

**BUDDHIST APPROACH TO GLOBAL  
LEADERSHIP AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES  
FOR SUSTAINABLE SOCIETIES  
OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES  
IN THE WESTERN AND ORIENTAL WORLD:  
THROUGH BUDDHIST MUSIC  
AND ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN**

---

by Leena Seneheweera\*

---

**ABSTRACT**

*The current study investigates the Buddhist approach to Global leadership and shared responsibilities for sustainable societies of people with disabilities in the experience of Western and Oriental communities. Buddha's teaching has proved the nature of leadership, positive thinking of sharing fundamental responsibilities and the features of sustainable societies in the universe. Those factors could be learned from reading, listening to audible and seeing visual Buddhist art as well. The study selected audible (Buddhist Music) and visual art (Architectural designs; paintings, sculptures, carvings) as the best way to lead and share responsibilities for people with disabilities to construct a sustainable society in the Western and oriental community. According to researcher's working experience as a resource person, the study has selected Autistic and Down' syndrome people from Sri Lanka as well as physical disabilities and selected abled people from Zagreb,*

---

\*. Dr., Department of Fine Arts, Faculty of Arts University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka.

*Croatia in the East Europe. The study intends to show the significant role and capabilities of Buddhist music and architectural designs that aid to realize global leadership within sustainable societies and shared responsibilities for people with disabilities as the purpose of this study. The study has followed qualitative research methods and the primary data were gathered from a few students of two special needs schools from Kandy Sri Lanka and physically disabled students from the faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences, University of Zagreb and able people from the village of Vinkovec, Zagreb, Croatia through practical workshops, education seminars, lecturers and interviews. The study analyses the facts under the experience-based findings. The results prove that applicability of Buddhist music and architectural design have great powers to reach the global leadership, shared responsibilities for sustainable societies of people with disabilities by understanding their self-esteem (atma mana) self-love (atma-sneha) as successful human in the world.*

*The research problem of study proceeds as how to mediate Buddhist music and architectural designs to build up global leadership, and sharing responsibilities for sustainable society of people with disabilities who comes from diverse cultural backgrounds.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The selected topic explains the significant role and capabilities of Buddhist music and architectural designs which are enhanced to realize global leadership within sustainable societies and shared responsibilities for people with disabilities and abled people as well. Art is constructed by cultural identity and humanity each other. There is not a bond with gender, ethnicity, disability, class and status etc. According to researcher's experience, Buddhist music and architectural designs prove as fundamental tools to initiate leadership and sharing responsibilities for non-Buddhist laymen in the Western society. However, the best examples of global leadership, sharing responsibilities and building up a sustainable society in accordance with the Buddhist approach, are depicted in the Buddhist temple visual arts in Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Thailand, China and India. Although, those Asian regions have powerful expressions of Buddhist art and aesthetic path in the temples, the Western world are different from them. However, the religious and other genre of art mutually contributes to teaching and learn the

reality of the actual world and spiritual as well as the emotional atmosphere in the human mind. There are various methods of understanding in Buddhist doctrine through art in between Buddhist followers and non Buddhist followers as well as disabled and non-disabled people. Therefore, study orientates to the people who comes from divers cultural background. The Buddhist art particularly music and architectural designs (including paintings, sculptures and carvings) can be considered as a tool of healing spirituality.

In accordance with the literature survey in 2017 it was very difficult to find a Buddhist temple, monk or Buddhist people in the Zagreb city in Croatia. Therefore, the researcher as a leader who is Buddhist follower, introduced few Buddhist doctrine among disabled and non-disabled people through Buddhist art for sharing positive experience with their healing spirituality. The main target group of the study is disabled individuals from Sri Lanka and Croatia and the non-disabled villagers from Croatia with non-English speaking cultural background. The study analyses the facts under the experience-based findings.

