poetic sentiment. His description of the journey to Kapilavatthu from Rāgāgaha (vv. 347-352) is beautiful and unique for which our poet should occupy a place in the foremost rank of poets. His description of the beauty and charms of Māyā (vv. 77-78) and Yasodharā (vv. 172 and 395) is delicate and graceful. His description of the overall change in the world immediately after the birth of Siddhattha (vv. 98-116), and his description of Siddhattha’s conflict with Mara under the Bodhi-tree (vv. 242-245)—all are striking, and exemplify the poet’s real poetic intellect.

But what is remarkable about the style of the Jina-carita is that in most cases it is coarse and light while at the same time elegant and brilliant. The verses are constructed artificially but we seldom find any difficult or irregular constructions. Besides, the verses are embellished with choice words and striking figures of speech. How excellent and appropriate appears that simile in which Sumedha is compared to a royal elephant as an elephant flees from a forest blazing with fire, Sumedha also departed from his house (blazing with passions, envy, delusion and the like—v. 21); or in which the newborn child Siddhattha is compared to a golden goose—Siddhattha came forth from the womb of his mother like a golden goose descending from a lotus (v. 88); or in which a crowd of deer (or animals) with lions is compared to that of parents with children (v. 100); or in which Yasodharā is compared to a moon which is aspired to by all bee-like eyes (v. 172); or in which the Buddha’s journey is compared to that of the moon—like a pure full moon surrounded by stars, the Buddha went there and there being accompanied by his brilliant disciples (vv. 326, 336-337).

In conclusion, we quote Charles Duroiselle’s comment: “The charm of the Jina-carita lies in its lighter style; in the author’s choice of graceful and sometimes forcible images; in the art of his descriptions, the richness and, in some passages, the delicacy of his expressions; qualities which go to make its reading of heavy didactic poetry. But for its some lengthy and bombastic compounded words and some proxy expressions, the Jina-carita could have occupied a place in the foremost rank of the Indian kāygas.”

THE LOTUS AS A SYMBOL IN THE PALI TRADITION

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From Hindu mythology, one learns that from the golden lotus on Visnu’s forehead appeared the goddess Sri. In another episode, while reclining on the serpent Ananta a lotus stalk arose from Visnu’s navel which gave birth to the god Brahma. In sculpture Visnu is often depicted holding a lotus-flower in one of his four hands. In post-Vedic literature Surya, the sun god, is represented as standing on a red lotus flower. Besides its importance in Hindu religion, the lotus-flower plays a prominent role in Mahāyāna Buddhist literature and art; it is especially associated with the Bodhisattva. The purpose of this paper is to examine the symbol of the lotus in the earlier Pali Buddhist tradition. It will be demonstrated that much of the later symbolic significance of the lotus in Mahāyāna Buddhism is prefigured in the Pali tradition.

The lotus is not just any lovely product of nature; it possesses a mysterious power. If used in conjunction with medicines, the lotus can cure illness. It is reported that it helped cure the fever of Sāriputta, an important early disciple of the Buddha. Thus from an early period in the Buddhist tradition the lotus had a magical quality.

The lotus is a plant which grows upward from the bottom of a lake or pond and slowly ascends to the surface. Thus the lotus is born in the water, it comes to full maturity in the water, eventually rises to the surface and stands unpolluted by the water. As such, it serves as a symbol of the Tathāgata (the one thus come), who is born and matures in the world, passes beyond the world, and eventually emerges untainted by the world. In this sense, the lotus is not only a symbol of the Tathāgata but also of upward action, spiritual growth and attainment, and detachment from the world.

The spiritual development of human beings is represented by the lotus. There are beings with a little or much dust in their eyes. Others possess acute or dull faculties. In other words, some individuals are more enlightened than others. Just as some lotus-flowers thrive while immersed in water, others reach the surface of the water, and some rise undefined out of the water.5

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3. Ibid., 214.

