

The Expansion of Mahayana Religion in the Anuradhapura Period: Evidence using the Buddha Statues

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The main objective of this study is to explore the Mahayana religion during the Anuradhapura period. Buddhism came to Sri Lanka as a result of its relationship with India. During the reign of King Devanampiyatissa, Buddhism was named as the state religion. Due to the social influence in India, Buddhism was divided into sects and as a result, Mahayana Buddhism was born. Mahayana Buddhism came to Sri Lanka due to migration, invasion and trade. The main sources show that during this time Theravada Buddhism which was centered on Mahavihara has its roots in the country and that Mahavihara and Theravada religion were sponsored by the state. It is said that the Theravada religion was powerful. However, a careful study of these sources and the spread of Buddha statues, have found information on Mahayana Buddhism. These Mahayana inspired Buddha statues have been found in the Mahavihara area, and the ruins have been found near Theravada Buddhist religious centers spread throughout Sri Lanka. Among these ruins are statues of Bodhisattva, Avalokiteshvara and various deities. Due to the fascinating features of the Mahayana religion and the fact that sectarianism was not an issue, people may have turned to the Mahayana religion. According to information found in the Mahayana tradition, statues and sources, the Mahayana Buddhism has been spreading extensively in comparison to Theravada Buddhism.

Keywords: Theravada Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, Mahayana statues