

Regional Identity linked to the Concept of Natha - Activities Associated with the Natha Canal in Kelaniya, Sri Lanka (15th to 19th century)

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Abstract:

In studying the trade history of the Indian Ocean, it is clear that from the 13th century to the 15th century AD, the developed region of trade was around the Arabian Sea region. After the 13th century AD, the southern, southwestern and western ports of Sri Lanka became more prosperous. The source provides the factors. During this period, the Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526 A.D.) and Mughal power (1526-1857 A.D.) were active in India, so there is evidence of how many South Indian traders came into contact with Sri Lanka. In particular, the advanced stage of "Natha" worship can be seen in Sri Lanka by the 15th century AD and after that period Natha statues were built in many temples and shrines focusing on the western, southwestern and Kandy regions of Sri Lanka. By the 13th century AD, "natha" worship was popular in Southeast Asia and India. Also, during this period, Catholicism and Protestantism spread in these areas. Natha Ela and its surrounding temples belonging to Gampaha district in the Western Province have been selected for this research. When studying its location, it becomes clear that this Natha canal (natha ela) is an additional canal built to transport goods from inland to the western coast. Kelaniya Raja Maha Viharaya, Sapugaskanda Rajamaha Viharaya and Heiyanthuduwa Rajamaha Viharaya etc. are the major temples built around Natha Ela. There is evidence that economic activities in this area were very prosperous during the reign of King Rajasinghe II (1635-1687 AD). Also, due to the prevalence of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism in those areas, during the Rajasinghe II period (1635-1687 AD), more Natha statues were built in this area to challenge Catholicism and Protestantism as well as to protect Buddhism. At the same time, during this period, Natha statues were built to bring the pilgrims from India as well as Southeast Asia to this area. Also, it is clear that in order to face the Mughal power in India and the expansion of the power of the Europeans, Buddhism was spread in the area by advancing the Mahayana concept.

Keywords- Natha, Trade, Gampaha, Rajasinghe II, Catholicism, Mughal

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Research Methodology

A qualitative methodology was used for the research. There, observational and descriptive studies have been conducted under qualitative methods. There, a cultural comparative study has been done on the data including murals and statues related to the concept of Natha Deva in the temples of Kelaniya area and the information related to Sri Lanka, India and South East Asia has been mostly used for this research.

Research Problem

The problem of this research is whether there is a causal identity in the construction of Natha statues and Natha Canal (Map'01) in Kelaniya area.

The administrative, religious and social activities that have taken place in the region around the Natha Canal have also helped.

Introduction

Sri Lanka, a country where the Theravada tradition has been practised since the Anuradhapura kingdom period, later created the Buddha statue and around the 7th century AD, the Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva statue was created following the Mahayana tradition. In this tradition, the statue of Avalokitesvara later represented as natha or avalokitesvara natha and in other cases as Maitreya Bodhisattvas. Avalokitesvara worship started in Sri Lanka since the Anuradhapura period, and especially under the patronage of kings of ancient Sri Lanka have created these statues. While making worldly well-being the decisive factor in the creation of these Avalokitesvara statues, the main objective has become to provide human happiness with the protection of their lives through the statue. In this design, it is also seen how the Buddhist monks basically gave their approval in this matter. The nature of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattvas has become the embodiment of protection in the past Sinhalese kingdoms. Avalokitesvara in the Buddhist tradition of Sri Lanka, written by John Clifford Holt, points out that according to traditional Sinhalese folk belief, a pious and powerful Buddhist king can become a bodhisattva on the

path to nirvana. (Clifford, 1991:53) But an important phenomenon that should be emphasised here is that after the migration of the Avalokitesvara worship to the southwestern regions of Sri Lanka, especially during the Gampola period (1341-1415) when Gampola was the capital, the concept of Avalokitesvara was localised and introduced as "natha". . Thus it is clear how Avalokitesvara was often depicted as an ascetic with no ornaments during the early mediaeval period in Sri Lanka. For example, the Sithulpawwa Avalokitesvara of the 7th century AD is considered to be one of the most important statues of this type found in Sri Lanka. Although in the Kandy period for example, the statue of Avalokitesvara in the Dambulla cave changes completely and it is seen that it is transformed into the guardian deity of the people. The image of a Sinhala king has been shown in the creation of this statue. Here they wear royal clothes (dhoti) and elaborate ornaments such as bracelets, necklaces, armbands and yajnopavita.