17. Very few contracted forms like pījāvī (v. 326) has been used for the sake of metre.
18. Jina-carita (ed. and translated by Charles Duroiselle), Introduction, p. ii,
At times, the lotus beneath the water is symbolic of a bhikkhu in the third state of trance. Just as the lotus flourishes beneath the water and is saturated by cool water, a monk in the third trance state is saturated with joy.6 The bhikkhu in this state is serene and self-possessed.

In the Sānghī Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya,7 four types of recluse are enumerated: the unshaken recluse; the blue lotus recluse; the white lotus recluse; and the exquisite recluse. I want to concentrate on the significance of the blue and white lotus recluses.

The blue lotus recluse is equivalent to a once-returner (sakadāgāmin):

Herein a monk, by utterly wearing out three fetters and by weakening lust, anger and delusion, is a once-returner. Coming back just once more to this world he makes an end of III.8

The blue lotus recluse is assured of no bad rebirths and enlightenment within one more lifetime. He is free of the three fetters (saṅyojana): delusions of self; doubts about the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha; trust in the efficacy of rituals and good works.9 If one places the colour blue within the Indian cultural context, one discovers that since indigo-blue is so durable, blue is the colour of faithfulness.10 Furthermore, the blue lotus recluse contemplates the rise and fall of the five-grasping groups (upādānakkhanda), but he does not experience the eight deliverances (vinākkhus).11

The white lotus recluse is equal to the degree of sanctification represented by a non-returner (anāgāmin):

Herein a monk, by utterly wearing out the five fetters which cause rebirth here, is appallingly born, destined there to pass utterly away, of a nature not to return from that world.12

The non-returner destroys the initial three fetters plus sensuality and ill-will.13 The white lotus recluse is assured of enlightenment during his current lifetime. He will be reborn in another world and never return to the present cycle of suffering.14 Like the blue lotus recluse, he contemplates the rise and fall of the five-grasping groups, but he goes beyond the level of spiritual attainment of the blue lotus recluse by personally experiencing the eight deliverances.15

In many world religions, white is the colour of purity. The lotus is rooted and grows in the slimy mud at the bottom of a pond. As it moves upward and blossoms forth, the white lotus is unaffected by the mud of the earth. Likewise, the successful monk emerges clean and purified of the world’s uncleanness.

The lotus is a symbol of spiritual progress and enlightenment. It grows in the maternal, primeval, procreative waters. The waters represent the pre-formal potentiality for spiritual enlightenment. It is the unformed from which a new form, new being or new life can emerge. Within the water, the lotus represents its generative organ; it is the energy and force inherent in the waters.16 The waters—the symbol of life-gives new life; the lotus is nourished by the waters, but it eventually rises above the waters and symbolically transcends them. Not a drop of water can cling to the leaves of the lotus which becomes totally detached like the enlightened saint. The gradual rising of the lotus is an act of creation; the emerging of a new being.

The significance of the lotus as a pre-eminent symbol in Mahāyāna Buddhism is prefigured in the Pali tradition. In other words, the seeds of its later importance are rooted in the Pali tradition and in early Hinduism. For example, a symbol of the atman is the lotus of the heart.20 For one who knows the truth, evil action does not adhere to him, just as water does not cling to the leaf of a lotus-flower.21 And from its association with the Hindu goddesses, the lotus connotes the supramundane character of the enlightened ones of the Mahāyāna tradition.22 The unfolding of the lotus is symbolic of the dawn of enlightenment and the victory over ignorance. It represents the wisdom of Nibbāna, the aspiring monk, and the various levels of human existence.

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6. Middle Length Sayings, I, 277; 2. 16; 3. 93.
9. Dialogues of the Buddha, I, 156.
12. Ibid., 2.88; 2.89.
13. Dialogues of the Buddha, I, 156.
15. The Book of the Gradual Sayings, 2.90; 2.89.
17. Maitri Upaniṣad, 6.2; Chāndogya Upaniṣad, 8.1.1.