were already departed, then only he turned to search for five ascetics as his former assistants to help them.⁶

As we know, throughout life, from birth to death, the Buddha treated the environment with enormous respect. He selected tree shades to be born and pass away; he also attained Enlightenment under a tree; often, he spent his time in an open environment and the shadows of trees. During six years of rigorous practice, he considered the environment as his mere supporter, from which he obtained almost everything.

5. Ko imaṃ dhammaṃ khippameva ājānissatī"ti? Atha kho bhagavato etadahosi – "ayaṃkho ālāro kālāmo paṇḍito byatto medhāvī dīgharattaṃ apparajakkhajātiko; yaṃnūnāhaṃ ālārassa kālāmassa paṭhamaṃ dhammaṃ deseyyaṃ, so imaṃ dhammaṃ khippameva ājānissatī"ti. Vinaya Piṭakaṃ, vol - I, 1997, p.7.

6. "bahukārā kho me pañcavaggiyā bhikkhū, ye maṃ padhānapahitattaṃ upatthahimsu; yaṃnūnāhaṃ pañcavaggiyānaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ paṭhamaṃ dhammaṃ deseyya"nti. Vinaya Piṭakaṃ, vol - I, 1997, p. 8.

According to Buddhism, donation (dāna) is the basic and most reliable meritorious deed for earning wholesome power, which makes beings happy and healthy. As Buddhism sees it, generosity is nothing but helping others to live without difficulties. Therefore, having realized the significance, the Buddha declared planting trees as one of the great meritorious deeds that generate heavenly bliss. Someone may wonder why the Buddha identified planting trees as one of the most profitable, wholesome deeds. It is because of its viability as a supportive factor to generate fresh air, clean water, shade, fruits, and many other things for living beings. Therefore, planting trees is equal to giving everything to every kind of being. In the Saṃyuttanikāya is said that those who plant trees, make bridges, and provide drinking water and shelter can get their merits increased day and night, and as a result, they will be the most virtuous and righteous people who go to heaven.⁷

Today, some may take Buddha's looking at the Bodhi Tree with non-blinking eyes as a fact to humiliate Buddhism. One can think that spending seven days after enlightenment is a waste of time and a meaningless engagement. As we can see, it is a general custom for people to pay gratitude to those who help people with certain achievements, particularly parents, relatives, and friends. This is the nature of beings who are bound by affections and relationships. People do not see the reasons or responsibility for paying gratitude to nature and the environment for their achievements. Suppose that not only this earth, its resources

7. Āramaropa vanaropā, ye janā setukārakā,
papañca udapānañca, ye dadanti upassayaṃ.
Tesaṃ divā ca ratto ca, sadā puññaṃ pavaḍḍhati,
dhammaṭṭhā sīlasampannā, te janā saggagāmino'ti. Saṃyutta Nikaya, vol
- I, 1998, p.70.

such as water, air, and other elements, not only achievements, but even living life would be unthinkable. Therefore, we have an obligation to the environment, and we are indebted to it, too. As Buddhism sees it, without such commitment to nature, the well-being of human life cannot be guaranteed.

The Buddha, when he decided to spend time looking at the Bodhi Tree, might have foreseen the long-lasting impact of his compassionate act of paying gratitude to the environment, taking the Bodhi Tree as a sacred object representing the entire system of the environment. Taking this lesson for granted, even after 2600 years, Buddhists pay homage to the Bodhi Tree and are conscious of the significance of the entire ecological system. In this regard, it should be noticed that Buddhism does not confine its concern to this particular tree itself, which is botanically known as *Ficus religiosa*, but some other trees as well, under which former Buddhas attained enlightenment. In the history of Theravada Buddhism, there are 28 Buddhas mentioned, , who were the predecessors of the Buddha Gautama. All those Buddhas mentioned below attained enlightenment under trees, which are also called Bodhi, and were subjected to veneration.

