Chapter two

Cultural and religious interactions between India and Sri Lanka during the ancient period

It is an accepted fact that geologically and palaeoecologically the island of Sri Lanka is essentially a detached piece of the Deccan, the Jaffna peninsula of northern part of the island lying within 20 miles of Cape Cormorin across the shallow Palk strait. This is particularly evident by the fact that the Sri Lankan island of Mannar off the northwest coast almost joins the mainland by a chain of sandy islets of Adam’s bridge. In addition, the occurrence of submerged river channels, cutting across the continental shelf which separates north-west Sri Lanka from India, when considered in conjunction with the close similarity between the fresh water fish of the two countries also suggests that the island had been connected to India probably in Holocene times. The faunal evidence including both extinct and present-day animal species as well as evidence from geology of both Sri Lanka and India on the other hand suggest that the island was first separated from India during the Miocene epoch. This happened in the very early period that has been termed the Ratnapura phase in Sri Lankan prehistory and was probably contemporary with one or more of the Himalayan glaciations, which were in all probability, accompanied by a general drop in temperature and of the mean sea level. Hence, most probably this first

separation occurred in the Miocene when the sea invaded the mainland between the regions of present-day Madras and Puttalam, thus severing the southeast extremity of the peninsula and making of it a continental island. This disjunction was in fact momentary because of land fluctuation that was the primary influential factor in the geography of the region.

However, given this geographical proximity of Sri Lanka and India and their long historical association, cultural links are in the natural order of things. This is evident by the fact that any major upheaval in India, whether political, religious or cultural was bound to generate repercussions in Sri Lanka eventually. Consequently, it is obvious that Sri Lanka is both an island and a part of the Indian sub-continent. The interplay of these two factors has been important in forming its character. Therefore, scholars of history, culture, art, religion, language and human biology of the island are frequently asked to assess the nature and extent of bio cultural relationships between Sri Lanka’s ancient and modern peoples and their contemporaries in India. Unfortunately, both these questions and their answers have been interpreted in the light of political theories, nationalism and an ethnocentric basis, even sometimes by persons belonging to the academic and research oriented disciplines.

It is hence apparent that there has been a great deal of historical writing on the subject of Indo-Sri Lankan relationship in the ancient period. But, it is significant that a majority of scholars have emphasised Indian political impact on Sri Lanka, while some have focused attention on the cultural relations of the two countries. In almost all these

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4 The faunal evidence suggests that this last separation had occurred about 25,000 years ago. Ibid pp.2-3.
writings, relevant details on the subject, particularly on the cultural relations of the two countries, have been discussed according to information obtained from the ancient Sri Lankan and Indian literary texts and very little attention has been given to the archaeological evidence, especially that revealed by recent archaeological excavations. It is obvious that the story is incomplete without focus on the evidence revealed by such excavations, since there are many apparent imperfections in the descriptions given in these literary sources and sometimes even in the epigraphical evidence too. It is to be noted at this point that these literal interpretations of early texts were compiled centuries after the events they report and personal memory has difficulty with intervals of time and the sequence of happenings.6

Nevertheless, it should also not be forgotten that a chronologically detailed and coherent history of cultural interactions of the two countries cannot be presented with the help of archaeological evidence alone. Hence, in this chapter a synthesis of both the literary and archaeological sources is being attempted. In contrast, it is significant that not only the descriptions given in the ancient literary works but also in recent scholarly interpretations, the cultural relations between the two countries have often been presented as an one way movement in the direction of Sri Lanka.7 On the contrary, quite a different picture has been demonstrated by the recent archaeological findings. Therefore, it is appropriate to start this analysis with an introduction of early historical settings of the island, as revealed by recent archaeological excavations.

Prehistory of Sri Lanka:

Apart from the various interpretations of historians, archaeologists and anthropologists on ancient Sri Lanka, it is evident that recent archaeological excavations in the island have provided a more reliable radiometric chronology of the prehistoric age of the country based on several radiocarbon dates on charcoal from the caves of Fa-Hien, Kitulgala, and Batadombalena all in the lowland or wet zone. Of these, the Fa-Hien cave has yielded a series of three dates ca. 34,000-31,000 BP; and another three for the upper contexts ca. 7900-5400 BP. Human remains were found at least in the context dated to ca. 31,000 BP and could well represent one of the earliest assemblages of anatomically modern man known to science.

The Kitulgala Belilena comprises 25 dates, from older than 27,000 upto ca. 3400 BP. It was reported that an excellent series of human skeletal remains was found from there dated to ca. 13,000 BP. Batadombalena has provided a series of ten dates from ca.

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28,500 to 12,500 BP for the earlier range at Kitulgala. The occurrence of bone points throughout the sequence is noteworthy and the beads (on shell) from ca. 28,500-16,000 BP constitute some of the earliest specimens of bone points and beads known from anywhere in the world. Besides, a very satisfactory sample of human remains was also found in the cave and one assemblage-dated ca. 28,500 BP represents the oldest anatomically modern humans (Homo Sapiens) known from south Asia. In addition, in the lower most levels of the caves were found geometric microliths, the earliest occurrence of this type of tools in south Asia. Interestingly enough in India, charcoal from microlithiferous deposits has yielded a radiocarbon date of 10,645-9654 years BP at Baghor II in the Son valley of north-central India, though Todd had recognised the similarity of Sri Lankan microliths to those of peninsular India nearly fifty years ago.

In contrast, it is clear that all these three caves of Fa-hien, Kitulgala and Batadombalena are exceptional in south Asia in having yielded large quantities of organic remains from the upper Pleistocene and much can be expected from their interpretation. Of such explanations, probably the most fascinating interpretation is that there is no doubt that technologically the Mesolithic assemblages date back at least to ca.

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28,500 BP in the island although the date of original settlement is unknown.\textsuperscript{18} But, it is interesting to note that quite a different story is told in the ancient literary sources of Sri Lanka. These suggest that the earliest habitation of the island was at Anuradhapura in the dry zone, under the leadership of Vijaya, a north Indian prince and his followers somewhere in the sixth century BC as will be discussed later. Hence, at this point it is necessary to examine the chronology and the specific features of the early habitations of Anuradhapura region (certainly, where the earliest centre of power of the island was) as revealed by the recent archaeological explorations. Interestingly enough archaeologists suggest that about six or seven thousand years ago Anuradhapura was inhabited by Mesolithic Balangoda man, the ancestor of the present day Vedda aborigine,\textsuperscript{19} instead of this so-called first Indian colonisation of the island in the sixth century BC. This has been confirmed by the fact that the artefacts from phase 1 of Gedige of the citadel of Anuradhapura are assignable to the Mesolithic Balangoda culture, which has been dated to ca. 4500 BC.\textsuperscript{20} In addition, it is noteworthy that according to Deraniyagala’s interpretation, the periodisation of history of Anuradhapura region and the conspicuous characteristics based on calibrated dates obtained from the five sites of Gedige (1986) Dingiribandagewatta (1987/88) Salgahawatta (1988) Mahapali Hall (1988) and

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\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, p.159. In fact, the Balangoda culture comprises the Mesolithic and Neolithic phases of Sri Lanka’s stone age. The two C14 dates obtained for the culture are suggesting that Balangoda man had survived well into the historic period, which commenced ca. 500 BC. S Deraniyagala, “Prehistoric Ceylon: A summary in 1968,” \textit{Ancient Ceylon}, Vol.1, January 1971, p.25.
Sanghamitta Mawata (1989), all located in the ancient citadel of Anuradhapura is as follows:

The earliest phase: Ca. 3900 BC, Mesolithic with geometric microliths; in certain respects, the Sri Lankan Mesolithic was comparatively more highly developed than its mainland counterparts and Allchin interprets this as evidence of a long period of relatively uninterrupted cultural development. However, the absence of rapid cultural modifications taking place in Sri Lanka, as was the case in south India after 2,500 BC, till the fifth century BC, led many scholars writing in the 40s and 50s to regard the island as a cultural backwater whose inhabitants lacked initiative in cultural progress because of withdrawal of competitive factors.

The second period: Undated Mesolithic and Iron age transition, it is noteworthy since the stone tools found in association with Iron Age burials at Pomparippu have been interpreted as being in secondary contexts. The suppression of stone tool technology with that of iron appears to have been a rapid process, thereby leaving few discernible vestiges of this transition in the archaeological record.

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The third period: Protohistoric Iron Age ca. 900–600 BC; is distinguished by the appearance of iron technology, wheel made pottery, horse and domestic cattle and paddy cultivation. It is interesting to note that the excavations in the citadel of Anuradhapura since 1984 have vindicated the assertion that there was indeed a town, if not a city, in Anuradhapura by 700-600 BC during the protohistoric iron age. The sondages have revealed substantive evidence of an area of at least 50 ha being encompassed by the citadel at this date.

The fourth period: The dawn of the historical period ca. 600-500 BC was marked by the use of an early Brahmi script in Anuradhapura region, which will be discussed later in detail. In addition, two ceramic traits also occur for the first time. Consequently, it is hypothesised that the occurrence of the Brahmi script and these ceramic traits are linked in some manner to a nonessential cultural impulse which reached the island during this period and it is tempting to see a connection with the legend of Vijaya (so-called first colonisation of the island) an event attributed to the sixth century BC.

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The fifth period: Lower early historic ca. 500-250 BC; No specimens of scripts have been recorded from this period at any site of Anuradhapura, though the Brahmi script found on a seal at Anaikkoddai could be of this period. Nevertheless, contact with the Ganga valley is evidenced by the occurrence of Northern Black Polished ware in this period.31 Although the cultural interactions of the two regions are not obvious, it is to be noted that the early historic sites in southern India have radiocarbon dates which fall within the range of this period at Anuradhapura: e.g. Kanchipuram at ca. 500 BC and Amaravati at 400 BC.32

The sixth period: Mid early historical period ca. 250 BC to 100 AD: Historically this period is relatively well documented both by literary and epigraphical records with extensive evidence of close cultural interaction with the Mauryan Empire.33

The seventh period: Upper early historic age ca. 100-300 AD was when burnt brick achieved prominence, at least in the citadel of Anuradhapura. Coins also tended to be rather numerous in this era. In addition, this upper early historic period indicates the

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use of Red Polished Ware, Sassanian blue glazed roof-tiles and evidence of trans-oceanic contact as in frequent finds of Roman and Indo-Roman coins.  

The eighth period: Middle historical ca. 300-1250 witnessed the commencement of the final devolution of the civilisation of ancient Sri Lanka.

In contrast, it is clear that particularly Sri Lanka’s prehistory, most recently investigated in comprehensive studies, differs significantly from that of the heartlands of continental Asia. For instance, Sri Lankan archaeological record shows no evidence of occupation by early man or other hominids from a period earlier than the late Pleistocene and lacks the typical chopper or hand-axe cultures associated with earlier phases of the prehistory of the subcontinent. Similarly, in later phases, Sri Lanka shows no clear indication at present of a pre-iron age development of agriculture or of the existence of a specific stone tool assemblage associated with such a transition. Instead, we find an apparently rapid and scarcely investigated transition from a monolithic or late stone age hunter-gatherer culture to iron age farming, with no intervening stage of ‘Neolithic’ ‘Chalcolithic ‘or ‘Bronze age’ developments.

Nevertheless, it is obvious that conventional historical writing has often asserted that the initial colonisation of Sri Lanka by civilised man was effected by Aryan speakers from northern India and that contact was subsequently established with the south.

