

IDENTIFICATION THE CEILING DECORATION PAINTING IN THE DOME AT GADALADENIYA SHRINE

W. Ishankha Malsiri

Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka.

Introduction

The Paintings belong to the *Gampola* period are very rare because many of buildings with paintings were destroyed by invasions, decayed by natural factors and some buildings were renovated and whitewashing in several times. So it is very difficult to study the art history of Sri Lanka during 14th century to 18th century. *Gadaladeniya* Rock inscription which was established by Ven. *Dharmakeerthi* gives a valuable information about paintings in the cell of the chaitya or shikhara or dome (Paranavitana 1966:101). Today, there are remains of wall paintings represent the *Vessantara Jataka*, flower decorations, Arhath figures, A tree behind the seat for Buddha statue and a marvelous decoration painting which has spread all over the ceiling. It is a result of reconstructing the ancient painting based on remaining evidences by CCF in few years ago. In this paper, for the first time, it will be considered with its whole context.

Objectives

It is very important to get an idea about the theme and the context of Paintings based on quantitative and qualitative data before making an interpretation. Though wall or ceiling decorations may be considered as paintings which

are used for filling the spaces, sometimes artists have used religious or social concepts as decorations. The main Objective of this research is to make an attempt to identify the conceptual background of *Gadaladeni* ceiling painting and interprets it on its own context. On the other hand, it can be helpful for making a decision about its dating.

Methodology

Re-reading the data revealed from inscriptions and primarily literary sources have been used as the cardinal methodology of this research. Details of the ceiling painting have compared with botanical evidences. Religious concepts and values are utilized as an indirect way to make a concrete conclusion.

Discussion

Gadaladeni shrine was built in 14th century by Ven. Sri *Dharmmakirti* thero. Sthapati Ganadhipati *Ganeshwara* and other engaging master artisans were architects. According to the *Gadaladeniya* rock inscription in the cell of the caitya on the top most storey, *Dharmmakirti* thero caused to be made an image of *Buddha* (depicting him seated) for delivering the discourse on the *Abhidharmma*, on the throne

Pandukambala under the *Parijata* tree, and attended by the gods *Sakra*, *Brahma* and others led by *Matru devaputra* (Paranavitana 1966:107). But it was not mentioned about the *Vessantara Jataka* paintings or arhath figures which can be seen today. It means that those paintings may belong to a later period.

There is a special drawing of a tree behind the seat. One of previous writers has identified it as the *Bodhi* tree (Herath 2004(54). But, it is a totally wrong identification. It is the *Parijata* tree, which has been mentioned in the rock inscription. *Parijata* is a well-known tree in the Buddhist and Hindu religious context. It is considered as a *Deva wruksha*, situated near the *Sudharma* hall in the heaven of *Thawatimsa*. According to the Sakka panha sutta, *Pandukambala* throne is situated under the *Parijata* tree. Today there is no *Buddha* statue there, but there is the seat representing the *Pandukambala* throne, under the *Parijata* tree. So, it is clear that the cell of the chaitya represents the heaven of *Thawasimsa*. *Parijata* is the Sanskrit word for *Erabadu* (*Erythrina indica*) tree.

The ceiling painting has spread all over the ceiling. This decoration spread from a centric *lotus* flower. A flower is included in internal spaces limited by a oval shape creeper design. As a result of this research, I could identify this flower as the *Erabadu* flower (*Erythrina indica*). Normally erabadu has a 5 petalled brilliant red flowers (Kottegoda 1994:86, no.164). Here its physical shape and items have been used with creativity. The question is why *erabadu* design has been used for

the ceiling painting? It shows that the artist wanted to make a relationship between the ceiling painting and the main topic represented in the cell. So, he planned a *Parijata* flower design on top of the *parijata* tree. *Parijata* or *Parasatu* flower design can be seen on some of moonstones belong to the *Kandyan* period.

Prof. *Paranavitana* paid his attention for the decorative floral designs of this period. He has pointed out some examples furnished by the wooden covers of an ola manuscripts datings from the time of *Parakramabahu II* now in the *Colombo* museum and another of a somewhat later date now in *Paris* (1960:793). Unfortunately, he has missed the ceiling paintings in the cell of the chaitya at *Gadaladeniya*.

Conclusion

The ceiling design in the cell of the chaitya at *Gadaladeni* shrine is based on the theme of *Parijata* flower. It may be the earliest painting which represents a *Parijata* flower in Sri Lankan Art history. According to the body of data, inscriptional information and painting remains can be overlapped. It means that the *Parijata* tree and the ceiling painting are contemporary with the original construction of the shrine. Finally, those paintings belong to the 14th century A.D. and can consider as a very rare example for the paintings in *Gampola* period.

References

- Mudiyanse, N. 1965. The Art and Architecture of the Gampola period (1341-1415 A.D.), Colombo: M. D. Gunasena & Company.

- Kiribamune, S. 1995. Sri Lankan Art and Architecture during the 16th, 17th & 18th centuries, History of Sri Lanka; from c1500 to c1800, ed. K. M. de Silva, Vol. II, Dehiwala: Sri Devi printers. pp. 491-530.
- Herath, M. B. 2004. Gadaladeniya Rajamaha Viharaya, Colombo: Department of Archaeology. (in Sinhala medium)
- Paranavitana, S. 1960. Architecture, Sculpture and Paintings, University of Ceylon History of Ceylon, Vol.I, ed. N. Attygala & others, Colombo: Ceylon University press. pp. 778-793.
- Paranavitana, S. 1966. Gadaladeniya Rock Inscription of Dhammakirtti Sthavira, Epigraphia Zeylanica, Vol. IV, ed. S. Paranavitana, London: Oxford University press. pp. 90-110.