

# The Traditional Temple Paintings in Uva Province, Sri Lanka: An Appraisal

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**Abstract:** Sri Lanka has a rich tradition of Buddhist Paintings. The purpose of maintaining such was to sensitize the devotees about the essence of teachings of the Buddhist philosophy. Interior walls of a variety of buildings, celestial places, shrine rooms were adorned by such painted surfaces depicting various themes of the Buddhist practice. This paper seeks to survey the regional peculiarities manifested by the 19<sup>th</sup> century temple paintings registered in the monasteries in the Uva province. A sample representing a wider geographical area was taken as a unit of analysis of the study. Stylistic variations and subject matter of the painting were considered as the main indicators of differences of the regional tradition observed. The socio-economic background has been identified as one of the major governing factors that influence the stylistic characterization of the regional tradition of paintings in Sri Lanka during the period under study.

**Key words:** Zoomofig, tradition, Paintings, Temple Paintings, Uva Province.

## I. INTRODUCTION

During 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Buddhist temples in the Uva Province were highly adorned by colorful paintings. It is identified as a parallel trend that occurred contemporary to the similar tradition existed in the outside of the Uva province, which was mainly visible in the Buddhist temples in the Central Province the Sabaragamuwa Province and in the coastal areas of the South. This creates a fascinating array of diversity in style and the mode of presentation. This study explores the dynamism that laid behind such stylistic contrast of the regional painting traditions in Sri Lanka with special reference to the Uva Province.

The Uva Province in the study refers to the areas which consist of the Badulla District and the Moneragala District. Uva Province is a region with complex geographical diversity. An area of such geographical complexity becomes an important unit for analysis in sociocultural development (Seligman 1908, Hartly 1913, 1914, Deraniyagala 1992). Life in Uva is mainly based on agriculture. The social content of the painting tradition in Buddhist temples of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries is not yet a unit of study that has been the subject of in-depth analysis.

In the twentieth century, scholars have sought to elucidate some of the central examples of that artistic tradition from a socio-political point of view, if not from a broader anthropological perspective. (Bandanayake, S., 1986, Marie, G., 1983, John Clifford Holt, 1996, Coomaraswamy, 1962). However, the study is limited to a few paintings in Buddhist

temples in the suburbs of Kandy in the early and late 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, which belonged to the early art tradition of Kandy. The focus here is on a comparative discussion with the Uva cave temple paintings on the style, line drawing, themes used in the Kandyan period paintings, the *Jathaka stories* used in the theme and other essential aspects of depicting and paintings.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are three sources that were used in this investigation.

1. Field observations
2. 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries Cave temples Art, consisting of literature (18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries cave temples)
3. Literature review to, history and bounded to the contemporary Art

The study was carried out to investigate the literature through such sources.

In this study on traditional temple paintings in the Uva Province, the literature review has been discussed in three main streams as mentioned above. Although there is a great deal of information on the *Vihara* paintings in Sri Lanka....(Incomplete sentence)

Very few books have been written on cave temple paintings in the Uva Province. The reason for this is that the attention of researchers on the Uva Province is very low. Due to this very few studies have been done on temple paintings in the Uva province. However, the study of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century temple paintings in other parts of Sri Lanka has witnessed a considerable amount. Among them, the research of Coomaraswamy (1907,1908,1969), Siri Gunasinghe (1978), Senaka Bandaranayake (1982,1986), Godakumbura (1964), Nandadeva Wijesekera (1959), Sirimal Lakdusinghe (1978,1981), Mahinda Somathilake (2002) and Raj Somadeva (2012) are important. Although these scholars did not study the paintings of the Uva Province, they did their research on the temple paintings in other parts of the island belonging to that period.

## III. OBJECTIVES

Most of the temple paintings of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were centered on Kandy and its suburbs. In addition, traditional paintings in coastal areas are inspired by the socio-political reactions developed by the European rule. The main purpose of the study is that the style of contemporary temple

paintings was, the center of political power in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, which can be summarized as follows.

1. Exploring the relationship of the style and content of these paintings with the religious, social and cultural background of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### 3.1 Research Problems

Four specific research issues have been identified in order to achieve the above-mentioned research objectives:

1. Do these paintings reflect a change in style in other parts of the country?
2. How can we identify the reaction momentum that generates such changes?
4. How do religious, socio-economic and political issues of the 18th century reflect?