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somewhere in the sixth century BC, which will be discussed later in detail. But, the archaeological evidence presented above clearly indicates that this was not the case and these stories of first colonisation of the island provide us with a series of problems arising from their interpretation for historical and archaeological works though it is obvious that the archaeological record so far throws very little light on these processes. According to these investigations, it is however, certain that human habitation in Sri Lanka dates to at least 31,000 BP with increasing evidence of internal complexity and cultural developments. In addition, the data obtained from pioneering excavations such as those at the Anuradhapura Gedige, Kantarodei and Pomparippu and research on the megalithic burial complexes and pottery sequences of the protohistoric and early historic period, give us an insight into similarities and differences between the Sri Lankan and the subcontinental developments, in the second half of the first millennium BC, though these do not go very far in solving the major problems of Sri Lankan protohistory.

41 Though etymologically the word Megalithic is composed of two Greek words Megathos, meaning huge and Lithoii meaning stone, neither all megaliths are built of huge stones; nor can all structures built of enormous-sized stones be called megalith. Megaliths are indeed built of stones, but their prime characteristic is that they are sepulchral in nature. See KR Srinivasan and NR Banerjoe, “Survey of south Indian Megaliths,” Ancient India, No.9, Special Jubilee Number, 1953, p.108. It is noteworthy that though the megaliths do not follow the same pattern even at the same site and are marked by structural differences, they have definite common features, which make all of them representative of one common culture, i.e. the megalithic culture. The common features consists of the use of iron implements, which at least at one site, viz. Brahmagiri in India, was an intrusion into the earlier stone axe culture which it ultimately supplanted, the wheel-turned black and red ware and post-excarvation fragmentary and collective burials. Ibid, p.115.
However, it is to be admitted at this point that if the early man of the island originally migrated from India, then it is natural to expect contemporaneous Indian and Sri Lanka prehistoric people to possess striking points of similarity. Interestingly enough, it becomes immediately apparent to any researcher of the Mesolithic and Iron Age archaeology of Sri Lanka and peninsular India that similarities in form and function of tool manufacture are shared across the region. The same degree of similarity is reflected in the ceramic artefacts of the megalithic and early historic periods, a black and red ware being predominant in association with megalithic deposits in both countries.

Nevertheless, it is to be noted that particularly the megalithic burial complex and the Iron Age cannot be separated in the context of peninsular India. In fact, most of our knowledge about the Iron Age comes from burial sites. The dating of the Iron Age also hinges upon the dating of the burial complex, which is quite widespread over south India. However, a recent study, which has evaluated carefully all the accumulated evidence, puts the beginning of the Megalithic culture to c 1200 BC and the terminal date around 300 BC after which there occurs the Brahmi writing. But, it is noteworthy that in most of the sites, potsherds with Brahmi writing appear very early in the cultural deposits, if not from the beginning itself. In addition it is evident that the Tamil literature of early centuries AD

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is also quite familiar with the megalithic and urn burials. These facts obviously raise a problem regarding the dating of the megalithic burials.

However, it is evident that the Prakrit names, though not many, have parallels in Sri Lankan rock inscriptions of the contemporary centuries. Hence, some have concluded that this would suggest that Kodumanal, an active industrial settlement for semi-precious stone bead making and also for iron working was involved in long distance trade. Interestingly enough some archaeologists have also suggested that most of the beads found at the megalithic sites like Ibbankatuva of Sri Lanka (ca. 770-350 BC) were imported from India. In addition, it is believed that the Pomparippu burial ware and the ceramics of Gedige of Anuradhapura generally adhere to the forms and shapes of the early Iron Age ware in peninsular India, though the quality of production and the range of the Megalithic ware in Sri Lanka cannot parallel the standard of its counterpart in the peninsula. Thus, it is evident that as far as megalith burials of peninsular India and Sri Lanka are concerned, these seem to belong to a common cultural tradition, sharing almost all the cultural traits including the chronological span. Due to all these facts, it is

48 Y Subbarayalu, Trends in archaeology of Tamil Nadu, Presidential Address, Association for the study of history and archaeology, Third session, Calcutta, February 26-28, 1999, p.5.
presumed that the megalithic monuments of Sri Lanka can be understood only in the light of their archaeological parallels on the Indian mainland since a single megalithic zone is apparent to many scholars.\textsuperscript{53} Consequently, some scholars have suggested that it is fairly certain that the burial culture of northwest Sri Lanka received its impetus from the urn-cairn burial complex in the Vaigai-Tambapanni plains of south India and it is also quite likely that the cist burials in north central Sri Lanka may have received its impetus from the primary cist burial complex extending from Pudukkotai (Tamilnadu) to the Chittor area in south Andhra Pradesh.\textsuperscript{54}

Accordingly, the most pertinent question to raise at this point is are the Iron Age people of the island indigenous or are they derived primarily from iron using people coming from the mainland of India. Besides the remains of material culture of the period, the information revealed by the investigations on the skeletal remains at Pomparippu and Bellanbandipalassa is also very important in this regard, since it has been revealed that the Iron Age people of Pomparippu of Sri Lanka possessed some biological features establishing their probable affinities to south Indian community.\textsuperscript{55} Similarly, some level of biological affinity between the Stone Age people of Bellanbandipalassa and the Iron


Age people under consideration is especially noted with respect to genetically determined morphological traits. But, it should also not be forgotten that in comparing the skeletal remains of Balangoda man with those of people of Sinhalese, Tamil and Vedda descent, as well as with a number of specimens from India (tribal, rural and urban populations), it becomes apparent that most of the biological similarities that were found in the prehistoric Bellanbandipalassa specimens occurred in highest frequency among the tribal people of the island the Veddas.

However, according to all these evidences it is certain that some of the cultural features of the Iron Age India can be seen even in the contemporary Sri Lanka to a certain extent although it is not clear whether these people primarily migrated from contemporary India or they belong to an indigenous source. But, it is important to note at this point that megalithic structures closely similar to some of those of the Indian peninsula have been found even in other parts of Asia, Africa and Europe too. The possibility of an integral unity of ideas and expression over a large part of the earth’s surface from 2,000 to 4,000 years ago lends to the enquiry an unusual potential importance. Hence, it is interesting to note that apart from neighbouring India, the material from the earlier historic sites in Sri Lanka, such as Bellanbandipalassa does show an intriguing resemblance to the materials from Hoabinhian sites in southeast Asia.

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also, though the results of archaeological investigations of the possible presence and influence of southeast Asian peoples in Sri Lanka during the prehistoric and early historic times was largely negative.

However, in contrast, it seems that at least the cultural associations between the inhabitants of Sri Lanka and India are very ancient and have been continuous since prehistoric times, the geomorphology of the region permitting a relatively free flow of peoples and their cultures. Consequently, the general view is that a society of advanced, socially differentiated, literate, iron using, farmers was superimposed upon an earlier population of microlithic using stone age hunter gatherers of the island and that this took place mostly through processes of migration and implantation rather than through internal development. But, in fact, we do not know exactly when and how the development of the earliest food production took place and who were the people responsible for it. The main question that we cannot answer yet is whether the first agriculturists were longstanding inhabitants of the island or one or more waves of migrants or some combination of the former and the later. The one thing that is certain is that they were the ancestors of the present day Sri Lankans and that they had passed through early phases and perhaps some incipient aspects of later phase sometime before the third century BC. Accordingly,

60 For instance, the typical known tools of the Southeast Asian extensionistic period (about 8000 to 1 BC) are ground and polished stone adzes, but nothing like these tools was seen in Sri Lanka. Certainly, only two or three polished stone tools are known from Sri Lanka and these are also not at all similar to Southeast Asian tools. Wilhelm G Solheim, “Archaeological Survey to investigate Southeast Asia prehistoric presence in Ceylon,” *Ancient Ceylon*, No.1, August 1972, p.7.
whether these cultural attributes were all introduced together following the so-called early colonisation of the island, as described by the early historical records of Sri Lanka or derived from the more gradual separate transference of the technologies of these individual cultural attributes awaits further intensive archaeological investigation and scientific chronological refinement.

It is, however, evident that some of the cultural developments had close parallels with those taking place on the Indian mainland at least from the early historical period onwards. For example, the sixth period of the Citadel of Anuradhapura mentioned above represents a cultural efflorescence, characterised by the introduction of coinage and use of Brahmi scripts, which has been ascribed to Mauryan influence commencing ca. 250 BC. It is also evident that there was an apparent transformation in the social organisation, which was marked by the formal introduction of Buddhism. Similarly, there was substantial urban growth at Anuradhapura, based on tank irrigation, monumental architecture with burnt brick and a stratified society.\textsuperscript{63} In addition, major developments in technology, in methods of using iron, food production and a general efflorescence in the entire cultural assemblage appear in the archaeological record, although the available data and its interpretation are still scanty.

**Historic periods:**

It is thus evident that the clearest and the most dramatic developments in early Sri Lankan history are those of the first phase of the historical period, from ca. third century

\textsuperscript{63} Senaka Bandaranayake, "The periodisation of Sri Lankan history and some related historical and archaeological problems," *Asian panorama: Essays in Asian history, past and present*, ed. KM De Silva and others, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1990, pp.11-12; Sudarshan Senaviratna, "Iron technology in
BC to first century AD and not the sixth century BC, as suggested in traditional writings for the so-called first Indian colonisation of the island. Nevertheless, the information provided by the excavation at Mahapali Hall of Anuradhapura (1988) is quite discordant with this decision since some archaeologists have concluded that the discovery of writing in Brahmi script\textsuperscript{64} on five sherds (belonging to five different pots) is significant for the periodisation of the sub-continent\textsuperscript{65} and these have been dated to a very early period than the generally accepted dates. Since the use of an alphabet in association with a language is unquestionably an indication of an important change in any society, this discovery of the Brahmi script has to be discussed in detail.

So far it was generally accepted that the earliest Brahmi stone inscription found in Sri Lanka that can be dated with certainty, was discovered at Mihintale very close to Anuradhapura where the earliest centre of administration of the island was located. The king Gamani Uti appearing in this inscription can be definitely identified as king Uttiya (207-197 BC), the successor of Devanampiyatissa who was a contemporary of emperor Asoka.\textsuperscript{66} Many Brahmi inscriptions have been recorded during the subsequent periods and these earliest writings in Sri Lanka record grants of caves to the Buddhist monks by pious individuals. It is conspicuous that these earliest Brahmi scripts are, on the whole, palaeographically similar to that of the edicts of Asoka,\textsuperscript{67} records found on the railings at

\textsuperscript{64} These belong to the above-mentioned fourth period.


Bharhut and Sanchi; and some of the other early Prakrit inscriptions discovered in northern India. Hence some have suggested that the art of writing and a readymade alphabet came from Mauryan India with the Buddhist missionaries to the island in the third century BC.

