

Ceylon Art

(Academic Script)

CEYLON ART

Sri Lanka is a green pear shaped Tropical Island in the Indian Ocean; it is located on the ancient silk route. It facilitated to build a trade relationship between east and west countries, the western influence made Ceylon cosmopolitan in nature.

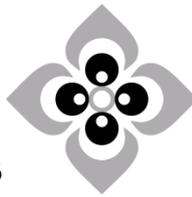
The subject expert is Ms. Sana Afreen who is working as TGT Drawing in Delhi Administration and I am sakshi mandwal

INTRODUCTION

According to the inscriptions of an Indian Maurya Emperor probably Asoka, in the 3rd century B.C., Sri Lanka was referred to as Tambapani. Ancient Greeks called it Taprobana, it came from the actual word Tambapani. Arabs called it as Sarandib, which originated from the word serendipity. The Portuguese named it as Ceilao, when they arrived in the island in 1505, later it was translated into English by British as Ceylon during their rule. Sri Lanka achieved independence from the British and known as the Dominion of Ceylon in 1948.

The Sinhalese called it Sri Lanka. Indian Tamil origin people call it Lankai. Sinhalese is one of the official and national languages of Sri Lanka. Sinhalese has its own writing system, the Sinhalese alphabet, which is one of the Brahmic scripts, a descendant of the ancient Indian Brahmi script.

We all know that Ramayana provides details of Lanka that was a creation of divine sculptor Vishwakarma. He created it for Kubera, known as the God of Wealth. In the mythological texts we learnt that Ravana, who was the step brother of Kubera built a flying machine named Dandu Monara. It is said that famous city of Wariyapola served as Ravan's airport.



In an inscription of the 4th century Gupta Emperor Samudragupta, Sri Lanka is referred to as Sainhalaka, the Land of the Sinhalas. Sri Lanka's written history exceeds 2550 years, which encompasses a vast prospect of painting, sculpture, literature architecture and much more.

The Sri Lankan texts such as Mahavamsa, which was written in the 6th century AD, suggests that painting and sculpture held a significant position in the art scenario of ancient Sri Lanka. These texts reveal information about the enormous carvings and paintings in the relic chambers of Buddhist stupa and monasteries, such as at the Loha Prasada monastic residence in the ancient city of Anuradhapura.

The blend of Indian and Sri Lankan elements makes the art of Sri Lanka distinct in character. It is obvious that Indian elements were deep rooted in Sri Lankan art; it can be noticed in Buddha images of Anuradhapura and in the bronze sculptures of Hindu gods and goddesses made in the Kingdom of Polonnaruwa from the 11th to 13th centuries.

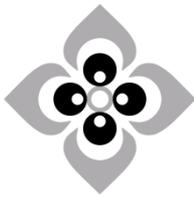
Sri Lanka was a kingdom that successfully ruled the island from 2nd century BC to 19th century AD. Like all king dominated kingdoms, king holds the highest position and was most respected. Due to this tradition the stylistic aspect of art practices lacked significance and everything else was dominated by king's presence and charisma. But instead of this ignorance ancient Sri Lankan arts of painting and sculpture grew enormously. This tempera painting in the background ceiling, depict scenes from Buddha's life, from the dream of Mahamaya to temptation by the demon Mara.

The caves and temples in Sri Lanka display amazing paintings. The tooth relic in Kandy, religious paintings of temples in Dambulla, the cave paintings and frescoes discovered at Sigiriya is of great importance. The influence of local and foreign culture is very visible in art of Sri Lanka.

The Lion symbol is surrounded by many myths and hearsays. Historians notify that the lion was considered a symbol of hope and freedom; some says that lion represented the power and strength of the king.

The historical phases of the Sri Lanka are divided into various periods.

1. Early Historical period: 250BC – 500AD, (Anuradhapura Period)
2. Middle Historical period: 500AD – 1250AD (Polonnaruwa Period)
3. Late Historical Periods: 1250AD –1800AD



ANURADHAPURA

The Anuradhapura kingdom signifies the art style of the early historical period of Sri Lanka. It was established in the 380 BCE by King Pandukabhaya and Anuradhapura served as the capital city of Sri Lanka for the next 1400 years.

