

# REJECTING THE “KANDYAN TRADITION” IN THE SOUTH

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The objective of this article is to draw the historian’s attention to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Buddhist Activities in the Southern and Western Maritime Region. The focus is on the architecture.

If we trace the religious activity of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century moving to the Southern and Western costal belt, the allegation that the British were responsible for the total destruction of Buddhist practices of the entire island cannot be regarded as a historical fact: Many temples in the South (*Pahata Rata*) received patronage from the upcoming Sinhala elite, who had established themselves as patrons of Buddhism by building large temples. They were adorned with impressive entrances called *Torana* arches as seen in the temples on the coastal belt from Panadura, Vaskaduwa, Kalutara, Alutgama, Ambalangoda, Kumārakanda and Ranvella. Murals of high quality dated to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century as seen in Telvatta, Mulgirigala, Mirissa, Kathaluwa, Kumārakanda, stand testimony that the temples could afford masters in mural painting.

The emergence of Queen Victoria as the patroness in the temple, with her portrait painted under the *Makara* Arch over the entrance, as well as the donations given to the temples provide some data that the essentialist statement of the British destruction of Buddhist temples has little historical evidence. In the Kandyan Region (*Uda Rata*), on the other hand, especially during the Kandyan Rebellion, when in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century members of the *Uda Rata* and *Sabaragamu Radala* (nobility) attempted to oust the British Regime, many temples and monasteries in the were destroyed - maybe because the monks and their patrons supported the rebels (Tennakoon Wimalananda: The Great Rebellion of 1818).

The histories of the monastic traditions of the *Amarapura Nikāya* and *Rāmañña Nikāya* stand testimony to the Buddhist revival activities of the period from 1800 to 1855 which fall into the early years of British Occupation. This paper argues that a unique tradition of art and architecture emerged in the Southern and Western Maritime Region under the influence of European taste and lifestyles. It seems that the aesthetics of the Elite in the South rejected all South Indian Influence inherited from the Kandyan Region (*Uda Rata*).

It is the earliest temples of the *Amarapura Nikāya*, that we discover the total rejection of the Kandyan Architecture. These temples like the temples in Ambagahaptiya (Balapitiya), Randonbe, Uтуру Kalutara, Ambalangoda, Kumārakanda, Dodamdōwa, Ranvella, Kande Vihāraya all belong to the *Amarapura* fraternities. Some even today serve as the *Pārsrava Mōlasthānaya* (Head Quarters of the Fraternity). These new fraternities which were affiliated with the *Sangha* of Burma (*Amarapura* and *Hamsavati*) may have preferred to be disassociated with the Kandyan Chapters (*Malvatu* and *Asgiri*) which claim the tradition received from Siam. The best evidence is that Higher Ordination (*Upasampadā*) ceremonies since 1803 were held in the South with no participation of monks from the Kandyan Chapters.