As the commentaries report, two Buddhas, namely the Buddha Gautama and the Buddha Koṇḍañña, had attained enlightenment under the same kind of Bodhi tree called *Asvattha*, Anomadassi under an *Ajjuna* tree, Paduma and Nārada under *Mahāsona* tree, Buddha Dīpaṅkara and Kakusanda a *Sirīsa* tree, Maṅgala, Sumana, Revata and Sobhita Buddhas under a Bodhi tree called *Nāga*, for Padumuttara a *Salala* tree, Buddha Sumedha a *Nimba* tree, for Sujāta a *Bamboo* tree, for Piyadassi a *Kakudha* tree, Attadassi a *Campaka* tree, Dhammadssi a *Bimbajāla* tree,

Siddhattha a Kanikāra tree, Tissa an Asana tree, Phussa an Amanda tree, Vipassi a Pāṭhali tree, Sikhī a Punḍarīka tree, for Vessabhū a Sāla tree, Konāgama an Udumbara tree, for Kassapa a Banyan tree (Buddhavamsa Aṭṭhakathā, 1978, p. 297). In addition to this, according to Pali Canonical and commentarial literature, Buddhists have been paying special respect to the other larger trees in the forests, also known as *Vanaspati*.

Thus, the Buddha's single act of looking at the Bodhi tree for one week soon after the enlightenment has made a long-lasting advantageous impact on the environment for thousands of years which led to the preservation and protection of a minimum of 20000 large trees (Bodhi) in Sri Lanka alone directly, and the entire vegetation system at large indirectly.

As mentioned above, there are reports about many tree-planting campaigns taking place throughout the world that are organized by governments, NGOs, and many other social organizations. Though they are spending huge sums of money, it seems to have failed to create sufficient awareness among the people of the value of trees. Nevertheless, the Buddha's endeavour to generate faith in the Bodhi tree and declare the destruction of seeds and plants as a sinful offence has made a long-lasting impact on the minds of at least Buddhists.

Psychological Impact

In the Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā, the commentary to the Dhammapada, there is an account of a monk called Cakkhupāla which also shows how Buddhism gives prominence to the cult of tree worship even in non-Buddhist contexts (Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā, 1970, p. 3). In that story, one

person with no children decides to pay homage to a larger tree in the forest by adorning it to get his wife to conceive a child. By doing so, eventually, his wife had a baby. One may think this is ridiculous. However, this non-Buddhistic story remains in the Buddhist commentarial literature as a fruitful conduct. J. H. Philpot, in her book about the worship of trees, says that the cult of tree worship has a long history, probably emanating from the origin of humankind on the planet (Philpot, 1987). If there were no substantial results from this kind of activity, it could have been abandoned by the people. On the one hand, the uninterrupted continuation of this practice throughout history, disregarding modern and scientific views, shows its impact on human lives. On the other hand, such acts have been conducive to people indirectly protecting the environment. More importantly, this kind of practice seems to have conditioned the human mind to be psychologically optimistic, which eventually led to the generation of physical transformations.

The belief in the potentiality of trees to influence women to conceive children is a common belief in many cultures and religions. This idea has been elaborately discussed in the book titled *Primitive Culture* by E. B. Taylor, who was the first professor of anthropology at Oxford University. According to him, even in Germany and Sweden, people have been decorating fine trees, expecting the blessings of trees to help them recover from illnesses (Taylor, 2010). In India, this practice has been beyond particular religious limits. A tree called Asoka was believed to be a symbol of fertility, which was worshipped and offered to obtain the gift of children by young childless women (Maity, 1989). Vaishnavites believe that God Vishnu was born beneath the shade of the Bodhi tree, also known as the Pipal tree.

Therefore, they hope that this tree can make human life safer and happier.

