

BUDDHIST SYMBOLS DEPICTED IN RAJAGALA SITE

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Introduction

Having preached *Dhamma* for 45 years, Buddha passed away in 543 AD. Since then, Buddha was venerated by followers using symbols on behalf of the Buddha. Iconography of Buddha had not been built in India for 5 centuries. It is clear that, the first Buddha statue was created by Mathura artists. (coomarswamy 2001, 3)

Research Problem

The various kind of symbols are excavated in *Rajagala* archeological site, which were worshiped by Sri Lankan Buddhists in *Anruadhapura* era. The research problem of this study is to examine the symbols of *Rajagala* which were used to represent the Buddha.

Research Methodology

This research had been done through surveying the primary sources, second sources, tertiary sources, and with a field observation.

Discussion

This sacred place is situated in the *Rajagalatenna* village in Uhana District Secretariat Division of Ampara District in the Eastern Province. In the past *Rajagalawa* was known as *Rassahela* which was one of the premier monastic complexes in Sri Lanka. This place was emerged since the advent of *Arahant Mahinda*. (Rajagala 2017) It is a rugged and heavily forested mountain situated 1,038 feet above the sea level. This site it spreads over 1,600 acres, and second only to *Mihintale* monastery in Anuradhapura. It consisted of more than 600 prehistoric ruins, monuments and artifacts, and nearly 100 of them are ancient Stupas. (Kurugala

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2012) During the reign of King *Saddhatissa*, *Rajagalawa* really began to grow and During his fathers governorship of *Digamadulla*, his son prince *Lajjithissa* and his family embellished Rajagala on a lavish scale in the 3rd century BC. (Rajagala Inscriptions of Sri Lanka 2012)

It is a huge and paramount monastery complex. Hundreds of buildings comprising *dagabas*, image houses, refectories, monastic buildings, ponds and promenades are visible everywhere of the temple complex. A breached reservoir which supplied water to the temple can be seen on the western slopes of the mountain. One of the Inscriptions of *Rajagalareveals* the arrival of *MahindaThero*.

As a result of visiting this site, various symbols which were venerated and worshiped on behalf of Buddha statues could be seen, such as *Chatra* (umbrella), *Vajrasana* (seat of Buddha) and foot prints. In the earliest period, after the demise of Buddha, people wanted to worship him but they did not build Buddha statues. Sometimes they were afraid to build up an iconography of such a great person. But on the contrary *Coomarswami* mentions in his book that "I believe that this worship had nothing to do with original Buddhism or Jainism, that it did not originate with the monks, but with the lay community, when the people in general felt the want of a higher cult than that of their rude deities and demons, when the religious development of India found in *Bhakti* the supreme means of salvation'. (coomarswamy 2001, 297) Anyhow, iconographies of Buddha had been built by Indian artists with the influence of Greek. As mentioned above, this complex has been built in the third century BC. The art of Buddhas iconography cant be seen in this site at present. The reason may be sometimes, the art of Buddhas iconography has not been spread to the east of Sri Lanka. Hence, the Buddhists of Rajagala worshipped Symbols of Buddha instead the statues.

Number of scattered *Chatra* (umbrella) can be seen in many places in this site. As a symbol of authority and power, the umbrella first appears in the mural paintings of the Ancient Egyptians, and later in the bas-reliefs of the Assyrians. (Longhurst 1992) Buddhists used this symbols in

Buddhist art to show the highest states of Buddha. In the top of various *Cetiya*, belong to earliest period, umbrella had been fixed. The symbol, umbrella had been fixed of *Cetiya* and *Vajrasana*.

The next symbol could be seen in this site is *Vajrasana* (seat of Buddha). *Vajrasana* represents the Buddha. The Buddhists at the time have worshiped the seat of the Buddha because, they did not have the iconography of Buddha. Hence, they worshiped the seat of Buddha on behalf of the Buddha. There is a wonderful *Vajrasana* in a shrine room of this site but the shrine room is no longer exists except its ruins. *Vajrasana* is shaded by one *Chitra* in this shrine room.

The footprints of the Buddha are venerated in all Buddhist countries. (Welch 2009, 1) In the beginning, figural images of the historic Buddha were non-existent; only aniconic (non-figural) symbols. Footprints of Buddha had been venerated by earliest Buddhists. Number of footprints can be seen in Rajagala site. Footprints is depicted the foot of Buddha. The Rajagala artists have created these prints using perfect methods of sculpture techniques cleverly and carefully with great commitment.

Even though, artists of Rajagala built the symbols for worshiping, There is a sign of an effort to build up an iconography of Buddha. There is a huge block of stone, nearly 16 feet long, with a half-carved Buddha image. All the lines on the statue are straight and at right angle to each other with no details. Some believe that, apprentice sculptors did the work up to this stage, and then the master was supposed to round it off, fill in the finer details and add the finishing touches. In this case however, for some reason, they could never finish the job. This half-completed statue shows that the great Buddha statues we find in the historic temples were made by the sculptors lived those days, and was not a result of some miracle.

Rajagala was declined during the last decades of the third century. Unfortunately, exact reason of declining this monastery complex has not been expounded yet. But it is believed that few reasons such as catch fire the monastery, invasion or monks give up and move to another place. It is clear that, Rajagala site was a well-developed and huge monastery complex.

Earlier period Buddhist did not try to build up iconography of Buddha. But the symbols were built instead. In conclusion Rajagalaca can be nominated as one of the fine examples to prove the fact that the symbols were used instead of the iconography of the Buddha at the earliest period.

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