Between the 13th and 15th centuries AD, trade along the west coast expanded greatly, establishing links with Southeast Asia and South India. As the Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526 AD) and Mughal rule (1526-1857 AD) operated in India during this period, rulers like Alagakkonara came to Sri Lanka and tried to control the trade power of the Silk Road.

The earliest information about Alagakkonara comes from the Kitsirimevan Kelani temple inscription (C.A.L.R. i:153.) which states that they were descended from the Vanchi family and that he was the 10th in that line. Vanchipura is Kerala, India. (J(CB) RAS,XXXII:296-297.) There is evidence that Dravidian artisans were very active in building temples during this period. Although the western coastal area was used for trade activities, various trade activities were carried out through caravan routes, focusing on the areas of Gampola, Kandy, Raigama, Kotte. However, there appears to have been an agreement between King Aryachakravarti and King Vikramabahu III (1357-1374 AD) and the Madavala inscription inscribed in the third regnal year of King Vikramabahu III names it "Salupathi Matanda Perumal". This letter is very fragmentary but it states that the customs duties of the three countries of Udarata Siguruwana, Balavita, Matale, Dumbara and Sagama were assigned to Brahmins known as "Madigaya". "Marthanda Perumal" is identified as King Arya Chakravathy. It is said that

once King Aryachakravarti gathered thousands of Tamil troops from the Chola country and invaded Gampola and Jayawardanapura of Kotte. During this period the rulers of Sri Lanka maintained constant relations with South India as most of the army were South Indians. This further explains that their connection was with the original land of South India. The Alakeshwara War mentions that King Aryachakravarti sent an army of hundreds of ships for this war. This is a very good proof that he had great naval power. Aryachakravarti can be introduced as a person who led the flourishing trade in the Indian Ocean at this time. The army that came from the sea has camped in the areas of Dematagoda and Gorakana near the Kelani River. (Rajavaliya: 207; Alakesvarayuddhaya: 20) In the advance of this battle, the Dravidian army of Udarata and Matale was defeated and succeeded in attacking Aryachakravarta's ships stationed at Colombo and Panadura and destroying the army including Alakesvara. (Rajavaliya :208 and Alakesvarayuddhaya:20-21) This reference further explains that the western coastal area of Sri Lanka was mainly used as port cities for trade in the Indian Ocean.

For example, the Lankatilaka (Sinhala) inscription belonging to the Gampola Kingdom period was established in the 14th century AD (1344/1345) and it is mentioned that Rayar was the main architect in the construction of this temple. (U.C.R. Vol.Xviii, Nos.1,2,(Jan 1960):4-14 and J(CB)RAS.Vol.X.,no.34) Vegiriya Vihara Rock Inscription was inscribed in 1414/1415 AD. . The purpose of this inscription was to record the offerings made to Lord Lokeshwara Natha at the Vegiriya temple. It is a clear fact that by the time of King Gampola, the worship of "Lokeshwara Natha" was popular in the coastal and central areas of Sri Lanka. (JRAS(CB),Vol.XVIII,Nos.1,2 :24-38) The Thisara Sandesha reveals many important details about Lord Upulvan, Lord Vibhishana and other temples in Dorawaka Natha Temple (Ibid, 130) and Tara Bisava. Although there are different opinions about the time when this work was composed, it is clear that it was comprised during the time of King Parakramabahu who lived in Raigama. King Parakramabahu can be identified as the fifth Parakramabahu. The Wuttamala Sandesha Sataka indicates that King Parakramabahu ruled in Dedigama, which has five hundred islands off the coast. (Vattamala :30.) In the description of the city of Kelaniya mentioned here, many contemporary economic details can be

revealed such as the form of the city of Kelaniya, the wall with many colours, the house classes of the city, the Gopura mansions. Among them are information such as traders from many countries, shops, statues, women playing games, traders from different countries, shops, paintings, theater women. (Ibid, 59-76)

An important fact to be pointed out here is that Lord Natha is the Bodhisattva concept we call "Avalokiteswara Natha ". Professor Paronavithana points out that the name Lokeshwara is commonly used to refer to Avalokitesvara Bodhisattvas, and the name "Lokeshwara (Lord of the World)" is commonly used in Cambodia and Javanese countries. (Ceylon Journal of Science Section G.Vol.II.) There is a statue of "Natha Avalokitesvara " in the Natha Devala at Kandy which is believed to be a "Natha" statue dating back to the 14th century AD. This area. Also, two names ``Maithri Natha " and "Lokeshwara Natha " are mentioned in the copper plate of Lankathilaka, it is clear that both of them were worshipped by the people as Bodhisattvas. (U.C.R. (1960), p.24-38.)