Seneviratne and Swarna Wickramaratne, in their research paper, have mentioned the people's objective of Bodhipūjā as "accumulation of merits for the other-worldly purpose of gaining desirable births." And further, they say, "subordinately, the Bodhi has also been worshipped to gain specific ends in this world" (Seneviratne & Wickramaratne, 1980, p. 734). As we know, Canonical or commentarial teachings in Theravada don't mention such results to be obtained through a Bodhipūjā, and people who have even a general understanding of Buddhism neither intend to accumulate merits for the other-worldly purpose of gaining desirable births nor for gaining specific ends in this world, through Bodhipūjā. It seems that this article, with a premeditated plan, attempts to show that present Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka mislead people for non-prescribed objectives.

According to Theravada Buddhist teachings, Bodhipūjā is a kind of offering to the Bodhi tree to gain blessings and probably protection from ill effects. The Bodhipūjā in Sri Lanka has also been a way of confidence-building. In rural areas, farmers and others in the industrial sector, since the commencement of their businesses, go to temples to get blessings through the Bodhipūjā as a means of confidence-building. Recently, the popularity of the Bodhipūjā has been increasing among children who sit for examinations. Women's engagement in the Bodhipūjā since the beginning of pregnancy and obtaining blessings from Paritta chanting is also a common practice throughout Buddhist history in Sri Lanka. It seems that through all these Buddhist ritualistic practices, people do not expect a better status in the next life, but

most probably, ushering blessings and evading the ill effects of the present life is expected.

As we know, the fundamental objective of Buddhism indeed is to gain emancipation from all kinds of suffering, by eradicating craving. Nevertheless, as Buddhism shows, while treading on the path leading to emancipation, followers can experience multifaceted relief from big and small sufferings. For example, when practicing the three major meritorious deeds: generosity (dāna), morality (sīla), and meditation (bhāvanā), one can enjoy enormous physical and mental freedom while gradually stepping towards the final goal, that is Nibbāna.

When examined carefully, one cannot say the objectives of Buddhist practices would be materialized only after death or in the lives to come. Chanting Paritta, conducting Bodhipūjā, and practicing mindfulness are some of the prominent Buddhist psychological healing methods in which people have a growing interest and trust as successful rituals for reducing stress, anxiety, depression, and many other mind-based complications. Especially, in Sri Lanka, people have been engaging in the Bodhipūjā for many centuries to overcome or mitigate the challenges in their lives.

As we see, in Western countries and the USA, as well as in some other developed countries, people go to psychological counsellors to get treatments for the above-mentioned mind-related problems, but for that, they have to pay consultation fees. At present, there is a misleading view that these Western methods of counselling conducted by modern professionals are only right, but not the traditional methods, which probably originated from religious teaching and were delivered free

of charge. In Sri Lanka, irrespective of social, economic, or educational status, people have faith in the Bodhipūjā, and it has been much more popular in modern days in both rural and urban communities. Forbes, while reporting about the Jayasirimahabodhi at Anuradhapura, says how Tree worship is powerful in recovering from psychological disorders like a post-traumatic situation. Trees play a critical role in food, water, and climate security, but they also play a critical role in our spiritual well-being. Our future depends on them (Forbes, 2017).

Seneviratne and Wickramaratne, in their article on Bodhipūjā, compare this traditional ritual, which was conducted by Panadure Ariyadhamma Thera, sometimes a couple of decades ago, with the ‘Sa’ musical show of the singer Victor Rathnayake. According to them, Sinhalese Buddhist monks have modernized the Bodhipūjā to be fit and attractive to the youth who have been victims of the social and economic restlessness (*asahanaya* in Sinhala) in modern Sri Lanka. It is true that, like every other thing, the settings of the Bodhipūjā have also been updated utilizing modern technology and facilities. But the fact that they are trying to hide or distort is the Sinhalese monks’ genuine and unchanged objective in conducting the Bodhipūjā, as well as the innocent expectations of most Buddhist followers. Except for the rising material cost for this practice, which also depends on the requirements of the devotee, there is no claim of service charge so far by Buddhist monks, compared with non-Buddhist religious services. Following is an excerpt from the article of the above writers who seem to have deliberately disfigured the image of both the Buddhist monk and the Buddhist follower in Sri Lanka:

