

Sinhala Buddhism

(Abstract)

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The paper will begin with an analysis of the most unique aspect of the Buddha's philosophy, namely, the centrality given to moral philosophy. No philosophical tradition, East or West, has adopted such an approach. We will highlight the place accorded to the good and the peaceful in determining what is true, so well exemplified by the four noble truths. Next we will examine briefly three works of the greatest interpreter of the Buddha's teachings, namely, Nagarjuna (circa. 150-250 A.D.)

His *Mulamadhyamaka-karika*, *Vigrahavyaartani* and *Suhllekha*, will be examined, with more attention given to the last. It is the most sophisticated treatise on moral philosophy based on the conception of five destinies (*pancagati*) and providing a superb summary of the totality of the Buddha's teachings. We will then present our most recent research, namely, an examination of Maitreya's *Lovedasagarava* (circa 13th century A.D.). As Maitreya himself admits, his work was based on an earlier translation in the Anuradhapura period. Comparing this poem with Nagarjuna's work, it can be said without any doubt that original translation was from the Sanskrit of Nagarjuna's *Suhrllekha*. We will also highlight the influence of this work on the understanding of the ordinary Sinhala Buddhists who do not read Pali language.

Finally, we will examine the veracity of the criticism of Sinhala Buddhism as a form of animism by the western trained anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists. It is one thing to assume that in the eyes of the ordinary Buddhists these five destinies are absolute realities and therefore they are following animism. The more enlightened way of looking at them is to assume that these beliefs have an enormous psychological impact in molding the moral character of these innocent people. This is where the Buddha's supreme knowledge of the psychology of the human beings came to play an important role.