Since the 14th century AD, the worship of these Bodhisattvas has been found in almost all parts of Buddhist Asia, including Sri Lanka. Avalokitesvara was recognized in many Buddhist countries by this time and the reason for the success of Bodhisattva worship outside India was that there was no competing religion in those countries. Also, just as Buddhism coexisted with Vedic Brahmanism and Hinduism in India, the concept of Avalokitesvara was integrated with those religions. An example of this is the city of Mangalore in the state of Karnataka, India, and the western coast is an area where people belonging to various religious sects live who carry out many trade activities. The Manjunatha temple here was an important center of Shiva, natha-Pantha worship in the 10th century AD(P1'01). The bronze idol here (height 1.5m) includes the Lokeshwara matsyendranatha and the idol was made in 958 AD. Kadri Manjunatha Temple was built by Masyendranath in Vijayanagara style of architecture. Based on its current form, it is assumed that the structure was renovated in the 12th or 13th century AD. Kadri was an important center of Buddhism in the 10th century AD. Buddhist influence in the area began to wane with the appearance of natha-pantha, a cult that originated in Kadri as a modified religious practice derived from the Vajrayana sect of Mahayana Buddhism. Over time the natha-pantha merged their

practice with Shiva beliefs. From then on they were known as Jogis of Kadri and their monastery was called Jogi-mutt. The Mahayana influence was definitely from the Buddhist monks who migrated to the area from North India and Kadri became their home temple. Mangalore is mentioned as "Mangalapuram" in the above mentioned 968 AD inscription. Another stone inscription in Kannada and Malayalam script dated 12th-13th century AD states that the king, along with local landowners and other important people of the area, granted land for the construction of the temple. As parts of the inscription are damaged, the king's name is unknown. Other evidence confirms that the Alupa Queen Balli Mahadevi (1277-1288) called herself a devotee of Lord Manjunatha. Overall, we have three important date markers for the temple: 968 A.D. of Lord Lokeshvara. According to the inscription, it is identified as an early 10th century construction; This differs from the Vijayanagara style architectural structures of the 12th-13th century AD following Hinduism, and later the temple was reconstructed in granite in the 14th or 15th century.

Moroccan traveller Ibn Battuta, who visited Mangalore in 1342 AD, called it Manjarur, and stated that the city was situated on a large estuary known as the "estuary of the wolf," a grated estuary (Ibn Battuta, 175). By 1345 AD, the Vijayanagara rulers had brought the Malabar coast under their control. During the Vijayanagara period (1345–1550), South Canara was divided into Mangalore and Barkur kingdoms (provinces). Then the rule here came into the hands of the Keladi rulers (1550-1763 AD). In 1448 AD, Abdur Razzaq, the Persian ambassador of Sultan Shah Shah Rukh of Samarkand, on his way to the court of Vijayanagara, visited Mangalore. He said that he saw that nearly fifty to sixty were prepared to sail at the port of Mangalore. (Ludovico de Vathma, 1863:122) He further points out that the people in this port are superstitious. It is said that the Mathsendranatha image was transformed into a Shivanatha statue.

It is very clear that by the 15th century AD, the main Natha temple in Sri Lanka was located at Vijayaba Pirivena in Thotagamuwa. The author of Gira Sandeshaya sent the message to Lord Natha in Vijayaba Pirivene. (Gira Sandeshaya, 2001:iv) Gadaladeniya inscription and Papiliana inscriptions were also mentioned about the "Natha Maithri". Also, Senarath Paranavithana points out that the current

acceptance is that Natha is embodied in the Weligama Avalokiteshvara statue. (Paranavitana, 1928:53) But in later times, Prematilaka recognized that this statue represents Manjushri Bodhisattvas.

Also, Avalokiteshvara is considered as a god who gives safeguard to the ships in the ocean at that time. The everywhere present savior is called an "Ocean of virtue" and then the "Chief of kings" as though these two concepts counterpoint each other to emphasise the comprehensiveness of his divine power". (Dohanian, 1977:54)

The Sariputra book, which contains the iconography used by the designers in the creation of statues in Sri Lanka, mentions the meditations of various deities. It mentions "Natha", the symbol of the universe, worshipped for prosperity by Natha holding a beautiful lotus shining white like a brown lily adorned with divine jewels. He spreads grace to the poor and needy. Abiding in meditation, Avalokitesvara has the typical characteristics attributed to Natha. For example, an image of a meditating Buddha holding a lotus flower is presented. (Sariputra, 1993; Paranavitana, 1928:60) In the Sariputra, Avalokitesvara Natha is presented in eight different guises, which may have been a factor in his later integration with Hindu-Buddhist beliefs. These can be pointed out as Shiva Natha, Brahma Natha, Vishnu Natha, Gauri Natha, Matsya Natha, Badra Natha, Buddha Natha, Gananatha. (ibid,60)

Natha worship near Kelani river.