Also parallel with Ratnayaka's Sa, the Ariyadhamma performance is an occasion for the youthful male population to meet young women who are attracted in large numbers to both performances by virtue of the personal, charismatic attraction of the two performers.' Performances-religious or secular-are traditionally the only institutionalized means available in the Sinhalese culture for the opposite sexes to meet. The youth especially look upon performances as occasions for romance. Going to a movie for the youth means much more than seeing the movie- hence the elaborate cosmetic efforts and the display of clothing that is conspicuous at movies and other performances. It is of little surprise that youthful devotees have abbreviated the name of the Ariyadhamma performance to dub it "Ariyadhamma's Ba" (Ba for "Bodhipūjā") in an obvious allusion to "Victor Ratnayaka's Sa." The youth find in both Bodhipūjā and the Ratnayaka musical performance a focus for experiencing what Turner (1969:94-2031 calls *communitas* (Seneviratne & Wickramaratne, 1980, p. 740).

Even in view of these unfair criticisms, it is praiseworthy that Sri Lankan Buddhist monks continue their engagement in the Bodhipūjā ceremony, making it freely available to people who are affected by the current competitive economic, socio-political, and cultural turmoil. Though the Bodhipūjā is conducted in every Buddhist country, the credit must go to Sri Lankan Buddhist monks for transforming its impact through the setting and melody of recitation to be an effective method of psychotherapy, and also not making the Bodhipūjā a commercial business.

As we see, Sri Lankan people have a great love and respect for Buddhism, for they think Buddhism is their traditional heritage. Therefore, except for very few, they do not like to see Buddhist teachings and practices misused. I think the above writers can witness how Buddhist teachings and practices have been commercialized and misused in the so-called developed countries. Today, there are thousands of mindfulness firms and meditation retreats in those countries exclusively devoted to secular gains. For example, the Buddha prescribed breathing exercise (ānāpānasati) as a technique for mindfulness (satipaṭṭhāna) to achieve a spiritual advancement leading to nibbāna.

Buddhist rituals and practices, including the Bodhipūjā, are exclusively human-friendly and eco-friendly performances. Particularly, in the Bodhipūjā, all prerequisites have to be performed with a serene mind and peaceful physical behaviour. It includes cleaning the ground and surrounding the Bodhi tree, decorating the Bodhi tree with flags and lamps, watering the Bodhi tree, lighting oil lamps, offering flowers, burning joss sticks and other purificatory substances, and finally recitation of verses that make the minds of participants relaxed and peaceful. An event of the Bodhipūjā also provides a much-needed opportunity to express personal or family grievances to the Bodhi tree, by which people can get relief from their unhealthy thoughts. The Bodhipūjā is most probably conducted in the evening when the atmosphere under the Bodhi tree is silent and comfortable. It seems that devotees gain a higher psychological advantage through the Bodhipūjā because it is conducted outside one's own home and under a tree in an open environment.

Conclusion

Buddha's attaining Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree and his gazing at the Bodhi tree continuously for seven days depict Buddha's gratefulness towards the environment, without which sentient beings cannot live, and the planet earth cannot be a better living place. In Buddhism, the Bodhi tree represents the entire ecological system that purifies the air, protects the groundwater, provides shade and food for the world, and balances the temperature. The Buddha made the Bodhi tree sacred by the simple act of gazing at the Bodhi tree, which generated a long-lasting impact in the minds of people, motivating them to respect the environment and declaring the cutting down of trees a sinful deed. Bodhipūjā is one of the most effective psychological methods of treating people who live restless and stressful lives with many expectations and challenges in day-to-day life. Bodhipūjā is also a psychological practice that generates courage and confidence in those who engage faithfully. With the material advancement of the world, the outer setting of the Bodhipūjā ceremony has changed to some extent, but not the fundamental objective and traditional custom.

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