The people with disabilities are susceptible and receptive human in the society. Thus, the responsibility of mainstream community is to rehabilitate them within knowledgeable, thoughtful, emotional as well as success group through leading and shearing responsibilities for inclusion them to the sustainable society. For developing the healing spirituality of a disabled person, proper leadership and shearing responsibilities with each other is fundamental values. Then they will be able to approach the sustainable society with self –esteem, compassion, happiness, well-being, good health and peacefulness.

According to the UN conventions the rules and regulations are legalized for disability rights in the modern world. Under the rules and regulations those conventions and policies highlight their health, education, support system, freedom, safety etc. for inclusion in society<sup>(1)</sup>. The accommodation of ‘*The United Nations*

---

1. (b) Support participation and inclusion in the community and all aspects of society, are voluntary, and are available to persons with disabilities as close as possible to their own

*Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006'* (here after UNCRPD-2006) confirms equal rights, fundamental freedom, enjoyment through non-discrimination for disabled as the basis of the world freedom, justice and peace. (UNCRPD-2006: Preamble (a) &(c)). The convention performs the common judgment of protection, sharing, responsibilities of abled people and needs of disabilities with the world happiness, peacefulness as well as protection for a sustainable society.

But during the Buddha's time there were not those kinds of rules to protect any people in the society. He always led the vulnerable community in the society as a welfare service. In the modern Western and Oriental world, disabled or special needs community in the society has not been considered as abled community and they are also not blended with typical society due to their impairments. Therefore, people have to understand their needs and address to support system and expand the awareness for leading as well as sharing experiences through religion, education and art education or performances. A person who is not suffering from mental impairment she or he could understand the basic level of Buddhist ethics, values, and morals for sharing experience and learning Dhamma. Buddha accepted all kinds of people to sharing experiences with them as a leader to build up a sustainable society through live discussion. In addition, he conveyed his teachings to the live audience through story telling during his Bodhisatta period, and in accordance with the actual situation with positivist tradition through verbal communication. During Buddha's Dhamma teachings the highest people gained *panna*<sup>(2)</sup> and other one could have concentrated practical knowledge of ethics, morals etc. to build their well-being and happiness life. Buddhist music and architectural designs prove the practical knowledge of Dhamma and it could be enhanced for sharing experience and responsibilities with healing spirituality of disabled and average people in the diverse culture.

---

communities, including in rural areas (UNCRPD-2006:Article, 26).

2. *Panna* has a specific application in Buddhism and it does not signify knowledge in general but knowledge which is connected with the highest good of man (Premasiri: 1987, 38).

## 2. THE APPROACH OF BUDDHIST MUSIC FOR DISABLED COMMUNITY TO LEAD AND SHARE EXPERIENCE IN THE WESTERN AND ORIENTAL WORLD

The concept of leadership appears as an activity of guidance or supervision to a group of community or individual through a clear vision. (Encyclopedia of Psychology, second edition 1984, Vol.2). And a leader motivates to achieve his or her clients' common positive goals with sharing experience in accordance with his/her practices of the life. The proper leadership is implemented for the people of physical disabilities' lives to solve their problematic area and for inclusive into the mainstream community. The study identified the practical approach of Sri Lankan Buddhist music particularly devotional songs which come from popular music genre and sound homage<sup>(3)</sup> (*shabda puja*) are the best tools to guide them with proper leadership and share experiences. Those songs express the Buddha's sacred Dhamma including pleasant lyrical composition and sound homage of sacred drums and those are performed in a sacred environment.

According to Buddhist teaching, a leadership as well as leader should practice the code of training (*vinaya*) through showing respect and honor. During Buddha's period all Sangha follows his leader's *sila* (moral conduct) *samadhi* (right concentration) and *panna* (wisdom) as higher value-added activities. Among of those concepts, the *sila* requests right speech, right action and right livelihood. Also, this is divided into four parts; avoidance of false speech, slanderous speech, harsh speech, abstention frivolous or vain talk (Premasiri 2006) Right speech is a very basic activity as well as an easy access for leading and accommodating the inclusion of people with disabilities to the mainstream community. Not only for special needs people, but also this term facilitates to change human's modern life style and solve social conflict for bridging a sustainable society.