In this context, the statements by Deraniyagala are important since his chronology on the early Sri Lankan script is quite different from that of the others. According to the findings of the Brahmi script on pottery at the excavation site at Mahapali hall of the early Mauryan period, the inscription of Mahastan stone plaque inscription, Piprava Buddhist vase inscription (483 BC), Badhi inscription (443 BC) etc. suggest that the Brahmi syllabary was introduced into South India about six centuries BC, when the first Aryan speaking people migrated to the island from north India about six centuries BC, they brought with them a knowledge of the writing. PEE Fernando, “The beginnings of Sinhala alphabet,” Education in Ceylon: A centenary volume, Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs, Sri Lanka, 1969, p.20; G. Buhler, Indian palaeography, Second edition, Calcutta, 1962, p.33. Similarly, some others believe that the Brahmi alphabet had several centuries of development behind it in the time of Asoka, since the literary sources indicate that writing, probably at its inception, was known by the Vedic Aryans in India ca. 1000 BC. RB Pandey, Indian palaeography, Benaras, 1952, pp.6-14; S Paranavitana, Inscriptions of Ceylon, Department of Archaeology, Colombo, Vol.I, 1970, p.xxii; KV Saundararajan, “Pre-Asokan writing in India,” The origin of Brahmi script, ed. SP Gupta and KS Ramachandran, DK Publishers, Delhi, 1979, pp.54-66. In addition, there a few inscriptions of preAsokan period is also available in India. For instance, Mahastan stone plaque inscription, Piprava Buddhist vase inscription (483 BC), Badhi inscription (443 BC) etc. See TV Mahalingam, Early south Indian palaeography, University of Madras, 1967, pp.105-106. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that at least during the subsequent period a parallel to the early Brahmi inscriptions of Sri Lanka is offered by some Brahmi records discovered in South India also, occurring in a series of caves found in Trichinopoly, Madurai and Tinnacvelly all in the Pandyan country. (For the accounts of these inscriptions please refer to Progress Report of the Assistant Archaeological Superintendent for Epigraphs, Southern Circle, 1907, p.46; 1911-12, p.57; 1928, p.1. For further details of these similarity please refer to PEE Fernando, “Palaeographical development of the Brahmi script in Ceylon from third century BC to seventh century AD,” University of Ceylon Review, Vol.VII, No.2, 1949, pp.282-301) It is generally believe that in the third or second century BC, the Brahmi syllabary was introduced into Tamil Nadu area. See A descriptive catalogue of palm leaf manuscripts in Tamil, Institute of Asian Studies, Madras, Vol.I, Part I, 1990. Introduction, p.x. Accordingly, though it is debatable some have suggested that the early Brahmi inscriptions of Sri Lanka confirm the existence of cultural influences not only from north Indian region but also from South India during the early historical period. Sudarshan Senaviratna, “The...
Anuradhapura he concludes that the associated cultural assemblage indicates unequivocally that the use of the script dates to the transition from the Protohistoric to the early historic period and hence these assignable to the basal early historic i.e. pre-Asokan period.\textsuperscript{70} He further concludes in this regard that it is highly unlikely that five such specimens derived from five different vessels could have been found in such close association unless there was a functional relationship between these artefacts and their matrix. The latter appeared homogeneous enough so as to preclude the possibility of the sherds intruding en bloc from an overlying context.\textsuperscript{71} It is hence tempting to see a connection between this archaeological evidence and the legend of Vijaya and his followers as enunciated in the Mahayavamsa an event attributed to the sixth century BC.\textsuperscript{72} Thus, it is hypothesised that the co-ovality in the first occurrence of Brahmi and the two ceramic traits is linked in some manner to an extraneous cultural impulse that reached Sri Lanka during this period.

It is remarkable that the finds of Sri Lanka-British excavation team also confirms the usage of Brahmi script in this pre-Asokan period in the island. According to the information revealed by the excavation at the site of Salgahawatta in the citadel of Anuradhapura, the early historic period (this has been termed as period J) represents 450-350 BC\textsuperscript{73} and from this stratum, they have found four potsherds scratched with portions archaeological of the megalithic black and red ware complex in Sri Lanka,” \textit{Ancient Ceylon}, Vol.V, 1984, pp.237-307.


\textsuperscript{71} Ibid, p.272. For the plates of these Brahmi scripts please refer to p.290.


\textsuperscript{73} They have presented these details thoroughly following the period names and numbers employed by Deraniyagala in 1990. RAE Coningham and FR Allchin, “The rise of cities in Sri Lanka,” \textit{The archaeology
of Brahmi inscriptions cut in ill formed but nonetheless convincing letters. As they have reported, the earliest indication comes from the first phase of this period, but it is only a single letter; other examples come from later phases; while the first fragment of a full inscription occurs in the uppermost fourth and fifth phases. This would indicate that the use of writing began some two centuries earlier than the first datable inscriptions of south Asia. Hence, it can be reasonably concluded that the Brahmi script began to be used in Sri Lanka at least a century or two before the rise of the Mauryan empire and perhaps as early as three centuries before the traditional date for the introduction of Buddhism into the island. Certainly, as its earliest manifestations indicate, Brahmi shows some variations from the Brahmi script of the Mauryan period, not least in the comparative irregularity, not to say ungainliness of some of its letters. However, the language of these early inscriptions is perhaps, unexpectedly in this setting, a typical north Indian Prakrit.

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74 Ibid, pp.162-163. See p.62 also.

75 Ibid, p.176. The inscriptions are found on sherds of local pottery, being throughout scratched with a sharp point after firing and as such almost all are incomplete. Further, they are also regrettably short. None of those discovered in Salgahawatta to date is of more than six syllables and many consist of only one or two syllables. There can however be little doubt that these single or double letters or symbols are parts of an inscription and are not to be confused with a second series of signs that are less certainly letters. The script in all cases appears to be an early stage of the Indian Brahmi alphabet. With one or two problematic exceptions the language where enough letters are present to make identification possible, appears to be Prakrit that is an early middle Indo-Aryan language rather than a Dravidian or other language. RAE Coningham and FR Allchin, "The rise of cities in Sri Lanka," The archaeology of early historic South Asia: The emergence of cities and states, FR Allchin, Cambridge University Press, London, 1995, pp.176-178. However, it is noteworthy that contemporary inscriptions on potsherds are known from Indian subcontinent too. See SU Deraniyagala, "Radiocarbon dating of early Brahmi script in Sri Lanka 600-500 BC," Ancient Ceylon, Vol.V, No.11, 1990, p.159.

76 FR Allchin, The archaeology of early historic South Asia: The emergence of cities and states, FR Allchin, Cambridge University Press, London, 1995, p.336. It is to be noted that despite this appearance of Brahmi inscription, the remaining features of the material culture stay on largely as in the previous period. Ibid, pp.162-163. See also p.62.
Thus, although the history of Brahmi script of Sri Lanka goes at least as far back as the sixth or fifth century BC, it is evident that these few Brahmi letters on potsherds and even Brahmi inscriptions of the early historical period of Sri Lanka which belong to the third century BC do not contain much information on the cultural history or the interactions of the two countries, since their epigraphic style is nearly always the same; some inscriptions contain only three words of the cave of so and so, others contain also the title of the donor and of his father and a dedication to the priesthood. Nevertheless, taken along with the Sri Lankan Chronicles these early Brahmi inscriptions of the island provide valuable confirmation of information recorded in literature and sometimes even supply new information on them. In addition, particularly on some aspects of cultural history of the island they fill gaps left by the chroniclers and they have the further advantage that they are contemporary records to the events.

According to the descriptions given in ancient literature, there was a quite different, but rather close intercourse between India and Sri Lanka from very early periods. Although this is mentioned by Sri Lankan literary sources, hardly any Indian treatise has left an account of this connection. Thus, incidental references are to be found in some works such as the Ramayana, Lamkavatara Sutra, Divyavadana, Rajatarangani, Jatakas and in the Tamil treatises of south India such as the Silappadikaram, Manimekalei, Pattinappalai and the Padirrupattu etc of the various periods. It is noteworthy that aside from these literary sources, with the rise of the first Pandyan empire in south India and

78 It is to be noted at this point that judging by these standards, the literary sources have obvious limitations as a source for the earliest period of Sri Lankan history – that covered by the Brahmi inscriptions. In fact, it shares almost all the weaknesses of a literary source.
gradual entanglement of Sri Lanka in the politics of the south Indian region, few epigraphical records of the Pandyas and the Cholas also contain references to the political fortunes of the island. Hence, it is clear that even in these epigraphical sources of south India were also mainly focussed on political events than cultural affairs of the two countries. Besides, a few inscriptions such as at Bodh Gaya and Nagarjunakonda that will be discussed later are important to this study since these are basically religious in character.

On account of this apparent scarcity of information from India, it is clear that more attention has to be given to the details supplied by the Sri Lankan chroniclers when examining the cultural interactions of the two countries during the ancient period. When considering these historical writings of early Sri Lanka, it has to be realised at first that these have been entirely the works of Buddhist monks. Among such works the three early Pali treatises, the Dipavamsa, the Mahavamsa and the introduction to the Samantapasadika, the commentary to the Vinaya Pitaka of the Pali canon are the main sources of history of the island during the earliest period. In fact, these are not the earliest records of the history of Sri Lanka, nor can these be understood apart from the traditions that lie behind them and the other works based upon them. In this context, it is evident that these were for a long time handed down by word of mouth. As Geiger correctly pointed out, these works were in addition closely related to one another, drew upon a source, now lost, which has been termed variously as Poranattakatha, Sihalattakatha or simply

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Porana. The various references suggest an earlier source, thought to be an historical introduction that was part of the old Sinhalese commentaries to the Buddhist canonical works.

Of these literary works, the earliest remaining record of the historical tradition of the island is the *Dipavamsa* compiled by an unknown author or authors and completed about the middle of the fourth century AD. It is conspicuous that being unused to the language, they wrote in inelegant, halting Pali verses. The so-called “memory verses” the double versions of some events and the numerous repetitions clearly show that it is very close to the original source though containing some legends.

According to the chronological order, the next document is the introduction of the *Samantapasadika*, which was compiled by the famous Buddhist commentator Buddhaghosa. It is believed that this was written in the twenty-first reigning year of Sirinivasa and he has been identified from the inscriptive and other evidence as king Mahanama of the *Mahavamsa* (406-428 AD). The descriptions given in the introduction of the *Samantapasadika* deal only with the history of the island’s Buddha Sasana from the beginning up to the event of the death of Mahinda thero sometime in the third century BC. Its main aim was to establish the authority of the *Vinaya* and therefore it does not deal with the subsequent history of the island in detail.
According to general acceptance, the most important literary work is the Mahavamsa by Mahanama.\textsuperscript{88} No doubt portions of the treatise that deal with the ancient period may be important as an example of ancient historiography.\textsuperscript{89} Although scholars like Geiger,\textsuperscript{90} Malalasekara,\textsuperscript{91} Adikaram\textsuperscript{92} and Mendis\textsuperscript{93} have studied the chronology, authorship and the sources of the Mahavamsa in detail, neither they nor the others have had the last word regarding the date and authorship of the Mahavamsa.\textsuperscript{94} Nevertheless, Paranavitana identifies therà Mahanama as the author of the Mahavamsa, who received from Moggallana I the temple founded by the latter at Sigiriya.\textsuperscript{95}

It has been generally assigned to the period of sixth century AD,\textsuperscript{96} but it can be argued that it is an even later work.\textsuperscript{97} However, it is certain that this was not compiled all at once, for it exists in four recognisable sections. Of them, only the first two compilations that cover the period of ancient history of the country are relevant to this study. The first part that consists of the first thirty-seven chapters is commonly known as the Mahavamsa.


\textsuperscript{90} W Geiger, The Dipavamsa and Mahavamsa, tr. EM Coomaraswamy, Government Printer, Colombo, 1908.

\textsuperscript{91} Vamsattappakasini, ed. GP Malalasekara, Pali Text Society, London, 1935.

\textsuperscript{92} EW Adikaram, Early history of Buddhism in Ceylon, Gunasena, Colombo, Second impression, 1953.

\textsuperscript{93} GC Mendis, “Pali Chronicles of Ceylon,” University of Ceylon Review, Vol.IV, 1946.