Anuradhapura is known for its sculptures and frescos; most famous is the gigantic Avukana Buddha.

Avukana Buddha is 11.36 meters tall statue and tallest Buddha in Sri Lanka, which portrays the Asisa Mudra or in a “posture of blessing”. It is a round sculpture carved out of a rock which is connected at the back to the rock boulder.

The delicacy of carving is evident of high artistic skills, an aura of spirituality and religious supremacy is prominent in the facial features, which also creates an expression of serenity and calmness. The alignment is so perfect that the nose and toes fall in a same vertical line. The robe and its draping, fall of pleats are neatly carved, which is draped on the left shoulder in single grooves, bring to our mind the expertise and artistic psyche of an unknown sculptor, who had carved this giant Buddha. Buddha stands firm on another slab of stone carved as a double petal lotus flower called Padmasana.

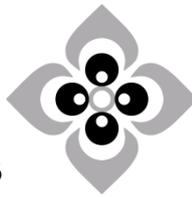
This is a skillful carving of a Vamana in a stone staircase from Anuradhapura Sacred City, Sri Lanka.

Historians indicate obvious presence of Indian influences on Sri Lankan art. The Gandhara and Amravati schools had significant impact on the iconography of Sri Lankan paintings and sculptures.

SIGIRIYA

King Kashyapa I, ruled between 477 – 495 AD. He built an amazing fortress on an unimaginable place, which became a popular tourist destination in the contemporary Sri Lanka. Sigiriya is a fortress built on the peak of a 180 meter high granite rock plateau, which was formed from magma of an extinct volcano. It is surrounded by a green forest, which enable a beautiful natural view from all four sides of this so called “Fortress in the Sky”.

A series of galleries and staircases emerge from the mouth of a gigantic lion, which is constructed bricks and plaster. This lion mouth provides access to the fortress. Before King Kashyapa I, the rock was used as a monastery to Buddhist priests and visitors.



The huge entrance in the shape of lions feet have survived up to today, but the upper body parts are in a ruined situation. Buddha was Sakya Simha, means lion of the Sakya Clan, and the words he spoke were true and as powerful as lion's roar. So, the presence of Buddha in their royal architectural marvels is understandable.

The beautiful wall frescos are remarkable for its portrayal of royal princesses and maids. It is controversial whether the portraits are of royal personalities, or of apsaras or of common females. But it is clear that all figures follow a certain divinity, religious and secular iconography.

Bell's interpretation ended with the following words:

"Each figure is imbued with divergent traits in face, form, pose and dress, which would seem to stamp it as an individual likeness"

Though Bell did not suggest any reason for the paintings, Paranavitana put it succinctly when he stated:

"If we accept Mr. Bell's opinion, we are to believe that King Kassapa used the rock cavity as a portrait gallery of the queens and princesses of his court".

Further on, Paranavitana stated:

"The figures in Sigiriya paintings are thus seen to have served an essentially decorative purpose".

Eighteen frescos are found in a good condition. They survived because of painted in the sheltered gallery away from the sun. Their colors are still glowing and bright.

Cobra Hood Caves

The cobra hood caves refer to the shape of a rock which resembles a fully opened cobra's hood. This rock cave represents several beautifully painted frescos which depicts nude females. They are either Kassapa's wives and concubines or divine figures of goddesses or apsaras. Many of these figures are shown performing religious rituals.

These unique old paintings are celebrating female beauty and gives incredible historical knowledge of socio-political-religious setting of ancient Ceylon.

Sigiriya is also noted for the mirror wall, which has now lost its shine. The mirror wall reflected the images painted on the facing wall. The mirror wall was highly polished with a white plastered ground. It is said that the wall was so highly polished that it could produce the reflections.



Middle Period

POLONNARUWA

The ruins of Polonnaruwa contain hundreds of ancient structures, temples, palaces, tombs and statues.

In 993 AD, the Chola Emperor Rajaraja I, sacked the city of Anuradhapura, forcing its ruler Mahinda V, to flee. This fall of Anuradhapura kingdom marked the beginning of medieval period of Sri Lankan art. The new administrative capital was Polonnaruwa, from 11th century to the end of 13th century.

