

Archaeology: The Three Savants in the Field of Sri Lankan Buddhist Monastic Architecture

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The Department of Archaeology, University of Kelaniya was established in 1979. Serving the department were three Professors, namely Abhaya Ariyasinghe, Senake Bandaranayake and H.T Basnayake, serving at different times, whose contributions have received national and international acclaim. There is no doubt that we can class them as savants in the field of archaeology.

Architectural remains of Buddhist monasteries, in terms of size and number, constitute the most significant branch of archaeology. The specialization area or the doctoral research of these Professors was Buddhist monasticism in Sri Lanka. This paper is intended to examine the approaches of these Professors in the field of Buddhist monastic architecture. It can be seen that there are two approaches to the study, the first is a historical approach and the second is a social approach.

Abhaya Ariyasinghe and H. T. Basnayake attempted to recognize a considerable number of details pertaining to particulars of monastic units as mentioned in the ancient chronicles. The publication of all existing remains of Buddhist monasteries under architecture would be a valuable record in order to study the historical context of the subject. Therefore, it can be said that Ariyasinghe and Basnayake developed the forms and concepts in the context of the historical approach (Gunawardhana, 2003). However, the decade of 1970 marks a turning point when there were two significant lines of development in archaeology (Trigger, 1989). First, the critical analysis of literary sources and inscriptional evidence that constituted the initial framework. Secondly, the research components as initiated by other disciplines of theoretical studies and other analytical methods in examining the Buddhist monasteries. The scholar who has engaged himself in Buddhist monastic scholarship in systematically analyzing the various types of these institutions, the individual building units and the theoretical framework of the monasteries is Senake Bandaranayake, who developed the social approach.

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