

MURAL TRADITIONS IN 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 *TämpitaVihāras*.

This type of single roomed very small image house emerges in the early Kandyan Era. It has a wooden superstructure. The murals in the inner room or sanctum have a very rigid spatial arrangement. One can view the central seated image of the Buddha under a “*Makara Arch*” attended by fly whisk bearers and deities on entering through the doorway. The side wooden walls and ceiling have almost similar picture programs.

The *TämpitaVihārayahas* only onesmall ritual space: The *Vihārageyaor Pilimageya* is the space where the devotee could visualize the living Buddha, venerate him by reciting Pali*Gāthās*. The innermost chamber or sanctum is the central place of worship. A seated Buddha is usually the main object of worship. The walls of the sanctum are adorned with Buddha statues, paintings of Buddhist monks (*Arhats*) standing in adoration. Protective Gods and other deities and future Buddhas(*Bodhisattvas*) face the main figure. Some mentors and donors also appear in the crowded space of the sanctum. The ambulatory narrates the Life of the Buddha (*Buddhacarita*) and former births

(*Jātakas*), how the future Buddha perfected his virtues with great selflessness (*Pāramita*). and Hells, it seems have been added later.

A specially of the *TämpitaVihāras*, seen in the Kurunegala, Gampaha, Kandy and Matale Districts, is that statues, murals and decorative motives from the pre-Kandyan and Kandyan period of art can be studied: Under the guidance of the research team of the HETC Project at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Kelaniya a survey was conducted in 50 *TämpitaVihāras* which revealed interesting patterns of Visual Communication.

Justification: Even in a bad state of preservation, murals of a *TämpitaVihāraya* show a layer of murals that reflect the Visual Communication of early 19th century. Very little research has documented the allocation of limited space for narratives and icons in *TämpitaVihāraya* and establishes iconographic patterns common to all *TämpitaVihārayas*.

A study that encompasses the *TämpitaVihāras* covering both Up Country and Southern Region has not yet been conducted. I hope the Southern Phase of this project will throw new light on the Southern Tradition of *TämpitaVihāras*. The objective of the current research is to view the isolated the *TämpitaVihāras* in the South in order to ascertain if the murals follow the tradition inherited from Kandy (*UdarataSampradaya*) or Low Country Tradition (*PahatarataSampradaya*).