The above mention moral conducts have been identified in the Sri Lankan Buddhist songs as well as *Pirith* chanting and sacred

---

3. *Shabda puja* means sacred sounds offering to Buddha. There is an offering beat and using five sacred musical sounds from percussion, winds and brass and family. (Seneviratne 2002).

recitatives. Researcher initiated to orient student with physical disability and abled peers at the Faculty of Education Sciences and Rehabilitation, Zagreb, Croatia and Autistic and Downs' syndrome students from Bluerose school in Kandy Sri Lanka through practical music workshops and lectures. I selected Buddhist songs which has been expressed Buddha's effort and experience for human liberation. Those songs represent the value of compassion and loving-kindness, his welfare service with using pleasant words with each other. The best example could be examined from *Mha-Parinibbana Sutta* in the 16<sup>th</sup> text of the *Digha-Nikaya*<sup>(4)</sup>. There are seven perceptions that leads welfare process such as: impermanence, Egolessness, impurity, wretchedness, relinquishment, dispassion, cessation (*Mha-Parinibbana Sutta*, (trans.) 1974). Welfare service has higher value for upgrading disabled people in the society. Therefore, at the beginning of the workshop, I briefly explained few perceptions which they could understand in simple manner and then start my musical arrangements.

Normally, there is no exact meaning of musical sounds as a meaning of verbal cues. It is globally diagnosed as a concept for healing not only human mind but also animals, plants etc. During the two hour workshop I shared my experience with them through translating the theme of songs and singing marvelous melody. This firstly explains the meaning and flow of the scared words of the song. Then it initiates a discussion with comparing other religious doctrine and the method of those religious activities. The issues mainly depend on their lives with good, happiness, and well-being atmosphere. Additionally, they express a forward integration mood and mindfulness with each other and also build a calm and quite environment in the class room. Then open the flow for question and answer.

According to my observation, I could see their performance without blankness, nothingness with pleasing emotional association in their actual life. Their understating of the sacred words of the song creates visual suggestion and it is helpful to figure out the high value of the Dhamma. The following examples convey

---

4. Bhikkhus, so long as they attend on each other with loving-kindness in deed, word and thought, both openly and in private; so long as in respect what they receive as due offerings (*Mha-Parinibbana Sutta*, (trans.) 1974).

those values. *Budukaruna Desa Them*i (The Lord Buddha) sung by famous female singer Nanda Malini and entitled *himi sanaramara* (the Lord Buddha) sung by female singer Malani Bulathsinhala.

*Himi sanaramara loka sinwankara Llowthuru Budhu saminde  
Ma hada malawena mal dothata gena - Padawadimi nibande  
Himi guna akara loka diwakara- Louthuru Budhu saminde  
Hitha duka wawana budhu bana padayata-Mihira dakimi nibande  
Himidam akara gunamini sagara- Louthuru Budhu saminde  
Hitha suwadayaka Budhu guna giyaka-Rrasaya vindimi nibande*

Meaning of the song in briefly:

*The Lord the Buddha, who is the utmost blessing for men as well as gods is pre-eminent to the world*

*With withering flowers in handfuls in my heart I worship your feet.*

*The Lord who is a mine of virtue is the sun to the world and surpassed as pre-eminent*

*I experience the delicateness, the line of your utterings of doctrine, upon which my sorrowful heart is rest*

*The lord who is the mine of doctrine is the ocean of the gem of virtue surpassed as pre-eminent*

*I sense forever the delighted song in which stored the virtue of Buddhahood*

Throughout the song including the above part depicts the cultural values of Buddha's preaching, taste and the healing spirituality of Buddhist songs as in the second part of the song expresses the healing function of Buddha's preaching and the third part of the song expresses the therapeutic value of listening to Buddhist song. The next step of my workshop was arranging practical musical events. Before the practical session I explained the healing effect of sacred music therapy for to the human mind and the explanation of the theory of Aristotle's reference to catharsis (*Poetics* 1449b 24-28). In its theoretical aspect, it examines briefly, the relationship as well as the value of pleasure to mind. Pleasure is a significant medicine in living a cheerful life. Similarly, listening to sacred songs, recitatives or hymns produce those values for balancing or stabilizing physical and mental relaxation.

