THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY OF SRI LANKA

7th Research Conference
27th - 29th March 2014

ABSTRACTS

Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka
96, Ananda Coomaraswamy Mawatha
Sorombo 07, Sri Lanka
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Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka
96, Ananda Coomaraswamy Mawatha,
Colombo 07, Sri Lanka
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A Study of Dancing Figures in Low Country
Late Historical Paintings

A.U. Sudasinghe1 U. Hettige2

Sri Lanka has a long and rich tradition of paintings. Sri Lankan art is an expression of the long and enduring Buddhist tradition that has absorbed and internalised numerous regional and local traditions. The main painting traditions in the southern or maritime tradition in 17th -19th century were examined as a prelude to the study. Although the southern school has many general features in common with the central Kandyan tradition, it has an artistic expression of its own. According to the definitions given in the Sinhala-English Dictionary, Vishwakosha and Sumangala Shabdhakosha, Nurthiyanga (Nurthi-Dance, Anga-movements), any dancing figure can be identified as Nurthiyanga. Charles Cater (1965) has identified a particular figure in dancing Nurthiyanga whereas Wejethunga (2003) has described Nurthiyanga as a different style in dancing. Therefore, any rhythmic dancing figure or style can be taken as a Nurthiyanga.

The objective of this study was to examine the dancing figures in low country late historical paintings. Three main sites selected for the study were Mirissa Samudragiri Viharaya, Telwatta Viharaya and Kathaluwa Purwarama Viharaya in the Galle district. Several dancing figures from these above mentioned sites were specially examined. Archaeological importance, the dancing tradition and the styles were studied. Most of the wall paintings on which the figures were painted displayed their own characteristic in the accessories, clothing and fashion.

All the above mentioned areas were analysed for each individual painting. An examination and evaluation of the pictorial tradition were made taking into consideration the historical period that they belonged to. Principal sources of the exclusive images were discussed in detail. In spite of the age of the paintings, they will furnish a stunning insight into the ingenuity and creativity of these painters.

Keywords: Nurthiyanga, Low Country, Dancing, Tradition, Styles.

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