\textsuperscript{96} W Geiger, Mahavamsa (ed.), Pali Text Society, London, 1912, p.xii.
and the rest of the chronicle is usually referred to as the Culavamsa. According to the references given in the Vamsattappakasini, the commentary on the Mahavamsa, also written in Pali not earlier than the end of seventh century AD and dated as being compiled between the eighth and the twelfth centuries, the text is a translation into elegant Pali of the historical material in the Poranattakata or ancient commentaries of the dwellers of the Mahavihara in Anuradhapura. Thus, it is clear that there existed an older Mahavamsa in Sinhalese prose, which was referred to as Sihalattakatha Mahavamsa and was included in the commentary variously referred to as Attakatha, Porana and Poranattakatha. It is believed that this early version of older Mahavamsa was placed on record very probably in the reign of Vattagamini Abhaya (89-77 BC) when the hitherto oral tradition of the Sinhalese commentaries was put to writing.

98 Since the author of the Culavamsa has started his work with the last verse of the Mahavamsa, it is obvious that the former is continued the latter that stopped at the end of the reigning period of Mahasena of the fourth century AD. This continued up to the reign of Parakramabahu I of the twelfth century AD and it is conspicuous that with the sixty-second chapter, the author introduces a new method, and dealt with king Parakramabahu I in the manner in which Indian writers dealt with epic heroes, and reminiscent of the style in which the author of the Mahavamsa dealt with Duttagamini. LS Perera, "The sources of Ceylon history," University of Ceylon History of Ceylon, ed. HC Ray and others, Ceylon University Press, Colombo, Vol.I, Part I, 1959, p.52. It is an established fact that a Buddhist monk named Dhammakitti wrote this chronicle (Wilhelm Geiger, Culavamsa, ed. Pali Text Society, London, Vol.I, Introduction, p.iii) although some have attributed this to Moggallana who also wrote the Abhidanapradipika and lived during the reign of King Parakramabahu I. Yagirala Pannananda, Mahavamsa: The third part, Colombo, 1935, Introduction.
100 It is noteworthy that the Mahavihara was the seat of the orthodox, Hinayana doctrine, but after the foundation in 89 BC of the Abhayagiriya temple, which became the centre of the heterodox, tended to be Mahayana doctrine, its supremacy was often challenged.
101 Ibid, Introduction. It is to be noted at this point that the Attakatha or commentaries was a compilation maintained through the centuries till it took its final form containing historical material up to the time of Mahasena of the fourth century AD. It is evident that the Attakatha was available to the great Indian commentator Buddhaghosa when he visited Sri Lanka in the fifth century AD and to the author of the Vamsattappakasini. It may be concluded that the sources of the present Mahavamsa and the Atthakatha, were compiled almost contemporaneous with most of the events they relate and handed down orally in the Mahavihara until the first century BC when these oral traditions were placed on record. Ibid, Introduction.
102 Ibid, Introduction.
However, it is evident that the author of the Mahavamsa makes use of various literary devices such as puns and alliterations, and presents his material as a well-balanced whole. But, it is significant that the Mahavamsa is religious in its outlook even when describing secular matters. As a result, the strong didactic purpose running through it is summarised in the phrase that ends each chapter, "compiled for the serene joy and emotion of the pious." Thus, parts of it were no doubt read for the edification of the faithful. It is also obvious that this chronicle represents fourth and fifth century claims about Buddhists and the history of Anuradhapura region. Consequently, it reveals that the Buddhist connection is the major preoccupation of the early historiography of the island as far as an Indian cultural relation is concerned. This link is evident in attempts to show that not only is the last Buddha made to visit Sri Lanka, but three other previous Buddhas are also said to have sanctified the island with their presence, having come over from India. Accordingly, Sri Lanka's affinity to the Buddha is emphasised so much that it even includes a family connection between the Sakyan royal dynasty to which the Buddha belonged and the royal family of the island, a subject which has been dealt with in depth by some scholars. Consequently, it is significant that the history of Sri Lanka mentioned in these Pali works came to be closely linked with the history of Buddhism in the island too. For the fulfilment of this amalgamation, the history of Sri Lanka from its

earliest times up to the reigning period of Devanampiyatissa was added.\textsuperscript{107} It is further evident that materials were gathered from whatever traditions, legends or myths that were current to fulfilling the aspiration of the author.\textsuperscript{108} Ultimately, it is obvious that these Pali chronicles of Sri Lanka without doubt, added the descriptions reign by reign, so that no section can be said to actually date from the given period.

Thus, although certain imperfections can be noted among the descriptions given in these chronicles, it is noteworthy that a majority of these have been confirmed by the epigraphical records at least from the period of third century BC onwards when Brahmi inscriptions are available abundantly. But it is to be noted that according to the descriptions given in these ancient chronicles, the unbroken and detailed history of the island runs at least as far back as the incident of landing of Vijaya, a north Indian prince and his followers some time in the sixth century BC.\textsuperscript{109} But, some of the early historians

\textsuperscript{107} Consequently, it is evident that an examination of the reigning periods of the early kings of the island from the time of Vijaya's period shows that these were artificial creations. For instance, the nine kings of the earliest twelve are allotted round numbers. Of them, Pandukabhaya and Mutasiva are given impossible reigning periods (seventy and sixty years respectively). Besides, Pandukabhaya is born just before the death of his father Panduvasudeva. He ascends the throne at 37 and rules for 70 years until he is 107. His son Mutasiva is born of Suvannapali whom he married before he was twenty. Nevertheless, he, who must have been advanced in years at his accession, reigns for another sixty years. His second son Devanampiyatissa, who too must have been old at his accession, reigns for another thirty years and fourth brother reins for another ten years after Sena and Guttika. Thus, it is clear that no value can be attached to the chronology of Sri Lankan kings at least from the period of Vijaya to Elara's time. The reigning periods seem to have been artificially fixed to fill the gap between the death of Buddha and the reign of Duttagamini. GC Mendis, "The chronology of the early Pali Chronicles of Ceylon," University of Ceylon Review, Vol.V, pp.39-54. It should be noted at this point that there are two schools of thought, one following that there was an approximately 218 years' interval between the death of Buddha and the consecration of Asoka which took place 268 BC and the other chronology placing the interval between these two events about 100-110 years. See H. Bechert, "The date of the Buddha reconsidered," Indologia taurinensis, Vol.X, 1982, pp.29-36.


\textsuperscript{109} Mahavamsa, tr. W. Geiger, Pali Text Society, 1912, chap. 6; 37-47vv. According to this story given in the Mahavamsa in detail, the daughter of the king of Vanga runs away from the palace and joins a caravan heading for Magadha territory. Nevertheless, on the way, in the Lala country, the caravan is attacked by a lion and abducts this princess. Ultimately, from the union of the princess with the lion are born a son and a daughter named Sihabahu and Sihasivali. However, when the children grow up, they flee with their mother from the lion's den and reach the frontier region of their grandfather's kingdom. Here a relative who rules the frontier province befriends them. The lion ravages villages in his search for his offspring. Consequently,
Men dis, for instance, strongly suggested that it was a synthetic account, a product of the mind\(^{110}\) and dating not earlier than the first century BC. Certainly, a detailed examination of the Vijaya legend at least reveals that it was a creation after the introduction of Buddhism and was fashioned by adapting stories from the Jatakas and further embellishing them with details from others.\(^{111}\) Besides, the story of next three kings, Panduvasudeva, Abhaya and Pandukabhaya also seem to have been adopted mainly from the Jatakas and they have been further transformed with the object of connecting the royal dynasty of Sri Lanka on the one hand with the Pandavas, the heroes of the Mahabharata and on the other with the Sakayas, the clan of the Buddha.\(^{112}\) It is interesting to note at this point that the Vijaya story contains some elements that are discordant with the other stories given in the same chronicle too. For instance, during the first visit to the island, the son Sihabahu kills the further the lion. Ultimately, on the death of his grandfather, he is offered the kingdom of Vanga, but he prefers to found a kingdom with a new capital city, Sihapura where he reigns with his sister as his queen. They have sixteen pairs of twins. Vijaya, the eldest, is of violent disposition. He and his seven hundred followers harass the people. When the enraged people demand the Vijaya be put to death, the king exiles him, together with his followers. Their ship touches at Supparaka, but because of their misconduct, they are driven away again and finally they land in Sri Lanka. On the day of their arrival in Sri Lanka, the Buddha lay dying, but his thoughts were on the satiety of Vijaya and his followers. The Buddha assigns god Sakra to protect them and the letter sends the God Uppalavanna to the island. Ibid, chap. 6; 37-47 vv. Although the Dipavamsa also gives the same story in short (See, The Dipavamsa, ed. Hermann Oldenberg, London, 1879, chap.9, 1-8 vv), Mahavamsa added an extra event to the story i.e. the marriages of Vijaya to indigenous Kuveni and daughter of Pandyan princess of Madura etc. The story further says that the other women who accompanied the princess were married to the followers of Vijaya and consequently colonised the various parts of the island. (For the critical analysis of Vijaya story of Mahavamsa, refer to GC Mendis, “The Vijaya legend,” Paranavitana felicitation volume, ed. NA Jayawickrama, Colombo, 1965). Nevertheless, it is very interesting to note that this story was not the only description of the so-called first colonisation of the island of Sri Lanka, since Divyavadana presented another story, (Divyavadana, ed. E.B. Cowel and R.A. Neil, Cambridge, 1886, pp 523-529) and Huen Tsang described still another two stories almost different from the Vijaya legend given in the Sri Lankan chronicles. (S. Beal, Travels of Huen T’sang, Calcutta, Vol.IV, 1958, pp 435-442). However, it is interesting to note that this first so-called colonisation of “Merchant Simhala” to Sri Lanka given the “Simhala Avadana” is pictorially represented among the paintings of cave no 17 at Ajanta. J. Griffiths, The paintings in the Buddhist cave temples of Ajanta Khandesh, London, Vol.I, 1896, see p.38. This story is believed to be the landing of Vijaya. See DB Dhamapala, The story of Sinhalese painting, Saman Press, Maharagama, 1957, p.42).


Buddha is said to have expelled the inhabitants, the Yakkhas of the island to the Giritipetta though subsequently Vijaya and his followers find their kingdom in the island.\(^{113}\)

But it is to be noted that some scholars did not reject these traditional tales completely as non-history. Geiger, for instance, states that if we bear in mind the tenacity in the east of the traditions connected with certain localities, we cannot merely ignore such traditions, but should try to discover the kernel of historical truth that they contain.\(^{114}\) Beyond these limits, it is interesting that as for the Vijayan hypothesis, the so-called first colonisation of the island to popular and semi-scholarly belief, few more modern historians would disagree with the notion that the story is legendary,\(^{115}\) a myth of origin or charter of legitimisation. In addition, it is noteworthy that on the basis of Sri Lankan chronicles, the early Brahmi inscriptions and certain linguistic characteristic of the island, some other scholars believed that the credit of beginning the earliest civilised habitations has to be given to a group that arrived from northwest and east India.\(^{116}\)

It is interesting to note that though some recent historians have pointed out that the use of legend given in the chronicles was a political charter,\(^{117}\) some other contemporary historians believe that these can also be seen as a reflection of the cultural identities of the people, realistic or imaginary as the case may be. Accordingly, it is implicit in the legend of Vijaya who peopled the island is the belief that Sri Lankan culture owes its origins to

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\(^{112}\) Ibid, p.81.

\(^{113}\) See Mahavamsa, tr. W. Geiger, Pali Text Society, 1912, chap. 6.

\(^{114}\) W Geiger, Culture of Ceylon in medieval times, ed. Heinz Bechert, Wiesbaden, 1960, p.22.


Indian culture. The belief is the same when considering the recent works of archaeologists. For example, the above-mentioned earliest Brahmi scripts found on pottery at the excavation site of Mahapali hall of Anuradhapura has been assigned to the so-called first colonisation of the island by Deraniyagala.