According to the existing Sri Lankan sacred music theory, I demonstrate my vocal part with monophonic style of the pitch<sup>(5)</sup>. It was strange for Western audience and they accepted this pitch system, and I developed not only songs but also sacred recitatives and *pirith* chantings with them. The *pirith* chanting is unaccompanied with music and there is no fixed time value but it has vocal unity and audible healing of its verbal sounds. The monophonic pitch of *pirith chanting* inquired how slowly create peaceful environment for mental and physical relaxation. However, the sense of sacred song slowly absorb to the human mind<sup>(6)</sup> and they could listen to the song with meaningful lyrics and those are demonstrated with mindfulness. Moreover, the nature of range in the pitch of Sri Lankan Buddhist song is not so broad and most of songs are created at middle octave. The middle octave mediates to ensure balance in our mind. It is not a low or high range of musical sounds therefore, I always select the song which is created by middle octave. According to the Buddhist teachings the middle path is helpful to arrange our life style. Its application is benefited for not only differently-abled people but also abled individuals.

Additionally, listeners express their emotions such as love, joy, happiness, peace and rational judgment through sharing emotions with each other. This situation creates a practical realization of an atmosphere love and kindness. This bridges the gap between vulnerable people and abled people of the society. At the end of the workshop all are realized basic morals of Buddhist teachings and its healing process as well as the mediation of Buddhist song for sharing and mutual understanding between Buddhist and non-Buddhist people in the world.

I applied those songs for Sri Lankan Autistic and Downs 'syndrome students through practical sessions per a week. Although they couldn't understand the lyrics of the song they quietly listen to the melody. Also, Sinhala words are familiar with them and few students could understand the meaning of lyrics. When they hear

---

5. Western style is polyphonic and oriental style is monophonic.

6. "The sense of tone was probably acquired slowly by man, and savages to-day are musically still in the rhythmic stage, while in the East music has developed on rhythmic rather than tonal lines (Halliday F.E. 1946, 122).

the word of Buddha in a song they express their happiness mood with sitting on their heels and showing patience. I share with them the experience about the Buddhist morals by singing and chanting or reciting verses in our daily life. Most of the students like to listen to Buddhist songs because of its slow or middle beat and tempo. For them, I accompanied our inherited sacred drums. These healing sounds produce a sacred and peaceful environment. They could memorize Buddhist songs rather than romantic or songs of children. Therefore, I led them to improve their memory through this kind of Buddhist approach. They sing with me and repeat words several times and learn basic Buddhist ethics through the songs. This is the basic method which I used to share experience with them through Buddhist teaching.

### 3. ENHANCEMENT OF BUDDHIST ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNS FOR DISABLED AND ABLED COMMUNITY TO BRIDGE SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY IN THE WESTERN AND ORIENTAL WORLD

The basic concepts of sustainable society maintain socially, economically, healthy and environmentally successful background of human. Those concepts could be identified as a uniform arrangement of the nature. Among of them the environment which can be natural and man-made impacts on developing the spirituality of the human mind. Furthermore, the material environment of human makes religious and aesthetic sense in accordance with the location, constructed structure, and cultural values<sup>(7)</sup>. Hence, architecture has been defined as a significance medium to fulfill religious and aesthetic sense rather than the other material environment and art forms. Among of them, the function of Buddhist architecture is examined to realize of Buddhist teachings, veneration of human and nature, orientation of visual rhythm, uniqueness and sense of site. Therefore, I presented visuals of Buddhist architectural designs such as painting, sculpture and carvings as well as location of Buddhist temples in hills, mountains, forests, rocks with green floral beauty to enhance fundamental Buddhist ethics and morals

---

7. The practice of architecture emphasizes special relationship, orientation the support of activities to be carried out within a designed environment, and the arrangement and visual rhythm of structural elements, as supposed to the design of structural systems themselves (Britannica Ready Reference Encyclopedia, Vol.1, 2005:126).

for non -Buddhist community in the West. The modern world it is made completely of different atmosphere of high-rise building blocks as human residence environment in the West and East.

But the simple architectural designs in Buddhist temples particularly the temple paintings give a lesson on how to construct buildings with natural resources and the impact of its benefit for health and a peaceful mood to demonstrate sustainable society. Also, those images contribute in understanding and developing human’s religious knowledge, thought and emotion. Most of temple paintings represent Buddha’s counselling services for physical and mental disabled as well as typical community. Few examples depict on the temple walls; enlightenment process, seven weeks after the enlightenment (*sathsathiya*) and *jathaka stories* (examples of previous life) in the *Bodhisatta* period. Selected images from Samawardhanarama temple, Kandy and those paintings were composed in 2012.



*Counselling service for patachara Samawardhanarama temple, Kandy*



*Understanding of human emotion and lead them Samawardhanarama temple, Kandy*

Those stories depict human needs and social function as well as the harmonious Buddhist society. In addition, some Paintings and carvings depict Buddha’s residence in natural environment; rocks, trees. These locations produce natural water, air shadows, cold weather as well as exchange the ideas with animals, birds, flowers and rivers etc. It is remind this kind of environment nurtures human health and mindfulness. After the enlightenment Buddha spent seven weeks in different locations with various postures for giving examples to the Bikkhu and the public community<sup>(8)</sup>. In

8. Buddha spent seven weeks with helping from human as well as natural environment including snake to repay his achievement of Buddhahood

addition, there are some painting compositions the Buddha and his followers' activities of daily life with expressing healthy, peaceful and mindfulness atmosphere from wall paintings. I show the example of the composition of food gathering culture of Buddha and his follower Bhikkhus. According to the feedback from the audience, it was a new experience for them about the sharing food gathering culture and values of alms giving and simple life pattern of human behavior.



*Using natural resources for health  
Samawardhanarama temple, Kandy*



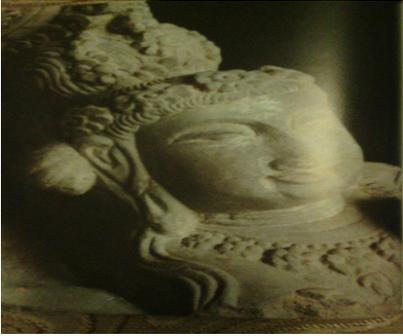
*Food gathering culture  
Samawardhanarama temple, Kandy*

However, Dhamma could be explained through Buddhist sculptural images. The best are examples of Buddha statues in the temple with various hand gestures and postures of sitting, standing and lying. The hand gestures depicted the concentration of the mind and facial expressions express mindfulness. During my presentation, I confirmed that the audience preferred white color Buddha statues and they love it because they think white color is the symbol of purification. However, my observations confirmed the color of statues, pagodas, wooden carvings and temple painting depicts Buddhist architectonic features and its three dimensional form such as shading, tone and intensity of statues are healed of spirituality in mind. Furthermore, the preparation to worship of the Buddha, devotees wear white colored cloths when they visit the temple. They also offer flowers, water, and fragrant medicinal plants in front of the Buddha statue to purify their mind as a habit in daily life. This is not a spiritual practice but an act done in psychological pursuits. These functions of sensory perception mediate to gather knowledge, thought and emotion. According to the Buddhism the way of our actual life is represented from its beliefs and it is

beneficial to grow our mental disposition with good behavior since it impacts to build a sustainable society.

All activities link with therapeutic processes such as color, smell, cloths, plants and sounds, shapes, form, pattern and material etc. In the feedback of the audience they mentioned these kinds of habits should be improved by elders in a family at home and children will follow them particularly this is a good example for physical and mental impairment children. Although this is a very basic activity it is a useful lesson for the children in a family. If children grow under this circumstance, and they initiate good conduct from their families and become a mature and sensible person in society. Then the person will be able to improve his or her moral conduct from the family and it can be confirmed that it is a fundamental level to build a sustainable society. Because a person create his own reality on the basis of insights.

