

## **The Impact of Colonialism on Traditional Sri Lankan Temple Painting: A Case-Study Based on the Southern Coastal Region**

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The aim of the present study is to identify the characteristic features and elements which signify the Western/European influence on the local mural painting tradition of Southern temples. The so-called developments that occurred in Sri Lanka's social, political, economic, and cultural spheres during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were marked significantly by the inculturation of western elements into those in Sri Lankan maritime life. Such elements inevitably merged with the temple painting tradition in the low-country maritime regions, despite the fact that their roots are found in the central Kandyan style simultaneously. The encounter with colonialism is described as a watershed in Sri Lankan history as well as in the tradition of temple paintings. The rationale behind the particular derivatives is the use of Western elements in the temple paintings without a meaning or a proper context. Evidently, the building elements, garments, trees, and various other elements in the paintings are highly decorative and the backgrounds of the paintings often depict Western decorative motifs i.e. roses, grapes catena and design elements influenced by the Rococo style of western art tradition instead of their root characteristics absorbed from the Central Kandyan designs and motifs. European attires, architectural elements and furniture are not rare in the temple paintings of the southern coastal belt. The compositional techniques, treatment of the human postures, and the color palette of the Southern school of painters also have distinctive characteristics which differ from the Central Kandyan style. An in-depth study of these characteristics makes it clear that the so-called socio-political factors i.e. the destruction of temples in the maritime region, the amplification of catholic campaigns, cessation of the Sinhala Kandyan kingdom etc., have affected the Buddhist monastic life in the Southern coastal region as well. A detailed survey of the literature pertaining to the period was conducted to reveal the factors affecting the Western influence on the Southern maritime region. This study examines the paintings of selected temples of the region in order to identify the characteristic elements of the painting tradition that evolved in and around the region, which identified them as the "Southern painting style" by scholars. This study is based on qualitative research Methods.

**Keywords:** *temple paintings of Sri Lanka, southern style, western influence, Kandyan painting*

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