Thus, it is clear that some of the historians as well as archaeologists still tend to accept the basic premise that civilisation in Sri Lanka had its origins in groups or waves of migrants from north India settling down in the island somewhere during the first millennium BC an amalgam of their Indo-Aryan dialects producing the early Sinhalese language. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that, in addition to the north Indian role, south India is also credited with playing an equal role in this so-called 'first colonisation' of the island since the story mentions the connection of a Pandyan princess. It is interesting to note that some archaeologists also believe that it is fairly certain that some cultural and political elements of protohistoric and early historic periods of Sri Lanka, particularly the megalithic culture received its impetus from south India, as we have already discussed above. But, in contrast, it is obvious that the descriptions

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given in these Chronicles, particularly as regards the earliest phase of the island, quite discordant with the information revealed by the recent archaeological explorations.

However, it is noteworthy that in addition to this so-called colonisation and other close cultural contacts, various references have been made in Sri Lankan literature in relation to the ancient trade connections between the two countries, which have been examined by various scholars in detail.\textsuperscript{123} Besides these references in Sri Lankan literature, both eastern and western historical records also recount the role of Sri Lanka as an important centre in the long distance trade of the Indian Ocean at least from the beginning of the Christian era.\textsuperscript{124} In this process, it is evident that Sri Lankan products like precious stones, pearls, chanks, turtle shell and cloth were in demand from a very early time. Apart from such luxury goods, it appears that Sri Lanka provided certain essential facilities for mariners of the Indian Ocean too. For instance, besides food and pure drinking water, a wide variety of timber used for making frames, planking, masts, spars and oars of boats


and oars of boats and ships was available in Sri Lanka, particularly in the southwestern parts of the island.\textsuperscript{125}

It is certain that in this ancient trade pattern, Sri Lankan’s earliest and closest trading partner was neighbouring India. Consequently, several early records describe Sri Lankan mariners who engaged in western part of India as early as the fourth century BC and the Sri Lankan ships coming to India.\textsuperscript{126} In addition, it is quite clear that the Sri Lankan polity was concerned about the hold of the Indian merchants as intermediaries and was trying to gain access to the western Indian Ocean trade.\textsuperscript{127} It is also evident that their involvement in foreign trade persisted even at the end of the twelfth century AD and in the beginning of thirteenth century AD. For instance, in one of the inscriptions of queen Lilavati, who ruled intermittently from 1197 to 1212, she refers to the presence of the south Indian trading guild in her kingdom.\textsuperscript{128} The record is particularly significant since it directs our attention to the continuing prominence of south Indian merchants in the island long after the termination of the Cola occupation.\textsuperscript{129}


Apart from the evidence of literary sources and also the rare epigraphical records, the archaeological excavations done at Mahatitta, the main port of ancient Sri Lanka also shows evidence of far-flung Indian Ocean trade from the last few centuries before the Christian era up to the end of tenth, eleventh century, with a very diminished trade continuing until the thirteenth century AD when the port functioned more as a military and naval base.\textsuperscript{130} In this context, it is noteworthy that the port of Mahatitta was strategically placed for the exchange of goods between the eastern and western blocks of the Indian Ocean, as well as the north-south exchange between the Indian mainland and Sri Lanka. Located in the shallow seas on the eastern side of the underwater reef-barrier, Adam's bridge, the small Mantai channel particularly allowed goods to be transhipped to the emporium, a fact remarked upon by Eratosthenese in the third century BC. He mentions that the seas between India and Sri Lanka were very shallow, but that there were channels through which ships could navigate with two bows, so that they need not turn around.\textsuperscript{131}

It is to be noted that the excavations at the site, have enabled the identification of four archaeological periods defined by bone and shell material, radiocarbon dates on carbon and chronologically diagnostic artefacts, mainly imported ceramics, glass, coins and other datable artefacts. Accordingly, in the Mesolithic period; the site was a marine-resource oriented camp-settlement in the middle of the second millennium BC. In the early historic period; there are indications of south Indian trade connections with

rouletted ware and black and red ware. This period is broadly dated from the second century BC to second century AD. During the third phase there are no distinctive imports other than Indian Red Polished Ware, including some sherds with moulded scenes from the Buddhist Jataka tales. This period is dated from the late second century to mid eighth century AD. In the next period, the five or six phases coincide with intensive occupation of all areas of the site, with Chinese and Islamic glazed wares occurring in nearly equal quantities in all phases. In this context, is the archaeological evidence, such as minor objects that have been found during excavations. Ceramics and beads, for example, provide information relating to contemporary trade connections of the two countries. Hence, it is to be noted that the following objects have been discovered in other recent archaeological excavations in various parts of Sri Lanka and have further revealed that the ancient Indo-Sri Lankan trade pattern was close.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the item</th>
<th>Place of origin</th>
<th>Place of findings</th>
<th>Chronology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern Black Polished</td>
<td>North Indian</td>
<td>Gedige of Anuradhapura</td>
<td>Around 250 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Ware</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Hellenistic</td>
<td>Greco-Indian</td>
<td>Same site</td>
<td>200-100 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with fine incision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Black partial slip on red-to-black Hellenistic Carinated and Grooved</th>
<th>Greco-Indian</th>
<th>Anuradhapura Citadel and Kantarodei</th>
<th>Same period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roulletted Ware</td>
<td>South Indian</td>
<td>Anuradhapura Citadel, Jetavanarama dagoba, Kantarodei and Mantai</td>
<td>200 BC - 200 AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indo-Sasanian fines</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Anuradhapura and Jetavanarama dagoba</td>
<td>Third century AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Polished Ware</td>
<td>Gujarat and Maharasthra</td>
<td>Anuradhapura Citadel, Sigiriya, Dagobas of Jetavanarama, Abhayagiri and Mantai</td>
<td>First to seven Centuries AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine red painted white kaolin fabric</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Anuradhapura, Abhayagiriya, Sigiriya and Mantai</td>
<td>Fourth to Seventh centuries AD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intaglio Seals</th>
<th>North-western India or Sri Lanka</th>
<th>Anuradhapura and Citadel</th>
<th>Third century BC or AD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carnelian stone beads and seals</td>
<td>Deccan, Gujarat or Sri Lanka</td>
<td>Citadel and Jetavanaramaya</td>
<td>Fifth century BC and onwards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Accordingly, it is clear that no imported Indian products were evident before ca. 250 BC except carnelian beads and seals, the origin of which is uncertain whether Sri Lankan or Indian. But, it is obvious that the first imports at least begin with the appearance of the Northern Black polished ware of North Indian origins at the end of the protohistoric period, a time of strong Mauryan influence as described by Sri Lankan chronicles. Thus, North Indian contacts are visible from the end of the protohistoric through the early historic and middle historic period onwards through the evidence of Northern Black polished ware. In addition, the Rouletted ware had primarily eastern and southern Indian contacts and exchanges.

Apart from these, Indian coins found in Sri Lanka also indicate that the earliest coins of Sri Lanka, the punch-marked coins were influenced by the Indian punch-marked coins. The absence on some of these coins of any symbol that can be attributed to Sri Lanka alone provides the space to further conclude that all the genuine punch-marked

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142 Ibid, p.166.
coins found in Sri Lanka were imported from India.\textsuperscript{146} Besides, it is conspicuous that with a few exceptions all the Indian coins that are found in Sri Lanka belong to the middle and late Mauryan period.\textsuperscript{147} The indications are therefore that coinage only became current around the time of Mahinda’s mission to Sri Lanka and of the expansion of north Indian or more precisely Mauryan influence there.\textsuperscript{148} In contrast, it is apparent that although a certain number of coins belonging to the succeeding Kshatrapa and Kushana dynasties are found in the island, they are quite rare.\textsuperscript{149} Apart from these, it should not be forgotten that the presence of a good number of south Indian Pandya coins in the excavations at Anuradhapura and other places of the northern part of the island indicates that Sri Lanka’s ancient trade activities were with south Indian region too.\textsuperscript{150} It is equally important to note that Sri Lankan coins were also found in south India.\textsuperscript{151} Undoubtedly, all these physical material evidences clearly indicate the close Indian contacts of Sri Lanka during the ancient period.

\textsuperscript{146} H.W. Codrington, \textit{Ceylon coins and currency}, Memoirs of the Museum, Series A, No3, Colombo, 1924, p.16; Osmund Bopearchchi, points out that the discovery of many terracotta moulds with Karshapana imprints in the excavations at Gedige site Anuradhapura and many other places, shows that some of these coins were cast in Sri Lanka. The moulds he could examine are identical to the ones found in Haryana in North India. See. “Seafaring in the Indian ocean: Archaeological evidence from Sri Lanka,” \textit{Tradition and archaeology: Early maritime contacts in the Indian ocean}, Proceedings of the International seminar Techno-Archaeological perspectives of seafaring in the Indian ocean, ed. Himanshu Prabha Ray and Jean-francois Salles, Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 1996, pp.59-77, especially p.66.

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid, pp.59-77.


\textsuperscript{150} Ibid, pp.59-77.

Buddhist interactions:

It was mentioned above that as there are certain imperfections in the accounts given in the early chronicles especially of the beginning of the history of the country, many historians had to rely on contemporary epigraphs, the history of which undoubtedly runs at least as far back as the reigning period of king Devanampiyatissa somewhere in the third century BC. Consequently, it is evident that a majority of the descriptions of the *Mahavamsa* and the other early literary sources of the island have been confirmed by these epigraphical records, as very reliable narrations at least from the third century BC onwards. Based on this fact, it is not unreasonable to conclude that the "historical Sri Lanka" or the "reliable history of the island" commences from the period of king Devanampiyatissa, which is marked by the official introduction of Buddhism. Hence, it is certain that this reigning period marks the turning point of early Sri Lankan history.

In this context, it is noteworthy that according to the descriptions given in these ancient chronicles very close cultural and political relations prevailed between India and Sri Lanka during this period. As it was recorded, for instance, the king of Sri Lanka sent a group of envoys with large presents to India. King Asoka bestowed gifts and honours and sent back the envoys. It is interesting to note at this point that the place name of

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155 Ibid, chap 11; 18v.

156 Ibid, chap. 11; 37v.
Tambapanni as taken to mean Sri Lanka is mentioned at least twice in the inscriptions of king Asoka too.\textsuperscript{157} It is also to be noted that the \textit{Mahavamsa} itself records that at the conclusion of the third council of \textit{Dhamma} that was held under the sponsorship of King Asoka missionaries were dispatched to various directions to spread Buddhism. Of these, one of the most fruitful missions was the one sent to Sri Lanka, which was headed by Mahinda theri, the son of emperor Asoka\textsuperscript{158} and historians believed that the historicity of the introduction of Buddhism in Sri Lanka is not in any doubt.\textsuperscript{159} Nevertheless, it is significant that in Asoka’s own inscriptions no mention is made of his son or of the mission headed by the latter. Hence, Asoka’s obvious silence regarding such an important mission headed by his own son has led scholar to express doubts regarding the \textit{Mahavamsa} account of Mahinda’s mission to Sri Lanka. But, it is to be noted that the \textit{Mahavamsa} account of the mission to the Himalayas has received striking corroboration from archaeological evidence at Sanchi. Similarly, an inscription on a relic casket at Sanchi reads “\textit{Sapurisa Mogaliputasa},”\textsuperscript{160} proving beyond doubt that Moggaliputta Tissa

\textsuperscript{157} These occur in the Rock edict II amongst those lands for which he had provided for the distribution of medicine and in the edict XIII amongst the countries to which he had sent envoys. See. Second rock edicts of Girnar, Kalsi, Shahbazgarhi, Manschra and thirteenth rock edicts of Kalsi and Shahbazgarhi. E Hultzsch, \textit{Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum: Inscriptions of Asoka}, Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi, Vol.I, (reprinted) 1991, pp. 3, 29, 51, 72, 48, 68 and 70 respectively. Though Tambapanni is one of the ancient names of the island of Sri Lanka, it is the name of a river in the Tinnevelly district that was known to the author of the \textit{Ramayana} too, Ibid, p.3; See also VV Mirashi, “Rewah stone inscription of the time of Karana,” \textit{Epigraphia Indica}, Vol.XXIV, No. 13, Archaeological Survey of India, (reprinted), 1984, pp.101-115, particularly p.103; KV Subrahmanya Aiyar, “Tinnevelly inscription of Maravarman Sundara Pandya II,” \textit{Epigraphia Indica}, Vol.XXIV, No.22, pp.153-172, particularly pp. 162 and 166. Nevertheless, there is a consensus of opinion that the Tambapanni of the Asokan edicts is Sri Lanka. See R Mookerji, Asoka, Macmillan and co, London, 1928, p.132 and its footnote no.2; J. Ph. Vogel, “Prakrit inscriptions from a Buddhist site at Nagargunakonda,” \textit{Epigraphia Indica}, Vol. XX, 1929-30, No.1, p.36.

