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A study of the existence of the concept of “Dhamma Dhāthu” in Sri Lanka through Epigraphy and literary sources

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Epigraphy and sources provide clear the evidence that basic Theravāda Buddhist concepts have been affected by Mahāyāna Buddhism. This may be due to the fact that Sri Lanka is situated in a strategic place in the Indian Ocean on the Silk Road. Offering special Pujās to religious books which contain special features of Dhamma is a special religious concept of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The word Dhamma Dhāthu of Thrikāyasthava gives evidence of the fact that this tradition was practiced in Sri Lanka as well. And also the wording “Daham Dā Depathek” which is inscribed on a metal bowl in the 10th century too confirms the concept of Dhamma Dhāthu. “Damsaṅgagunagehi Dā Rekaval Karana” which is found in the 3rd century inscription of Anuradhapura inner–city, also proves that the religious books had been protected with special offerings; So much of solid evidence of this nature can be cited to prove the fact that the religious books were stored and protected with great care and they were offered special Pujās regularly. The inscription of Kāshyapa the 5th and the inscription of Mihiṇdu the 4th provide valid evidence to reinforce the above matter. The legends like Mahāwansa and Saddharmaratnākaraya too mention in several places of the protection of religious books and performing of special Pujās to them. This study aims at exploring whether worshiping and offering special Pujās to religious books is a tradition established due to the influence of Mahāyāna or not Data collection is mainly based on referring to inscriptions and records of different nature. Offering special Pujās to religious works is a tradition inherited from Mahāyāna Buddhism and it had later fused with the Theravāda tradition; this has been proven through the data analysis of this research.

Keywords: Concept of Dhamma Dhāthu, Inscription, Literary sources, Mahāyāna views in Sri Lanka