

Abstract

Title: Morphology and Utility today of the 18th century Temple on pillars (*Tämpita Vihāras*) of Sri Lanka

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The structures built on a wooden platform resting on short granite pillars or stumps are a unique type of image houses from the 17th to 19th centuries called *Tämpita Vihāras*. The Samkathana Project on documenting evidences of the *Tämpita Vihāras* has collected data in Kurunegala, Kegalla, Kandy, Matale, Nuwara Eliya, Rathnapura, Galle, Mathara, Hambanthota and Anuradhapura Districts.

This type of single room very small image house emerges in the early Kandyan Era. It has a wooden superstructure. From over 70, already documented in this project, I shall select a cross section to demonstrate structural morphology of *Tämpita Vihāras* according to regions.

Although the reports of the Archeological Department mention 240 *Tämpita Vihāras* and the study by *Sri Lankawe Tampita Vihara Sampradaya* by Archeology Department (1999), editor, Gamini Wijesooriya and *Architecture of Tampita Viharaya in Sri Lanka* by D.P.Chandrasekara and D.M.K.D.Silva, (2002) and *Heritage Building of Sri Lanka* by Nimal De Siva and D.P.Chandrasekara, (2009) Documented 50 there has been no comparative study of these over 240 *Tämpita Vihāras*, most which are in a sad state of decay and some have been demolished or the features of this unique stone and wooden plinth cemented over.

The utility of *Tämpita Vihāras* as Image Houses, Preaching Halls, Chapter Halls, Temple of Tooth Relic and a planned Royal Palace in Dodantale, leading to the question of protection and conservation of these Single Room Image Houses has never been envisaged.

This will be the first attempt to categorize *Tämpita Vihāras* according to their architectural structure in order to study the morphology and report on the present conditions and the challenges faced by the members of the *Mahāsangha* to protect this heritage from the times of the Kandyan Kings.

This work in progress is aimed at opening a critical multidisciplinary discourse between architects, archeologists, art historians and academics engaged in heritage management.

Key words: architecture, archeology, art history and heritage management.