\textsuperscript{158} \textit{Mahavamsa}, tr. W. Geiger, Pali Text Society, 1912, chap 12; 2-10vv.


who according to the Mahavamsa was the convenor of the third council was a historical figure.

Interestingly enough, the Mahavamsa further states in this regard that theri Sanghamitta, the daughter of King Asoka also brought the sacred Bodhi sapling of Bodhagaya to the island.\(^{161}\) It is also said in the chronicle that many groups of people were said to have been sent to protect this Bo sapling and among them were the weavers and potters and other guilds. Nevertheless, as in the case of Mahinda’s mission to Sri Lanka, some scholars have expressed doubts about the historicity of Sanghamitta and the arrival of the Bodhi tree because there is no other evidence to corroborate the Sri Lankan Pali chronicles. But, Geiger who firmly upholds the tradition is of the opinion that the archaeological evidence at Sanchi, the birthplace of Mahinda and Sanghamitta, confirms it. According to him Grundwedel, has pointed out that the carvings of the lower and middle architraves of the east gate of the Sanchi stupa depict representations of this event and since the Sanchi carvings belong to the second century BC, the representation is distant from the event by roughly speaking only 100 or at most 150 years.\(^{162}\)

In these carvings, in the middle of the lower scene is the Bodhi tree, as it stood at Gaya with Asoka’s chapel, rising halfway up the tree. A procession with musicians is on both sides of it. To the right, a royal person, perhaps Asoka, is getting down from his horse with the aid of a dwarf. In the upper picture, there is a small Bodhi tree in a pot and again a procession moving towards a city, perhaps Anuradhapura or perhaps Tamralipti to which the young tree was taken before it went to Sri Lanka. The decorations on either side

\(^{161}\) Ibid, chap 18; 6-8vv  
of the lower bas-relief are peacocks, symbolic of Asoka's family, the Mauryas and lions, symbolic of Sri Lanka or the royal family of the island.\textsuperscript{163} It is significant that as in the case of Geiger's assumption, Rhys Davids also concluded that the opinions may differ as to the meaning of some of the details, but there can be no doubt as to the main subject.\textsuperscript{164} Accordingly it seems that even the arrival of Theri Sanghamitta with the sacred Bodhi sapling cannot be dismissed as a mere legend.

According to further descriptions given in the Sri Lankan chronicles, during this period, the king and the people of the country embraced the new religion of Buddhism and its order of monks was consequently established.\textsuperscript{165} As a result, Buddhist religion became firmly established in Sri Lanka and with the adaptation of Buddhism as the religion of the state, followed by changes consequent on it in the religious and social life of the people, Indian influences began to pervade the cultural life of Sri Lanka. For instance, it is an established fact that the people of Sri Lanka during this period put up buildings of brick, began to carve in stone, learnt the art of writing and benefited from the teachings of Buddhism. Consequently, the period witnessed the first blossoming of art in the island as well. Correspondingly, the theme of these early stories is that the roots of Sri Lankan culture go back to the Buddhist ethos of the sub-continent.

Although the Indian and Sri Lankan historical records do not provide direct evidence of Buddhist intercourse of the two countries during the subsequent periods, the chronicles present some indirect information on the subject. In the second century BC, during king Duttagamini's time, for instance, it is mentioned in the \textit{Mahavamsa} that at the

\textsuperscript{163} Albert Grunwedel (tr. Agnes C Gibson), \textit{Buddhist art in India}, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1985, See Chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{164} Rhys Davids, \textit{Buddhist India}, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1971, p.303.
inauguration ceremony of the Mahatupa, the Ruvanvalisaya in Anuradhapura, a large number of monks from the Buddhist centres of Isipatana, Rajagaha, Savatti, Vesali, Ujjeni, Kosambi, Pataliputra, Kasmira and Vindhya came to the island with gifts for the king. Besides these descriptions given in the chronicles, it is noteworthy that during the second and third centuries AD, evidence of Buddhist intercourse between Sri Lanka and the lower Krishna valley is furnished by a Prakrit inscription discovered at the Buddhist site of Nagarjunakonda, which describes the erecting of Buddhist temples there by Sri Lankan Buddhists. In addition, the donative inscriptions at Nagarjunakonda and at other sites in the Vengi region further testify to the closeness of relationship that existed between the Buddhists of that region and those of Sri Lanka during the ancient period.

Similarly, it is obvious that Sri Lankan Buddhist pilgrims, like those from other Buddhist countries, made the round of the holy places in Magadha. Of these, Bodh Gaya, the site of the Buddha’s enlightenment, was a particularly important pilgrim centre. Consequently, an Indian document mentions a communication between king Meghavarna (301-328) and king Samudragupta of the two countries leading to the erection of a

\[\text{Mahavamsa, tr. W. Geiger, Pali Text Society, 1912, see chapters 12-16.}\]
\[\text{Ibid, chap 29; 29-43vv.}\]
\[\text{Ibid, pp.1-37, especially pp.9-10.}\]
\[\text{It is evident that during the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries AD, north India passed under the sway of the imperial Guptas. Of these, Samudragupta who came to the throne in the beginning of the fourth century AD was renowned for his military exploits, his cultural accomplishments and his name and fame spread far beyond the confines of his dominions. His Sri Lankan contemporary Sri Meghavarna (301-328 AD) had established friendly relations with his illustrious neighbour according to the Sri Lankan sources. Nevertheless, the Allahabad Pillar inscription of Samudragupta mentions that the people of Saimhala among those who paid tribute to the Gupta emperor. See JF Fleet, “Allahabad posthumous stone pillar inscription of Samudragupta,” Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Vol. III, Varanasi, 1963, pp.1-17, particularly pp.8 and 14. It is possible that many of the neighbouring kings including Sri Meghavarna sought to maintain close contact with the most powerful empire in the mainland and thought it politic to win the good graces of the great emperor by sending rich present or showing respect in some other way. For further details see Majumdar RC and Pushalkar AD, The classical age: The history and culture of the Indian people, Vol. III, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1962, pp.11-12.}\]
residence particularly for Sri Lankan monks visiting Bodhgaya. It is interesting that the same incident or another exactly similar, relating to the same two sovereigns has been recorded in a Chinese document too. The story says that a king of Sri Lanka named Sri Meghavarna sent two monks to visit the monastery built by Asoka to the east of the Bodhi tree at Gaya. The said two Sri Lankan monks paid their respects to the Bodhi tree but the monastery did not offer them hospitality. Hence, the two monks reported this to the king on their return and on hearing, the complaint, Sri Meghavarna, sent envoys with gifts of precious stones to Samudragupta requesting his permission to build a Sri Lankan Monastery at Bodh Gaya. In this connection reference could be made to a Sanskrit inscription found at Bodh Gaya, which records that a monk named Mahanama from Sri Lanka caused a shrine to be built at the site. Although this well-known inscription of Mahanama stavira of Sri Lanka is dated in accordance with the year 588-9 AD it is interesting to note that Sri Lankan sources do not make any reference to this activity.

In addition, there is another Sanskrit inscription of seventh or eighth century date, which records the devotion of a distinguished Sri Lankan pilgrim, Prakhyatakirtti.\(^\text{175}\) The inscription is written in Nagari characters on the coping stone of the ancient railing at the Mahabodhi temple. Besides, a votive inscription cut on the broken pedestal of a Buddha image in Nagari characters of the ninth century form at the site records the piety of the Sinhalese layman, Udayasri, who commissioned the image in order to escape from the world of woe.\(^\text{176}\) In addition, it is noteworthy that a slab inscription, datable to the tenth or eleventh century AD, records the gift of a pious king and was written by a Sinhalese monk named Ratnasrijana.\(^\text{177}\) It is interesting to note that during the same period the *Culavamsa* also describes that king Vijayabahu I on several occasions sent costly offerings to the Mahabodhi at Bodhgaya.\(^\text{178}\) Meanwhile, the "*Sinhala sangha adayas*"\(^\text{179}\) has been mentioned in another Gaya inscription of the eleventh or twelfth century AD. Perhaps this indicates the income that the Mahabodhi derived from the Sinhalese pilgrims of whom evidently there was a large number.\(^\text{180}\) It is to be noted at this point that based on these


\(^{180}\) Ibid, pp.27-29. Thus, it is evident that the script of Nagari was the vehicle for these donative records of the Sinhalese pilgrims at Budh Gaya. RC Majumdar, "Foundation of Gupta imperial power in India and its relations with Ceylon," *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon*, ed. HC Ray and others, Ceylon University Press, Colombo, Vol.I, Part I, 1959, p.273; A Ariyappan and PR Srinivasan, *Story of Buddhism with special reference to south India*, Madras, 1960, p.70.
epigraphical sources, Barua goes to the extent of arguing that Sri Lankan monks were in control of the Mahabodhi at least up to Pala period.\textsuperscript{181}

According to all these evidences, it is clear that since this was the ultimate place of pilgrimage for the Buddhists of Sri Lanka, many undertook the journey despite severe odds. No doubt that even today, this place retains its enchantment. To the average Buddhist, this is pilgrimage to the land of Buddhism. Hence, the above references would prove that there had been regular visits by pilgrims at least to the major Buddhist sites.\textsuperscript{182} Obviously, these contacts further testify to the vital and continuing communications between the holy places and the monasteries of Sri Lanka too. These religious missions must have been instrumental in establishing contacts with the various schools of Buddhism that were at that time in a flourishing condition under the Pala rulers of Magadha.\textsuperscript{183}

In addition, it is evident that Sinhalese monks and nuns had special dormitories near Vijayapuri and were present at other religious centres, such as Kaveripattinam, Kanci and some in central and north Indian regions too.\textsuperscript{184} Thus it is obvious that the monasteries in Sri Lanka had enjoyed close contacts with institutions in various parts of India. As a result, in times of trouble at home, Sri Lankan monks habitually sought sanctuary there. On the other hand, foreigners found their way to Anuradhapura, also, for it lay on one of


the southern routes travelled by pilgrims going from India to China. In fact, Anuradhapura, by the fifth century AD, had become a chief centre for Buddhist study, as Fa-hsien was careful to point out, the early canonical texts had been committed to writing. In addition, the fame of Buddhaghosa, who had come there to translate the Pali and Sinhalese books, added to the lustre of its reputation. Besides these references, Sri Lankan literature frequently mentions the coming of Indian monks to Sri Lanka and particularly the Mahavamsa records that the queen of Udaya I (797-801 AD) had built in Mihintale a temple, which she granted to the monks of the Tamil community.