When studying this concept, it appears that Natha worship was done in the temples built around Kelani river and the Natha canal. Among these, the Natha Canal is unique because it is close to the Kelani River and this subordinate canal was used for internal cargo transportation in the Kandian period, from Pattivila area to Modara, Mattakkuliya, Sedawatta, Muthurajawela and Thotalaga ect. During the reign of King Rajasingha II (1629-1687 AD), Portuguese and Dutch activities in Kelaniya, Sapugaskanda, Mabima and Kaduwela surrounding provinces can be cited as proof that the trade in this area worked better.

Natha Lokeshwara worship is most common in the temples around Kelaniya in Gampaha district. The statue at Kossinna Yatawatta Rajamaha vihara was built after the Kandy period and the Buddha image house built during the British period, houses a large statue of Lord Natha. It should be emphasised here that there is no other deity image in that Buddha image house. There is a Vishnu shrine on one side of the temple. The reason for constructing the Natha statue here is that Natha deity worship is popular in this area. This Kossinna temple is close to the ancient port cities of Colombo and Negombo and is located very close to the Colombo-Kandy road. Also, at the time when Catholicism and Protestantism spread in these areas, the aim of the Sinhalese ruler may have been to popularize a secular Buddhist Bodhisattva worship among the people at the same time.

Similarly, the Waboda Purana Gallen Rajamaha viharaya in Gampaha district is also important because there is a post-modern statue of Natha(Pl' 05). It is special that this statue is also designed with a crown and formal jewels. Waboda temple is also located in Gampaha district near the Kelani river and the Colombo - Kandy road, near the western coast. Accordingly, this temple is also a good example of the postmodern period of worshipping Natha to bring prosperity to the local people and the trading community.

The Natha painting depicting the Paramartha Dharmakara Piriven Viharaya in Kelaniya Pethiyagoda belongs to the 18th century AD. (Gamalat and Kekulavala,2020:380) A life-size "Natha Bodhisattva" portrait looking at the Buddha statue with the Ashinsana mudra. Bodhisattvas are represented beneath this late 18th century dragon pantheon.

According to the legends of the province, the Rajamaha Vihara and its Vishnu temple at Heyyanthuduva were patronized by Rajasingha II. It appears that the Lord Natha painted in the inner chamber of the Buddha image house belongs to the period of that king (1635-1687).

A statue of Natha Deva, 10 feet high, has been created in a small chamber at the end of the reclining Buddha statue in the Gandha Kuti of the Kelaniya Rajamaha Vihara. This belongs to the Kandy period. As in the rest of the Natha Deva statues belonging to this tradition, the right hand holds the Ashinsana Mudra

and the left hand is down. The decoration of the crown is done here in the same manner as seen in many Nath statues of the Kandy era.

In the Sapugaskanda Rajamaha Vihara,(P1'03& 04) a statue of the same height as the Natha Deva statue in the Kelaniya image house has been created in the Gandha Kuti with the Samadhi Buddha statue. Here also the left hand is pointing down with the Ashinsana Mudra on the right hand. Another statue of Natha, slightly lower than this statue, has been created in a chamber at the lower end of the Gandha Kuti with the reclining Buddha statue. Both these Nath statues belong to the 18th century.

Conclusion

Many faiths and beliefs are common in Asia as well as Southeast Asia, each based on its own regional identity, trade force, and religious activities. Natha worship, cities and forts, irrigation systems such as Natha Canal can be pointed out as an identity that operated simultaneously with the Kelaniya area. During the eras when Kotte, Gampola and Kandy were the capitals, these activities and additional Natha canals were developed along the Kelaniya River, the west coast and the river estuary. Due to trade activities on the west coast, transport on the Colombo-Nuvara road, the Kelaniya area has developed a local identity. The spread of Catholicism and Protestantism to the coastal areas has led to the spread of the Natha concept with a local identity.