The early history of Polonnaruwa, before it became the capital, is a story of reservoirs. Polonnaruwa is a hub of Buddhist shrines, stupas, chapter houses, hospital and ponds.

Shiva Devale is a religious architecture, which dates back to the early Chola rule in Sri Lanka. This is the oldest shrine in Polonnaruwa which belong to Hinduism. Emperor Rajaraja I ruled between 985-1014 AD, an inscription in the shrine describes it as a memorial to one of his queens. Rajaraja built enormous architectural marvels one of his most famous is the Brihadeswara Temple in Thanjavur, India. Rajaraja I conquered Anuradhapura and shifted his capital to Polonnaruwa.

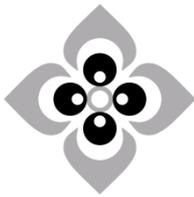
Lankatilaka shrine was built by Parakramabahu I, has a number of marvelous artistic examples of that era. The architectural relief and stucco covered walls make this huge scale building more consequential. Archaeologists had found indications of paintings also but they had withered with time.

This shrine contains a 14 meter tall colossal standing Buddha. This weather beaten sculpture is in a ruined condition and now headless. Standing in a narrow space, it is evident that there would have been a roof over it to offer the worshipper a sacred feeling. This statue is gigantic physically and mentally it must have been inducing the feeling of fear, frightfulness, reverence and respect in worshipper's mind.

Some historians compare this divine figure to the western Athena Parthenos.

This beautiful relief carving of a Nagini shows her with female attendants. Nagini figures are popular in Sri Lankan architectural carvings; they often appear on the guard stones or entrances of ancient religious buildings.

Though, this is the only one that is found on a balustrade in Lankatilaka.



Many of the exterior walls of religious buildings or gedige in Sri Lanka are adorned with intricate relief carvings. The gedige of Lankatilaka displays immensely beautiful relief carvings on its exterior wall. Visitors wonder at the beauty of these carvings and how they may have appeared when they were freshly created.

This tall and slender recessed window in Lankatilaka splits vertically by a skillfully decorated square pillar. The decorative carvings continue around the frame and lintel, and the window is crowned by a recessed double arch. The windows surprisingly look like the Gothic windows of European cathedrals; they designed them vertically high to make the already tall building seem even taller.

THUPARAMA IMAGE HOUSE

The Thuparama Image House is known for its semi cylindrical roof structure, which is completely made of brick. The more amazing thing is that it has survived more than 900 years.

Historians could not authenticate the original name of this house that is why its owner is also unknown. It is thought that this was built by a minister of King Parakramabahu (1153-1186) called Mahinda to house the tooth relic. Another belief is that this was built by king Vijayabahu I (1070-1110).

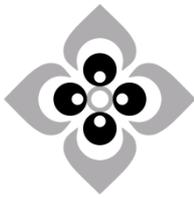
A large seated Buddha, which was kept behind the massive walls of this building, is no longer here, it may have ruined with time. The shielding walls of this building are 7 feet thick. It is known from certain hearsays that the eyes of this Buddha were embedded with precious stones, sunlight would reflect on these stones to light up the image house.

The identification of this statue is controversial; some historians recognize it as King Prakarma, who had commissioned this statue, while some historians strongly indicate that it represents a sage, probably Pulasti, after whom the city was named as Pulastipura.

The 3.4 meter high statue of a bearded sage carved out of a rock mass. The skillfully carved statue stands in a 'tribhanga' posture, having a swelling stomach full of 'Prana', his upper torso is bared. He is wearing a sheer lower garment knotted below the navel.

He holds a palm leaf book in his hands and outstretched arms, which designate him as a sage or a wise man.

The palace of Parakramabahu is in ruined conditions, but displays an example of immense power and wealth of the king. The architectural



remains suggest that it was extremely large, which consisted of thousand rooms.

The Council Chamber or Audience Hall, was built during the time of Parakramabahu, was a multistoried building. The multi-layered base of the building is still intact that suggests the presence of roofs attached to the columns that would have held them.

The council chamber also had some beautiful relief carvings of elephants, lions and dwarfs.

This is an inscribed piece of lion, it was surely a part of the King's Throne, however it is not known exactly what the throne looked like or how this piece fit into it.