Without doubt, all these facts reveal that religious exchanges with mainland India were frequent during the ancient period. Consequently it is significant that the impact of many new ideas that developed in India was soon felt in Sri Lanka. For instance, in the reign of Voharaka Tissa (263-285 AD) Vaitulyavada, identified as Mahayana, made

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189 Ibid, chap. 36; 40-41 vv.
190 Paranavitana has shown that the periods when the Vaitulyas were active in Sri Lanka synchronise with the dates assigned to some significant development in Mahayanism in India. See S Paranavitana, “Mahayanism in Ceylon,” Ceylon Journal of Science Section G, ed. A.M. Hocart and S. Paranavitana, Vol.II, December 1928 – February 1933, p. 35. The spread of Buddhism far and wide and the introduction into it of various adventitious elements led to its great re-organisation, and it was near about the beginning of the Christian era the two categories of the Buddhist order were gradually evolved as the Hinayana and the Mahayana. JN Banerje, “Developments in Indian Buddhism,” University of Ceylon History of Ceylon, ed. HC Ray and others, Ceylon University Press, Colombo, Vol.I, Part I, 1959, p. 194. The Mahayana in India first came into prominence about the beginning of the first century AD, though it is probable that its doctrines were prevalent in an under developed form even in earlier times. About the latter half of the second century AD, its doctrines were given an authoritative form by the genius of Nagarjuna who is generally believed to have been a native of the Andhra country of South India. S. Paranavitana, “Mahayanism in Ceylon,” Ceylon Journal of Science Section G, ed. A.M. Hocart and S. Paranavitana, Vol.II, December 1928 – February 1933, p. 35. Consequently, its main centres were Amaravati, Dhanyakataka and Nagarjunakonda in the Andhra country. Interestingly enough, the Mahayana and Tantric beliefs were in fact the result of Buddhism conceding to the strength of resurgent Hinduism. The main features of the Mahayana Buddhism are as follows. Strong belief in number of Buddhas and Bodhisattva concept and in the ability of human beings to become Bodhisattva status. Code of altruistic ethics, which teaches that every one, must do well in the
its appearance in Sri Lanka too. The centre of this revolutionary doctrine in the island was
the Abhayagiriya temple and king Gothabhaya (249-262 AD) had to take drastic action
against 60 monks dwelling in Abhayagiriya. Nevertheless, they were active again in the
reign of Mahasena when a monk from south India curried favour with the king and
instigated him to do immense damage to the Mahavihara.

Later, in the time of Silakala (518-531 AD) the Dhammadatu, a Mahayana text
was brought to Sri Lanka from Varanasi by a merchant and the king housed it near the
royal palace. He ordered that every year the Dhammadhatu be taken to the Jetavana
temple where a festival was held in its honour. But it is recorded that in the reign of
Aggabodhi I (571-604), the Vaitulyas were humiliated in a public debate. Although this
was an indication of an official victory for Theravada Buddhism, Mahayana ideas had
infiltrated into orthodox Buddhism and the theistic and ritualistic tendencies became
popular. An eighth century fragmentary Mahayana inscription written in Sanskrit
characters found at Mihintale, the cradle of Theravada Buddhism establishes this fact
unmistakably. In addition, it is evident that in the ninth and the tenth centuries AD

interest of the whole world and make over to others any merit he may acquire by his virtue. The aim of the
religious life is to become a Bodhisattva, not to become an arahat. Doctrine that Buddhas are supernatural
beings distributed through infinite space and time and innumerable. In the language of later theology, a
Buddha has three bodhies (Kayas) and still later, there is a group of five (afterwards six) Buddhas (Dhyani).
Various system of idealist metaphysics, which tend to regard the Buddha essence or Nirvana. Canon
composed in Sanskrit and apparently later than the Pali canon. Habitual worship of images and elaboration
of ritual. Special doctrine of salvation by faith in a Buddha, usually Amitabha and invocation of his name.
Sec. JN Banerje, “Developments in Indian Buddhism,” University of Ceylon History of Ceylon, ed. HC Ray
worship of certain gods and goddesses and recommended the chanting of mantras for attaining
emancipation from life as in the case of Hindu practice. See I-Tseng, A record of the Buddhist Religion, tr. J.

192 Ibid, chap.36; 1-16vv.
193 Ibid, chap.41; 37-40vv.
194 Ibid, chap.42; 35v.
Mahayanism was particularly strong in Sri Lanka. Besides, it is apparent that even the extreme form known as Vajiriyavada, which made the distinction between Buddhism and certain forms of Saivism nominal, appeared in Sri Lanka in the ninth century AD. Thus, it is evident that all the principle changes in the doctrine and practice of Buddhism appeared simultaneously in India and Sri Lanka.

In this context, it is noteworthy that unlike the Mahavihara, Abhayagiriya was devoted to knowing and mastering the latest trends in a sophisticated, global Buddhist world. As a result, Abhayagiriya connected Anuradhapura with Indian universities, Chinese imperial courts, Javanese trading communities and brought Indian scholars, Chinese ambassadors and Javanese traders to Anuradhapura. Consequently, Abhayagiriya made Sri Lankan Theravada – Mahayana – Theravada - a real player in the bigger cosmopolites of the day. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that Abhayagiriya so far as we know never denied the relative value of the Lesser Vehicle. They sported their own canon of the Lesser Vehicle, probably not much different from the Pali canon except in minor details. It is evident that at least the Chinese knew that Abhayagiriya disseminated its own Lesser Vehicle canon throughout Asia. On the other hand, it is to be noted that though some of the Mahayana doctrines differ from Theravada Buddhism, Mahayanist monks who followed almost the same rules of discipline as the monks of the Theravada sect in Sri Lanka were able to live in the same temple and influence the monks of the Theravada sect. Consequently, Mahayana Buddhism did not replace the Theravada

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tradition. Indeed, it only added something to it and the only thing it did replace sometimes was the worship of local gods, for whom Bodhisattvas were substituted.\textsuperscript{200}

In north India, Buddhism continued to flourish under the Pala dynasty of Bengal and Bihar till the Palas and their faith were both uprooted by the Muslim conquest of twelfth century AD.\textsuperscript{201} At the same time, the victorious armies of Rajaraja Cola dealt the final blow to Anuradhapura at the beginning of the eleventh century AD and having made Polonnaruva their capital, the Colas ruled Sri Lanka for a period of half a century during which time south Indian Hindu influence became stronger than ever before.\textsuperscript{202} Thus, it is clear that no new influences from north India had any effect on Sri Lankan Buddhism after eleventh century AD and the island’s Buddhists began more and more to turn towards the other Theravadin countries of the Buddhist world in their religious matters. In this context, it is obvious that the most important centre of the Theravada Buddhism in the eleventh and twelfth centuries AD was Southeast Asia and therefore the Buddhists of Sri Lanka had begun to turn away from India to this region.

Of these, certainly the relations with Burma are significant.\textsuperscript{203} It is known that ever since the time of Buddhaghosa, the famous Buddhist commentator, Burmese monks were in the habit of coming over to Sri Lanka especially to the Mahavihara of Anuradhapura to

\textsuperscript{199} Ibid, p.13.
\textsuperscript{200} GC Mendis, Ceylon today and yesterday: Main currents of Ceylon History, The Associated Newspapers of Ceylon, Colombo, 1957, p.45.
\textsuperscript{203} Sri Lanka’s relations with Cambodia also seem to be implicit in a few references in the chronicles and inscriptions, but whether they were of any religious character, it is difficult to determine. Vincent Panditha, “Buddhism during the Polonnaruva period,” The Ceylon Historical Journal, ed. SD Saparamadu, Special Number on the Polonnaruva period, Vol. IV, No.1-4, July-October 1954 and January-April, 1955, 1958, p.127.
imbibe the orthodox tradition and continue it in their own country. But later, Sri Lankan Buddhists suffered great calamities during the Cola occupation and the extensive monasteries that flourished at Anuradhapura and other places of the island in the tenth century AD were abandoned. As a result, most of the Buddhist monks were unable to maintain themselves even in the southern part of the island and large numbers of them migrated from the island to Southeast Asian countries where Buddhism was flourishing particularly to Burma. After liberation from the Cola power, it was the timely help from Burma to Sri Lanka that helped to revive the higher ordination in the time of Vijayabahu I (1056-1111). Subsequently, although Parakkramabahu’s invasion of Burma (1165 or 1166) somewhat strained this relationship, the common Theravada Buddhism that closely knit the two countries was strong enough to overcome all such minor differences.

However, it should not be forgotten that as in the case of the Indo-Sri Lankan association, the cultural relations of these two countries were also bilateral. One of the services provided by Sri Lanka to Burma was the help granted by Vijayabahu to establish a common authoritative Canon for both countries. Next is the interesting episode of the establishment of the Sihala Sangha sect in Burma. It is said in this connection that in the reign of Parakkramabahu I, the elder Uttarajiva from Pagan visited the Mahavihara bringing with him one of his pupils, the novice Chapata. He received higher ordination

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204 Ibid, p.126.
from the Sinhalese monks of the island and lived for several years ardently studying the
doctrine at the Mahavihara. Chapata next returned to Pagan taking with him four
Sinhalese monks on a mission of orthodoxy. Thus it is evident that deeply convinced of
the fact that the Mahavihara alone had kept the unbroken and legitimate line of descent
and that the valid ordination could only be received in Sri Lanka he sought to form a
nucleus of the orthodox tradition in Burma by establishing the Sihala Sangha.
Consequently, it is evident that the artistic traditions of Burma were also
influenced by the Sinhalese traditions during this period.

The traditional view and the sphere of art:

According to the above-mentioned discussion, it is clear that the geographical
location of Sri Lanka in relation to India is such that any major upheaval in the mainland,
whether political, cultural or religious was bound to generate repercussions in the island,
eventually. Due to this close proximity of the two countries and resultant impact of India
on Sri Lanka, some of the early historians of Sri Lanka and also the scholars of India have
gone to the extreme limit of terming the periods upto the colonial time as the Indian period
of Sri Lankan history. They have further divided this into northern and southern Indian

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periods of the island mainly based on the belief that Sri Lanka was largely influenced by north India upto the Cola conquest of 1017 and by south India from that date upto the arrival of the Portuguese in 1505. Of these, the north Indian period is further sub-divided into two: The first period begins with the reign of Devanampiya Tissa (250-210 BC) and ends with the reign of Mahasena (274-301 AD). The second period begins with the reign of Mahasena's son Kirtisri Meghavama (301-328) and ends with the Cola conquest of Sri Lanka in the reign of Mahinda V (982-1029).213

This trend figures prominently in the studies of Geiger,214 Raghavan,215 Mendis216 and Ellawala217 etc. For example, Ellawala suggests that the social organisation of Sri Lanka in early times was modelled on that of the Indo-Aryan kingdoms of northern India218 and Mendis concludes that the economic, political and social background of Sri Lanka was particularly the same as that of India and the modifications, which it went through till the end of the fifteenth century AD and to a limited extent after that, were mainly due to Indian influences. Thus, he believes that till the end of the fifteenth century

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213 Indian Council for Cultural Relations, Asian Publishing House, New Delhi, 1969, especially the fourth chapter titled “The Indian period of Ceylon history.”
215 To Geiger, Sinhalese literature may be said to be a respectable offshoot of Indian literature and in his evaluation of the architectural achievements of the country he seems convinced that for the most part the architects came from India. W Geiger, Culture of Ceylon in medieval times, ed. Heinz Bechert, Wiesbaden, 1960, pp.75 and 92
216 M.D. Raghavan, India in Ceylonese history society and culture, Indian Council for Cultural Relations, Asian Publishing House, New Delhi, 1969, especially the fourth chapter titled “The Indian period of Ceylon history.”
219 Ibid; Nicholas's view is also the same. See CW Nicholas, "Professions and occupations in the early Sinhalese kingdom," Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon Branch) New Series, 1956, p.70.
AD Sri Lanka was a unit of the civilisation of India. According to these scholars, the major reasons for this view of the Indian cultural influence on the Sri Lankan society are as follows. The main religions of the people of the island, Buddhism and Hinduism came from India. The Sinhalese and Tamil scripts and the Sinhalese and Tamil languages are also derived from the same source. Of these particularly, the Sinhalese language is closely related to the Indo-Aryan tongues of northern India and it has descended through Pali, Prakrit from old Sanskrit. Its evolution proceeds on the same lines as that of the modern Indo-Aryan vernaculars such as Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi and Bengali etc. Besides Sinhalese literature, in subject matter and style also shows itself strongly influenced by Pali and Sanskrit literature. In addition, the Sri Lankan styles of architecture and sculpture of the ancient period can also be traced to India.

