

An Investigative Study of Historical Reference Sources Used in Ancient Monastic Libraries in Sri Lanka

Rev. Upali, Demunnewe Thero

Dept. Social Sciences and Comparative Studies, Bhisku University of Sri Lanka,
Anuradhapura.
upalithero@busl.ac.lk

Abstract

This study delved into the historical reference sources housed in ancient monastic libraries of Sri Lanka, uncovering their pivotal role in safeguarding and conveying a deep understanding of Sri Lankan civilization. Employing an exploratory approach, data analyzed both primary and secondary sources, focusing on the period from the Anuradhapura to the Dambadeni era. Findings revealed the importance of traditional reference sources like Atthakatha, Tika, Tippani, Getapada, Sanna, Pitapoth, and Glossaries. These include various commentaries on Buddhist scriptures and specialized glossaries, which are instrumental in interpreting Buddhist teachings and philosophical concepts. It concluded that these resources are indispensable for scholars and practitioners of Buddhism, playing a crucial role in maintaining the continuity and accessibility of Sri Lanka's rich historical and cultural knowledge.

Keywords: *ancient monastic libraries, cultural knowledge, historical reference sources, reference sources.*

Introduction

A reference source is a source that should be read only to get unique information but should not be read continuously. It is a print or electronic source designed by the arrangement and treatment of its subject matter to be consulted for definite items of information rather than to be read consecutively. Some examples are Glossaries, Bibliographies, Almanacs, Directories, Dictionaries, Encyclopedias, Handbooks (Manuals), Indexes and abstracts, Yearbooks, Statistical sources, Biographies, Geographical sources (Gazetteers, Guidebooks,

Maps, Atlases, Globes), Government Publications (Katz, William A. 1992). Reference sources are fundamental in providing reliable and comprehensive information to aid research and understanding.

The historical context of Sri Lanka reveals the significance of monastic libraries as centers of learning and repositories of knowledge. Monastic libraries played a crucial role in preserving and disseminating sacred texts, historical chronicles, and other important documents related to Sri Lankan civilization. Ancient libraries in Sri Lanka have preserved additional reference sources that exhibit distinct characteristics and offer unique insights. This research involves a systematic examination of various types of historical reference sources used in monastic libraries of Sri Lanka.

Objectives

This study aims to investigate the historical reference sources used in ancient monastic libraries in Sri Lanka. The monastic libraries of Sri Lanka hold a wealth of historical and cultural information that has been preserved and passed down through the generations. Understanding the reference sources that were available in these libraries and how they contributed to the understanding of Sri Lankan history is essential for comprehending the rich cultural heritage of the country.

Materials and Methods

The research methodology for this study is exploratory, combining both primary and secondary sources. As the sample of this study, only the classical language literary information sources used in the monastic libraries belonging to the period from the ancient period to the early medieval period or from the Anuradhapura period to the Dambadeni

period were investigated. Primary sources will include ancient manuscripts and documents that have been preserved in ancient monastic libraries. Secondary sources will encompass scholarly articles, books, and publications that discuss the topic. By analyzing and correlating primary and secondary sources, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the historical reference sources used in ancient monastic libraries of Sri Lanka. This study was limited only to Sinhala, Pali from the Anuradhapura era to the Dambadeni era.

Results and Discussion

It can be identified that there are some traditional reference sources in ancient monastic libraries in Sri Lanka such as Atthakatha, Tika, Tippani, Getapada, Sanna, Pitapoth, and Glossaries. Commentaries on Buddhist scriptures, known as Atthakathas, and sub-commentaries, known as Tikas, will also be investigated. These commentaries provide insights into the interpretation and understanding of Buddhist teachings during ancient times. In this comprehensive study of ancient monastic libraries in Sri Lanka, spanning from the Anuradhapura to the Dambadeni periods, we unearthed a rich tapestry of historical reference sources, pivotal in understanding the intricate fabric of Sri Lankan civilization and Buddhist teachings. Our exploration revealed an array of traditional reference materials, including Atthakatha (detailed commentaries on Buddhist scriptures), Tika (sub-commentaries elucidating textual meanings), Tippani (glosses offering clarifications), Getapada (verses summarizing complex teachings), Sanna (concise summaries facilitating memorization), Pitapoth (indexes categorizing knowledge), and specialized Glossaries. These sources, preserved with remarkable fidelity in the monastic libraries, offer invaluable insights

into the philosophical underpinnings and cultural heritage of ancient Sri Lanka. They not only illuminate the scholarly and religious practices of the time but also significantly contribute to the continuity and accessibility of a profound historical and cultural legacy for future generations of scholars and practitioners of Buddhism.

The Atthakatha represents a genre of commentaries on Buddhist scriptures, providing detailed explanations and interpretations. Tika refers to annotations or commentaries that elucidate the meaning and implications of specific texts. Timpani are glosses, providing clarifications and supplementary information on important terms and concepts. Getapada is verses or stanzas that summarize complex teachings. Sanna denotes concise summaries of canonical texts, facilitating easy memorization. Among the old Sinhala palm leaf manuscripts, there is a type of book called Pitapoth. It is a type of book written to describe only the difficult words in the content of a major Sinhala literature palm leaf manuscript. They are attached to the outside of the main palm leaf manuscript. Such books are called Pitapath. Pitapath are catalogs or indexes that organize and categorize vast amounts of knowledge. Finally, Glossaries compile definitions and explanations of specialized terms for quick reference.

References

Abesiriwardhana, Ananda. (2012). Sanskrutha, Pali, Prakruta bhashawanhi nighanthu (Kosha) grantha pilibanda adyayanayak. mahacharya jayasiri linkage abhinandana granthaya, 157-180.

Adikaram, E. W. (1946). Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon. Ceylon: Migoda.

Endo, T. (2013). Studies in Pali Commentarial Literature, Hong Kong: Centre for Buddhist Studies.

- Pannakitti, H. (2003). PalisahityayeItihasaya. trans. Colombo: S. Godage.
- Pannasara himi, Okkampitiye, (1997). Sinhala Wyakhayana Sahithyaya Pilibanda wigrahayak. Manawashasthrapeetha Shasthreeya sangrahaya. Kelaniya Wishwawidyalaya.
- Katz, William A. (1992). Introduction to Reference Work. Vol. 1: Basic Information Sources. 6th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Yasassi himi, Okkampitiye (2017). Kosha Sahithyaya Arambhaya Wishayehi bala pe chathurtha padarthayan. pranama, 229-246.