This Vatadage Buddha is kept in center of the shrine. He sits in a meditation pose with relatively dour expression on his face. The four Buddha statues are symmetrically arranged each in four cardinal directions at four entrances of Vatadage.

All the entrances have decorative relief carvings on its stairs and guard stones sculpted in round. Three circles of pillars used to support the roof, only the outer one is remaining.

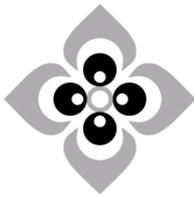
Stone screens were decorated with the motif of four petal flowers and stood between each of these pillars.

The Eastern Entrance is both the most complete and the most beautiful of the four cardinal entrances to Polonnaruwa's Vatadage. Behind the exquisite guard stones, makaras disgorge their impossibly thick and curled tongues upon the balustrade.

This guard stone is one of the most beautiful examples of Nagaraja compositions in Polonnaruwa.

The seven hooded Nagaraja is delightfully posing with a floral stem in his right hand and a pot of plenty and prosperity in his left hand. Two ganas or attendants are posing pleasingly at the bottom of this carved composition. With this Nagaraja figure the Polonnaruwa sculptors bring curves and flexible movements in the anatomy of figural portrayal, which were tranquil and still in earlier representations.

The rises of each stair were decoratively carved with dancing dwarfs and flanking on both sides of the flights are a pair of Makras mythical dragon



disgorging their exaggerated thick and curled tongue upon balustrade behind the guard stones.

The elaborated moonstones that describe the cycle of Samsara in Buddhism, represent the journey for an ultimate escape from sufferings. The famous moonstones from the site of Vatadage, displays intricate carvings divided into bands of patterns. The outer band represents hamsas, the middle band shows elephants and the inner band of the moonstone depicts finely carved horses in a symmetrical and repetitive pattern. While in the moonstones of Anuradhapura we see the addition of lions and bulls which is omitted in the moonstones of Polonnaruwa.

The outer wall surfaces were decorated with friezes of lions and dwarfs with abstract lotus designs on the tops. A melee of decorations turns up to be an interesting art piece, gorgeous!.

Many parts of wall surface were carved with Lions which were the national symbol of Sinhalese Kingdom.

HATADAGE

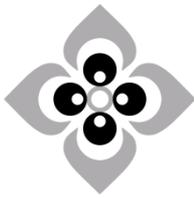
The Hatadage building was built adjacent to Vatadage. An inscription at the entrance reads that the Hatadage was built by King Nissankamalla during 1187-1196. Many inscriptions depicting his glorious deeds are found from this period. It was originally constructed into two-storey, it was built as a sacred center to enshrine the tooth relic and alms bowl of Buddha. Only one storey remains today at this sacred site.

An almost ruined frieze on the wall of the sacred center depicts the Bharat Natyam classical dance form which originally belongs to South India. It is said to be an oldest version of this classical dance form.

There are three Buddha erected inside Hatadage, the two are in a ruined condition only the standing one is in a better condition. This statue is standing straight with calm and relaxed expressions on his face.

GAL VIHARA

Gal Vihara is acknowledged for its gigantic colossal Buddha statues, which dates back to the 11 century. There are four Buddha statues, which were originally protected by secluded enclosures. The specialty of these Buddhas is that they were carved out of single rock stone. These Buddha display a great serenity yet humanistic expressions, and considered as the best carved sculptures in Sri Lankan art up to this era. The standing Buddha



represents Ananda and the reclining one represents Buddha in Parinirvana posture.

This sitting Buddha from Gal Vihara is one of the four statues representing various positions of Buddha. Here the Buddha sits in a meditation, with his eyes closed, legs are folded, and both hands are positioned on his lap in a dhyana mudra and his expressions undoubtedly showing that he is in an intangible world. His head is visibly oval and sensitively carved, seems to be aloof and lost in another world. Behind his torso is a shallow carved niche framed by a 'makara torana'. The base of his lotus throne is decorated with alternating 'trisulas' and lions.

