

Iconographical Study on Solias Mendis's New Kelaniya Vihara Shrine's Sculptures

C.P. Dharmasri

Department of Sculpture, University of Visual and Performing Arts
caprasannaart@gmail.com

The new Kelani Vihara shrine construction is a temple project that reflects the socio-political and cultural change in Sri Lanka in the early twentieth century. This was implemented during the colonial era from 1927 to 1946. It seems that nationalistic ideas that existed during this time influenced the structure of the shrine and the visualisation of its paintings and sculptures. In the design of the new Kelani Vihara, there is a complete suppression of the previous temple styles, such as Kandyan and colonial Architecture. Here, there are differences in the form and theme of the exterior sculptures of traditional temple designs. This shrine has many paintings related to Sri Lankan history along with convent paintings of the Lord Buddha's life story, and there were many Hindu god figures, provincial god figures, various animal symbols, flora fauna decorations and endemic god figures unique to Kelani Vihara. The form of all these sculptures depicts a change from previous styles. Also, the form of the sculptures has been inspired by the Hindu idols built in ancient Indian architecture and the sculptures created outside the Thivanka statue. Moreover, this style replaces the popular contemporary style of M. Sarlis's sculpture and creates a new style. Therefore, the research question of this project investigates the difference in theme selection, form and style of his project, and whether there is any influence from the contemporary social and political situation on these differences. The purpose of this is to study the thematic and stylistic innovations of this Vihara project, to identify the social and political influence that affected it, and to examine the patronage and creative roles of the Vihara project. The iconographical research methodology has been used to analyse these sculptures. As a primary source, the sculptures on the exterior of the new Kelani Vihara were studied. Books, journals, and research articles have been studied under secondary sources.

Keywords: Solias Mendis, Colonial era, New Kelaniya Viharaya, Sculpture, Iconographic