As the next step, I selected to show mythical images from Buddhist temples in Sri Lanka and Vietnam to the audience to determined the equality and inclusion in the community to sustain the society. Moreover, some animal figures and mythical images which are a combination of human and animal or bird together represent symbols of *metta*, *karuna*, *muditha*, *upekkha*. The concept of mythical images such as divine or demoniac is not new or strange for Western audience because mythical figures are very famous concept like goddess of phoenix appear in Western churches. Mermaid (*kinnera*) female stoned figures of musician at Phat Tich pagoda in Vietnam and wooden dancing figures at Padeniya, temple Sri Lanka are represented Buddhist artistic and aesthetic sense pleasing human with cognition. The mermaids at Paht Tich pagoda are holding and playing sacred musical instruments such as; drums, Pipa, cymbals, horn, etc. Their smiling face, facial expressions and music gesture express peaceful, prosperous and well-being life. Furthermore, those images present another lesson in between universal creation of human and animal.



*Smiling face from the image of mermaid  
stone pillar at path Tich pagoda, Vietnam*



*Dancing mermaid from wooden pillar  
Padeniya temple Sri Lanka*

I discussed this concept with comparing between Buddhist art and the art of Catholic churches through visual images. Furthermore, I understood the abled and physical disabled people enjoyed with its religious mimetic representations. During my presentation, I saw their smiling faces and they expressed their happiness forgetting their barriers in life due to the images that I presented these examples through my presentation. There were selected examples in my presentation; the divine assembly in the temple paintings in Sri Lanka and Dunhuan cave art in China and demoniac composition of the Buddha defeating evils (*mara parajaya*). Moreover, significant architectural designs of floral decoration of wooden and stoned carvings, painting on ceiling and walls, were always used to decorate in the background of the composition. This creative process remind the impact of long-term ecological balance in the human and the nature for developing sustainable society.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

To sum up with my argument, the study of Buddhist music and architectural designs which have mediated to build up global leadership and sharing responsibilities for sustainable society of community including disabled people. The results prove that the Asian audible and visual art successfully respond to healing and mutually understanding not only basic Buddhist doctrine but also sophisticated references of Dhamma by all community to

develop unsustainable ways in the society. Buddhist approach in art represent main activity to introduce the elements of sustainable society such as sharing responsibilities and experiences to the Western community including disabled as well as abled people.

\*\*\*

## References

- Bandaranayake, S. (1974). *Sinhalese Monastic Architecture: The Viharas of Anuradhapura*, Netherland.
- Britannica Ready Reference Encyclopedia*, (2005). Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc: New Delhi.
- Encyclopedia of Psychology(1984). Second edition Vol.2. New York: John Wiley & sons
- Halliday, F.E. (1946). *Five Arts*. Riverside Press: London.
- Last Days of the Buddha. (1974). The Maha Parinibbana Sutta of the Pali Canon. Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Premasiri, P.D. (2006). Introduction of Ethics in Buddhism. *Studies in Buddhist Philosophy and Religion. Collected papers of Professor Premasiri*. Homagama: Karunaratne & Sons Ltd.
- Premasiri, P.D. (1987). Early Buddhist Conception of ethical knowledge- A philosophical analysis. *Buddhist Philosophy and culture, essays in honour of N.A. Jayawickrama*.(eds.) David J. Kalupahana & W.G. Weeraratne. 37-70. Kelaniya: Vidyalandara press.
- Seneviratne, A. (2002). *Dalada Maligawa: The Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic in Kandy, Sri Lanka*. Nugegoda: Piyasiru Printing Systems.
- Tien, T.D. (2014). *Phat Tich Buddhist Heritage Site*, Vietnam:
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. (2006). <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/rights/convtexte.htm>
- How to mediate read Buddhist philosophy and culture book page 133.

