

## Libraries in Sri Lanka in the Ancient Anuradhapura Period (250 BC – 1017 AD)

R.A.A.S. Ranaweera<sup>1</sup>, Piyadasa Ranasinghe<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

The origin of libraries in Sri Lanka is related to the introduction of Buddhism. Buddhism was formally introduced to Sri Lanka by Venerable *Mahinda*, in the third century B.C. during the reign of King *Devanampiyatissa*. The advent of Arahata Mahinda and Arahata Sangamimtha to Sri Lanka during the ancient Anuradhapura era was considered as major landmarks in history. The art of literary work, educational and bibliographic activities began in the country with these two events.

Inauguration of libraries in Sri Lanka has a well-established connection with the introduction of Theravada Buddhism. Education was enriched by the influence of Buddhism during the *Anuradhapura* period (250 BC – 1017 AD). There were three main learning centers for monks in ancient Sri Lanka namely the *Mahavihara*, the *Abhayagiri* and the *Jetavana*. It is possible that these centers possessed repositories of books or simply known as libraries. Recorded evidence available in the *Mahawamsa* and *Chulawamsa* show that there had been large numbers of monastic libraries in ancient Sri Lanka but it is difficult to find evidence of these early types of libraries, except for the fact of their existence.

From literary evidences, it is very clear that the literary activities and libraries were maintained in an excellent manner during the ancient Anuradhapura period. Also there were extensive support were given from majority of kings who ruled the Anuradhapura kingdom with regard to development of libraries and literary activities.

The main objective of this research is to study the ancient libraries in the Anuradhapura period. This study adopts qualitative approach based on secondary data sources. Data were mainly collected through historical and archival information sources available in the National Archives Department and Museum Library.

*Keywords: Anuradhapura period, Monastic libraries, Libraries, Sri Lanka*

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<sup>1</sup> Assistant Librarian, Library, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka.

<sup>2</sup> Professor Department of Library & Information Sciences, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka.