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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*. “*Damsaṅgagūṇagehi 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 *Mihindu* 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 worshipping 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*