This gigantic Buddha stands on a lotus throne, and is one among the four statues, which is 7 meter tall. It is erected second from the right, historians identify this sculpture as Ananda but some historians have given contradictory opinions about this Buddha that he is in the second week after his enlightenment. His subtle bend at the waist, that is consistent with his turned-out left foot, is admirable.

Reclining Buddha displays the serenity and peace, probably representing Parinirvana. This is the rightmost figure among the four Gal Vihara Buddhas. The natural striations or linear texture of stone form distinctive effect and creates more drama in folds of drapery.

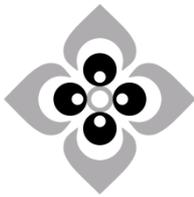
Tivanka Image House

The name 'Tivanka' or some historians pronounce it as 'Thivanka', is derived from the 'tribhanga' posture of a standing Buddhist sculpture on this square shaped building.

This minor but significant, figure represents Buddha in a tribhanga framed by architectural design of pillars. This is one of the most photographed images in Tivanka.

Tivanka Image House is located north of Gal Vihara, it is known for its paintings created in 12th century. These paintings appear like Indian Buddhist Jataka paintings, the Indian influence at this time period was not surprising in Sri Lankan art. In the dark interiors of this gedge, the natural light falls on the paintings that make them interesting and engaging for the viewers.

A Bodhisattva of beautiful expression is imaged here, in the dim light of the interior.



This 12th century architectural relief is one of many enormous carvings on the exteriors of Polonnaruwa structures. It is faded with the time, but would have looked beautiful when it was new.

This architectural relief shows a large seated Buddha at the center on the lower segment of carving. Upper sections display a string of dancing dwarfs and some animals loom down with frightful expressions. The upper most section displays a chain of plumped hamsas.

These skillfully stuccoed dwarfs exhibit delightful and joyous expressions in dancing postures. One of the notorious dwarfs shows his butt-cheeks to the viewers, while the rest are shown individually with different enchanting expressions.

THE LATE HISTORICAL PERIOD

The late historical period dates back to the 1250 AD- 1800 AD. Sri Lankan art went through a stylistic transformation during this era, which resulted in a newly formed approach of painting and sculpture. The classical naturalism gradually transformed into a highly stylistic and exaggerated art form, which was equally expressive and vibrant in character as were art of the classical era.

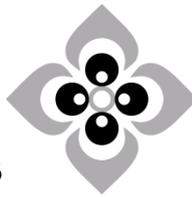
In the 13th century AD, Sri Lanka witnessed political instability, for another 400 years the administrative capitals kept on moving to five different locations. This whole mayhem resulted in a condition where art became inferior or might not be accurately documented, however some historians argue that art tradition in this period was continuously expanding.

The sculptures of Dambadeniva, Yapahuwa and Kotte showcase spectacular sculpture carvings. Paintings from this period are long lost, though we get some information of it from literary texts of this period.

Yapahuwa

Yapahuwa was the national capital of Sri Lanka during the late 13th century. It is built on a 90 meter high monolithic rock, and compared to the famous Sigiriya rock fortress. It was constructed for protection against invading South Indian armies. A steep ornamental granite staircase leads up to the tooth relic temple at the top of this rock.

The intricate and elaborated carvings at Yapahuwa surpassed only by those at Sigiriya during 5th century AD.



The carved granite windows at Yapahuwa showcase remarkable artistic skills and achievements of this period.

The huge ornamental staircase is main attraction for the visitors, especially the carved goggle-eyed lion carvings which repeats with every single step. There are signs of colors in some areas that suggest these rocks would have been painted at that time.

It is a well recognized sculpture of late period. Yapahuwa Lion also appears on the former Sri Lankan note of 10 Rupees. Sri Lanka's most impressive ancient lion sculpture, seems to be inspired more by South Indian and Southeast Asian styles of architecture than by earlier Sinhalese or Buddhist traditions.

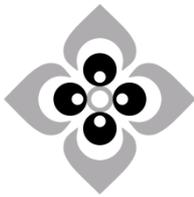
This is a beautifully carved window, known as Makara Thorana. This frame is carved with a character called kibihi-muna, which represents a sneezy faced dragon with a lion face. Placed under each thorana is the figure of Gaja-Lakshmi, seated cross-legged and holding a lotus in each hand. Two elephants on either side bathe her with the pots they hold in their trunks.