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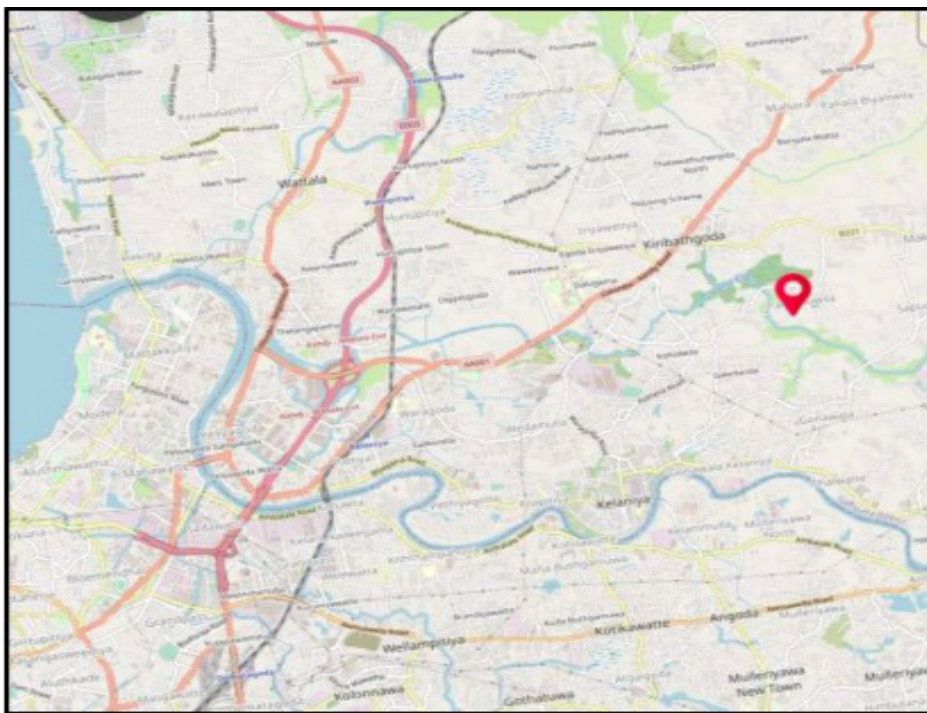
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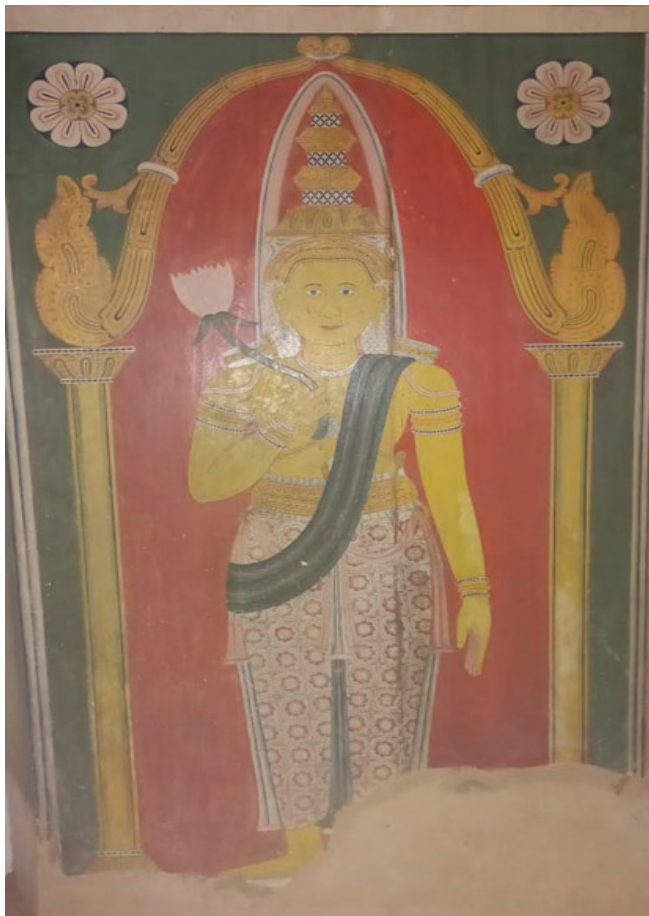
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Map 01- Natha canal which is close to Kelaniya river



Pl.1- Brahma Manjunath at Kadri Temple



Pl.2- Natha painting - Heiyanthuduwa Rajamaha Vihara



Pl.3 - Natha statue (1) of Sapugaskanda Rajamaha Vihara



Pl.4 - Natha statue (2) of Sapugaskanda Rajamaha Vihara



Pl 05. - Natha statue - Waboda Purana Gallen Rajamaha viharaya (19th Century)