### 3.2 Research sampling

There are 27 cave temples located in Uva province and 20 of them identified with paintings in Uva. The timeframe is focused on each sample, since a considerable amount of time must be spent examining and reporting the all temples. The criteria used in the sample selection are as follows: The first 20 paintings were divided into three categories as follows. It is based on the time period of the paintings.

1. Temples which are believed to belong to the Early Kandyan period, dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
2. The temples with paintings dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> the medieval Kandyan period.
3. Temples with paintings showing the features of the Kandyan period but not modern ones.

Although these cave temples can be styled into a tradition known as the Kandyan tradition, they are unique in their extensive analysis another infrastructural boundary. This is a method to calculate the amount in Purposive sampling method.

## IV. METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study investigates the Buddhist temples Paintings in Uva. Not only that but also these paintings reflect their cultural identity. Data were obtained via a participatory observation, and an in-depth-interview. The key informants were the representative of major temples and well known historians in Sri Lanka. The obtained data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

### 4.1 Data Collection

In collection of facts, four field studies were conducted to gather the information needed to check the basic hypotheses of the study.

1. Documentation of macro scale information - The physical and social context of each of the Buddhist caves examined here are described.

2. Documentation of micro scale information - under this, the internal details of each temple are recorded.

The information's gathered by the field visits in this study are considered the primary source of the research. Selected cave temples located in the two districts of the Uva were recorded in detail. Two basic steps were taken to record the field study. The first is to fully Record the paintings in the cave temples. The location of the cave temple was marked with the geographical location receiver (GIS). In addition to reporting location, the key to obtaining information was the systematic reporting of the spatial environment with study art. This was followed by recording the location of the paintings depicted on each panel, the nature of the distribution of the painting, the orientation, the use of colour, the style of the component, the representational themes, the dimensions of the paintings represented.

A digital meter scale helped to record all the paintings in the temples that were inspected. By this measure, it was necessary to examine the relation between the cave temples and the interior of the cave, to see if there was any connection between the painted themes. All the information has been done on the basics of the cave temples, surrounding reserves, sea-level high-altitude cave temples and reading the literature written on those areas.

To achieve the basic objectives of the research was to understand the people's lives, their customs, beliefs, and the main livelihood of the people, and the circumstances of the people politically.

## V. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The subject of this research is the question of the conceptual background in which he uses his or her expressive ideas to construct and elaborate their cognitive models, particularly within a given time-frame. The way in which individuals live independently of their thinking, the cognition that underpins that thought, is of a wider variety, but the expression and perception of the whole society given, which individuals are members is a different kind of objective phenomenon.

There is an extensive body of literature on social concepts. Carl Marx (1967) and Louis Althusser (1979) have discussed this extensively. According to Marx, the social concept is the reproduction of the quality of the product. The obvious implication of Marx's statement is that the dominant social conception that spreads to a society is produced in parallel with the product relations pursued by that society. It is important to focus on the two concepts that I will introduce here are the basic structure and superstructure. Marx's aim is to explain how the social concept of objectification leads to the creation of a particular society.

He points out that the basic structure of a society is based on the economic root of that society. Since history, society has adopted different economic production processes. Thus, societal changes occur. This idea was expressed by social anthropologist Louis Lewis Henry Morgan in his

classification of social evolution as social, pastoral, social, and civilized. (Morgan 1877). The social production of economic change, which follows the basic index of social change, is being followed.

According to Marx's explanation, in addition to an economic model that forms the basis of a society, it forms the basis for creating the superstructure of that society. The elements of the superstructure of a society are the law, ethics, aesthetics, and character of the state. (Althusser 1970: 5) It is necessary to understand clearly the equitable relations between the foundational structure of a society and its superstructure. In order for the economic system of a society to be sustained on a long-term basis, beneficiaries of that economic system need to create a host-nutrient structure. For example, a state mechanism is required to maintain the social, political dichotomous relationship between the landlord and the slave-owner in some tension-based society on a long-term basis. It is the intention of the landowners to use their labor unrestrainedly to make necessary arrangements to ensure that the plight of the native slaves who work for the landlord without the benefit of the society is exerted by them is not to be turned into a stressful stress.

There are various ways to exploit the landlord's right to exploit such labor. The economic system and the relations of production are feudal and other sociopolitical attributes that provide for the long-term maintenance of the system belong to the superstructure of that society. Some of the pillars of the temples are depicted as *bahirava*'s depicting people carrying the weight of the buildings but dancing and playing musical instruments. It symbolizes the relationship with power and, on the one hand, is an image of an analogous concept of genetic slaves that landlords contribute to the livelihood of animals.