Finely carved relief sculptures on both sides of the flight of steps have a similarity and showcase figures of a dwarf, a female dancer and a graceful figure of a female. The next railing is a balustrade with a carving of the lion face. On this balustrade two stylized figures of a lion in the kneeling posture have been sculpted.

On the second half of this flight of steps, figures of dwarfs and gajasimha (a mythical lion) have been sculpted. The lower half of the doorway of the top tier has been ornamented with borders and the middle section borders have been carved with a dancing female, male figures, musicians etc. In front of the doorway decorated pillars and in the middle of the entrance a stone door frame with various sculptures exist.

Kandy

Kandy was the last capital of pre modern Sri Lanka during 18th century. It lost prominence when British established their rule and Sri Lanka became colonized. The splendid temples of Sri Lanka tell the story of its richness and luxurious past, through its beautifully carved sculptures and huge wall paintings. It is a highly stylized art language that forms the basis of the visual vocabulary of the Kandyan School of art. The Buddhist paintings of the early twentieth century present an impressive stylistic and artistic visual glossary that resided in the temple murals of the time.



Originally the Kandyan paintings were done in tempera technique using natural dyes and a limited range of colors, which included white, red, yellow, blue and green. These color pigments were then mixed with wood gum produced from apple tree and water. On a coat of magnesite or locally named makul, the painting was initiated with a line drawing in red and black and the colors were added subsequently.

The George Keyt murals at Gotami Vihara, the Solius Mendis murals at Kelaniya Raja Maha Viharaya and the numerous murals by M.Sarlis, all done during the first four decades of the 20th century, are the best examples to demonstrate this formation of various styles in Sri Lankan art.

Gothami Vihara

George Keyt's impressive cubistic murals of the life of Gautama Buddha are displayed inside a lesser known quiet little temple known as the Gothami Vihara in Borella.

The Buddhist murals of Gotami Vihara, painted around the 1930s, exemplifies a style that is a fusion of the linear beauty of Anuradhapura, the sensuality of traditional Indian sculpture, and Pablo Picasso's cubist style. All these elements blend into a sensual and opulent artistic style which grew in the 19th century Sri Lanka.

Kelaniya Raja Maha Viharaya

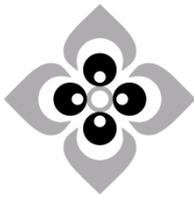
Image: Kelaniya Temple Carvings

It is evident from the literary works that the city of Kelaniya was built along with its enormous temple dedicated to Buddha during the 3rd century BC. The original paintings on the shrine walls were painted during the reign of King Voharikatissa (214 - 236 AD).

To restore the murals of numerous times destroyed and restored temple of Kelaniya Raja Maha Viharaya, famous temple artist Solius Mendis was employed to restore the lost murals of temple walls during the year 1888.

Solias Mendis's work is a little more traditional when compared to the works of Sarlis Master and George Keyt, but his attention to detail is extraordinary. From varying facial expressions to strands of grey hair, the effort that has gone into the beautiful murals is hard to miss.

For another twenty years Mendis continued the restoration work of Sinhalese classical art tradition of Anuradhapura, painting the frescoes that depicts events in the life of Buddha and narrative scenes from Buddhist history in Sri Lanka. He also added geometric motifs and drawings on the ceilings of temple hall.



Frescoes of the Kelaniya (Kaleniya) Rajamahavihara composed in the regular rectangle panels of the Kandyan Art are pleasant to the eye with their subdued colors. Line work is robust and retains rhythm.

Gradually, Mendis developed a mix of several styles which included Indian and European visual elements.

This Painting at the Kelaniya Temple, tells the story of bringing the Sacred Relict of the Tooth of Lord Buddha to Sri Lanka by Prince Dantha and Princess Hemamala.

The amalgamation of art produced during consecutive successive kingdoms of Sri Lanka is credited with the formation of stylistic and artistic iconography of a long art history in Sri Lanka, which starts from the 2nd century to 19th century A.D.

Traditional historiography presents Sri Lankan art in terms of Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Yapahuwa, and Kandy, the successive kingdoms of pre-modern Sri Lanka.