Nevertheless, as some of these scholars themselves admitted that in India itself owing to its vast size the culture of the people varied from area to area due to differences in the physical background, racial types, economic and social systems and religion etc. Certainly, this difference applied to Sri Lankan culture as well. This would indicate that the culture of Sri Lanka was not uniform with that of India. In this context, though some critics have wrongly concluded that Sri Lanka has nevertheless made her own what she has adopted; she has stamped with her own personality all that she derived from India, and

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220 GS Gai, Introduction to Indian epigraphy, Occasional Monograph Series No.32, Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore, 1986, pp.15-16 and 43.
so intensive and far-reaching has been the process, that Indian origins of Sri Lankan art can scarcely be distinguished as such today,\footnote{M.D. Raghavan, \textit{India in Ceylonese history society and culture}, Indian Council for Cultural Relations, Asian Publishing House, New Delhi, 1969, p.94.} it is fairly certain that Sri Lanka’s development differed culturally from that of India. For instance, the most outstanding feature in Sri Lankan civilisation at least during the first ten twelve centuries is the irrigation system which alone formed the basis of the renowned hydraulic structure giving life and water to the plains which nature had condemned to lie parched and desolate is entirely the product of Sri Lankan genius owing nothing to Indian influences. Regarding Buddhism too, though it was an Indian import, it soon became indigenised. It is also to be noted that though Buddhism disappeared from India, yet Sri Lanka enshrined the faith in her bosom never to be forsaken, thus evolving culture entirely her own.\footnote{Lorna Dewaraja, “Cultural relations between Sri Lanka and north India during the Anuradhapura period,” \textit{Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences}, Vol. X, Nos. 1 & 2, 1987, p.2.} Therefore, it cannot be said that the whole culture of ancient Sri Lanka was a replica of Indian culture in every sense though early islanders borrowed some of the cultural elements of India, due to close interactions between the two countries that had started from very ancient times.

But, it is to be noted at this point that it has often been accepted that the cultural relations of the two countries were one-sided or there was only a one-way movement in the direction of Sri Lanka. Certainly, there are not enough evidences to show how far Sri Lankan society or the people influenced Indian culture or the people except in the case of a few examples like Sri Lanka developed Buddhist Commentaries on the Pali canon in Sinhalese that were later translated into Pali for the use of Buddhist monks in the Indian
subcontinent,\textsuperscript{226} Sri Lankan Buddhist monks have spread their faith in north India and the Deccan region,\textsuperscript{227} the Buddhist sacred places like Bodh Gaya have been controlled by the Sri Lankans throughout the ages and Sri Lankan Buddhist nuns cast themselves in the role of missionaries in India.\textsuperscript{228} Hence it is clear that the civilisations of India and Sri Lanka followed lines of historical development, which were both interdependent and resonant though this has not been accepted by the ancient literary traditions of both countries.

Besides these ancient literary interpretations, it is significant that the early historians have also sometimes been shown to be erroneous particularly when speaking of the facts on Indo-Sri Lankan cultural relationship during the ancient period. This of course is in the natural order of things. With the increasing volume of new archaeological data and with more sophisticated techniques of historical research, earlier beliefs can become out dated. Hence, modern scholars will no doubt disagree with the early historian’s above periodisation of the history of the island and the interpretations of the Indo-Sri Lankan cultural relations where the discussions follow the pattern of the early chronicles.\textsuperscript{229} As a result, modern scholars are inclined to view the history of Sri Lanka from a different stance. Particularly historians today are looking more at the inner dynamism, which

\textsuperscript{226} "It was found necessary to have the canonical literature that had till then existed in the form of Sinhala commentaries translated in to Pali and treatises of exegetical nature compiled for the use of students of Buddhism in Sri Lanka and abroad. This responsible task was entrusted to a versatile scholar-monk named Buddhaghosa who came from the Tamil country" Gunapala Senadheera, “Cultural contacts between India and Sri Lanka through bhikkhus, scholars and pilgrims,” \textit{Sri Lanka and the silk road of the sea}, ed. S. Bandaranayake and others, The Sri Lanka National Commission for UNESCO and the Central Cultural Fund, Colombo, 1990, p.137.


shaped the history and culture of the island and more importantly there is increasing evidence that the cultural horizons of Sri Lanka extended far beyond the confines of India.  

However, as in the case of the overall history or the cultural history of the island, it is evident that the situation is the same when considering the artistic traditions of Sri Lanka too. The descriptions given in the Mahavamsa are particularly important in this respect. Accordingly, king Asoka is said to have sent to Sri Lanka sixteen guilds of artisans with the sacred Bodhi tree in the third century BC. Interestingly enough, this belief is recorded in some of the land grant manuscripts of the medieval and late medieval periods of Sri Lanka also. The information presented in these, particularly in relation to the Nilagama generation of painters is very important though the descriptions are legendary in nature. Based on such random references it is generally believed that it was the contact with Mauryan India and the enthusiasm for the new faith of Buddhism that first inspired the Sri Lankan people to creative activity in the fields of art, architecture and sculpture. For instance, it is said that with the possible exception of a single dolmen and three groups of cists there are no structural remains so far brought to light that can be dated as pre-Buddhist remains. It is also believed that the idea of using stone for building purposes and rock cave abodes for monks was also introduced from Mauryan

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India. Interestingly enough, due to this belief it is evident that some writers have arrived at entirely wrong conclusions too. For example, though nothing has been mentioned regarding the representation of the life story of the Buddha in any source of India or Sri Lanka during this period, some writers have wrongly concluded that after Buddhism became established in Sri Lanka, artists came from India, sent by King Asoka, to depict the life of the Buddha.

At the same time, it is to be noted that many scholars have expressed the view that a very close affinity can be seen between the extinct artistic traditions of the two countries also. According to them, this close affinity is confirmed by the earliest Sri Lankan sculptures found at Kantaka cetiya in Mihintale, which are similar to the earliest school of Indian sculpture at Barhut and Sanchi. It is also believed that one can notice the connection with the mainland in sculptures now exhibited in the National Museum in Colombo and the archaeological museums at Anuradhapura and elsewhere in the island. Accordingly, these sculptures found in Sri Lanka are in the Amaravati style, for instance the Mahailuppallama image is in the style which is characteristic of the standing Buddha images of Anuradhapura; there is no doubt that it was fashioned in the Amaravati (Vengi) region and imported to Sri Lanka. In addition, it is said that the fragments of Buddha images in Amaravati style and in the marble distinctive of that school, have also been


found at other places in the island and a number of bas-reliefs in this same marble, imported from the same source, have been found at Anuradhapura and other sites. 239

Besides, it is believed that the bronze Buddha statue from Badulla is also not very different from some of the metal images of Buddha of the Amaravati School240 and the figure of the so-called king Duttagamini from Anuradhapura too recalls contemporary Amaravati models, as does the monolithic seated Buddha.241 It is further assumed that under the influence of the mainland, especially from the early Buddhist art of Amaravati, there are beautifully proportioned guard stones, dwarfs, snakes, with three, five or seven hoods, of exquisite workmanship at Anuradhapura.242

In this context, it is noteworthy that there is another belief that the Gupta imperial impulse was also as strong and enduring in its effects as the Asokan imperial impulse.243 Consequently, it is presumed that the influence of the Indian Gupta sculpture was felt in the Isurumuniya elephant reliefs244 and the well-known relief of the Isurumuni lovers and other sculptures found at the same premises has the vigour and refinement of the Gupta period.245 In addition, it is believed that carved on the face of a low cliff of granulitic boulders overhanging a partly artificial tank at the site, we may observe

239 Ibid, p.18.
242 Mulk Raj Anand, India in colour, Themes and Hudson, London, 1958, pp.75-76.
244 Mulk Raj Anand, India in colour, Themes and Hudson, London, 1958, pp.75-76.
245 In addition to these artistic works of carvings and statues, it is a common assumption among scholars that this period witnessed the glory of classical Sanskrit literature too. S Paranavitana, “Civilisation of the period: Religion, literature and art,” University of Ceylon History of Ceylon, ed. HC Ray and others, Ceylon University Press, Colombo, Vol.I, Part I, 1959, pp.393-394. Consequently, it is believed that a highly rated Sanskrit work composed in Sri Lanka by Kumara dasa known as the Janakiharana bears unmistakable influence of Kalidasa’s Raghuvamsa. See Lorna Dewaraja, “Cultural relations between Sri Lanka and north...
carvings in a 'pure Pallava style.' According to such critics, isolated in a kind of niche is a relief of the sage Kapila, seated on the plains of hell and not only are the proportions of the figure remarkably close to the work at Mamallapuram, but the suggestion of the form's emergence from the matrix of the rock is also in the same technique. Due to this belief, even contrary to the above assumption of the so-called Gupta influence on the Isurumuniya carvings, some others have concluded that the carvings of elephants at the site, submerged in a nearby pool of lotus-filled water, look like early Pallava carvings. Similarly, though chronologically later, some have presumed that at Anuradhapura a dagoba of the first century BC has elephants as caryatids, a feature that is also found at Mahabalipuram and at Ellora belonging to the later periods.

According to such critics, this close similarity between the artistic traditions of India and Sri Lanka is demonstrated not only through the stone sculpture, carving or architecture alone, but through the Buddhist wall painting tradition also, as discussed in the first chapter in detail. It is evident that in this assumption, some critics have gone to

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the extreme to express the view that not only the painting tradition of ancient Sri Lanka borrowed from India, but that Sri Lankan artists were also trained by Indian artists. Nevertheless, though the discussions are very short some other scholars have argued that there is no such very close connection or affinity between the two painting traditions of ancient India and Sri Lanka. The next few chapters of the thesis, mainly focus on the styles, techniques, themes, social context and the material culture of the Buddhist mural painting traditions of the two countries of the ancient period and show that these are two distinct traditions to a large extent, though some minute similarities can be noted among these. Certainly, such minute similarities can be seen even among any different artistic traditions as in the case of Ajanta murals and Chinese-Japanese and early renaissance paintings as discussed in the first chapter in detail. In addition, it is worthy to note that though obvious dissimilarities can be seen between the paintings and the reliefs of Ajanta, most of the writers have noticed some similarities between these two artistic traditions and have compared the murals even with the carvings of Barhut, Sanch and Amaravati etc while some others have gone to the extreme limit to discuss the similarities between the Buddhist art of Ajanta and Christian art of Sopocani in Yugoslavia.

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