When a particular group of people reproduces the mechanism for production, the superstructure of the society belongs to the particular group of people to predict it. Life and history are discussed in order to gain access to the aforementioned theoretical framework. Among the people living in the area of study, the symbolic character of the lifestyle, which existed at least two centuries ago, has changed drastically and some groups have disappeared altogether. Nevertheless, some of the historical writings, which are a reminder of the minority of the elderly, have also helped to reshape the community.

### 5.1 Analysis/ Conclusion

**Buddhist Temples in the Uva Province** Some subconscious conclusions can be drawn from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries because there are clear differences between the other cave paintings of Uva Province and the other parts of contemporary Sri Lanka. They are majorly a reflection of both the integral style and content of the art traditions. The regional tastes and implications for the communicative aims of art were identified as critical in determining regional identities. It has shown how the Jataka Stories, Buddha Characteristics depicted in the Vihara frescoes studied how the criteria of ethics, ideology, culture, rituals and identities are expressed in the woods with

the basic themes of Buddhism. Publications on the identities of the elites who sponsored the paintings are also included.

The traditional cave paintings in Uva reflect a simple, largely representational and illustrative art formulated by an artist or patron, or by a monk who acted with the attention of both. Because of the social and political changes of the time, changes in the style, color, and objects of art were able to achieve the long-lasting religious and social functions of the basic structural and structural elements.

Considering The Buddhist Temple in Uva, one can draw a hypothetical conclusion about the paintings of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was pointed out that there are many differences between the paintings in the temples in different parts of Sri Lanka, mainly the following points can be pointed out.

1. Use of space in temples in Sri Lanka
2. How themes are used in drawing
3. Colors used in painting

Importantly, they emphasized how the style and content of the art traditions reflect both aspects.

The points of discussion have shown that the local level of tastes and the role of the village in the implementation of these objectives are crucial to the dismantling of regional identities. The paintings depicted in the space of Buddhist temples are called Vihara paintings. It affirms how events related to the character of the *Buddha, Jathaka Katha* are depicted in frescoes. It also includes the declaration of the identities of the elites who sponsored these paintings.

The *Uva* vihara paintings represent a highly orthodox, highly representational and illustrative art that is often conveyed to the artist by the patron saint, or by a monk who has taken care of both. Although there were many changes to the social and political changes of the period and the use of color and the objects in the painting, the basic structural features and methodologies remained in place for a long time to fulfill the expected religious and social functions.

The second objective was to find out what are the distinctive features found in Buddhist temples. The *Uva* vihara paintings reflect the various types of edicts and social practices adopted by the society during the period. This is an excellent example of how spiritual beliefs have an impact on the lives of people living there.

Objectives in this research attempts to balance the following observations with the contribution of local schools to the construction of temples.

1. Following the basic features of the Kandyan tradition of painting, the artists have highlighted its unique morphological features.
2. Artists have been practicing their own techniques in terms of their features and style.
3. The paintings reflect the artisans' understanding of the social, economic, political and cultural

backgrounds of Uva in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and have been appropriately used in their design.

European tradition has been inspired to Buddhist painting in Sri Lanka in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Many of the basic elements of the paintings of the churches of the post-European Renaissance and before, reflect the image of the elite palaces and churches of that era. The palaces and the architectural features depicted in the *Jathaka stories* often show such symbolic features. Similar features can be seen in the distant objects in the designated buildings. European tradition has had a profound influence on the portrayal of hellfire. In addition to the basic colors used to paint the Kandyan period, it seems that artists have resorted to the use of multicolores. European invasions have made it possible for the local market to acquire such products as a result of the availability of various products and services, which can be seen in the way artists used them in paintings.

Although the artists were not keen on the observation of their paintings, it can be revealed that the local artists knew about the visualization of the paintings in only one place. Great cultural influence introduced by the British realist representational art tradition. In all such cases, the style and component changes took place during periods of social and political climate that were both necessary and possible to cause severe epistemic disruption.

In the creation of paintings of Uva Buddhist temples, a continuous method of speech has been used and they have been created in two-dimensional form. Each of the images depicts a sense of meaning, and a plain drawing does not appear in the paintings of this era.

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