

The influence of the western painting traditions on southern coastal drawings of Sri Lanka

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The objective of this research is to pay special attention to the distinctive characteristics of the influence on paintings of the Southern coastal belt of Sri Lanka. Most of the Buddhist viharas and temples destroyed by Portuguese and Dutch in the southern coastal belt were reconstructed by King Keerthi Sri Rajasinghe with the patronage of the chief Buddhist priest Rev. Welivita Sri Saranankara Thero, during the late 19th century. Due to this renovation process, the Kandyan art tradition expanded towards the Buddhist viharas and temples of the Southern coastal belt of Sri Lanka. Although the art tradition of the paintings of the upcountry, Sabaragamuwa and the North-Western provinces was preserved by the paintings of the Southern coastal belt, the paintings evolved in the low country developed slightly different characteristics. The main theme of upcountry and southern painting tradition was the illustration of the incidents related to Jathaka stories. A common feature of the southern painting tradition was the application of a brilliant colour scheme in their paintings. Another special feature observed in their paintings was the enrichment of the spaces and the background with environmental objects. Special characteristics that were observed in the Buddhist paintings of the Southern coastal belt was that they had a keen influence of the painting tradition of the western world. It was noticed that during this period, the western religious, social and cultural influence had an impact on the painting tradition of viharas and temples of Sri Lanka. These characteristics could be observed in the paintings of the temples namely Mulkirigala, Shailabimbaramaya of Dodandoowa, Poorwaramaya of Kathaluwa, Thelwatta Rajamaha viharaya of Totagamawa, Samudragiri viharaya of Mirissa, Sunandaramaya of Ambalangoda, Kande viharaya of Aluthgama, Rajamaha viharaya of Kumarakanda and Rajamaha viharas of Kotte and Kelaniya. It could be concluded from the research that although the Southern tradition of paintings was as the evolution of the Kandyan painting tradition, the paintings of Buddhist viharas in the southern coastal belt depict mostly the western tradition of drawings. Books and articles related to literature on the tradition of art and paintings of Sri Lanka were associated along with the sources of the field study for this research.

Keywords: Western painting tradition, Renovation process, Southern painting tradition, Buddhist paintings, Kandyan painting tradition