HOW THE BUDDHIST MONKS OF MEDITATION MONASTERIES FULFILLED THEIR MEDITATIONAL NECESSITIES; A CASE STUDY OF ANURADHAPURA WESTERN MONASTERY COMPLEX, IN SRI LANKA

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How the Buddhist Monks of Meditation Monasteries Fulfilled Their Meditational Necessities;
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Abstract

Architecture is a built environmental factor that reflects a country's political, social, economic, and cultural characteristics in different eras. Therefore, in understanding history, it is important to pay special attention to the architecture of the past. This study also focuses on the study of architectural traditions that describe the features of one era in ancient Sri Lanka, namely the Anuradhapura Period. This era is one of the longest periods of the monarchy in Sri Lanka, and in this study we will reveal how the Buddhist monks who lived in the meditation monasteries used their meditational necessities to create the architectural features of the temples. By studying this architecture we intend to reveal how the features of the meditation monastery tradition were applied to their needs. The main purpose of this study is to examine examples of how the Sri Lankan monks of that period built environmental elements in an aesthetically pleasing and clever way to suit their religious and utilitarian needs as well as to offer opportunities for socializing. The research methodology here was primarily a pre-research study and later a field study. Data collection through mapping, planning, and photography was done by scrutinizing the Western monastery complex in Anuradhapura. The data collected in the analysis of the data were studied by comparing it with other monasteries in this tradition and by comparing it with Buddhist texts and other historical sources. In interpreting the analytical data, we built on previous archaeological research and resultant hypothesis on how the monks of that period used each of the architectural elements for meditation.

Keywords

Anuradapura, Architecture, Meditation monasteries,

Western monasteries

Introduction

Studying Sri Lankan temple architecture leads to an understanding of its origins and gradual development. Religious architecture which began with cutting drip ledges in natural caves has transformed into more complex monasteries and buildings. The

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emergence of the 'Mahavihara' tradition can be identified as the architectural pinnacle as has been demonstated by many previous studies.

There are three main monastery traditions that stand out in the Anuradhapura period, namely the Mahavihara tradition (major monastery tradition), the Pabbatārāma tradition (mountain monastery tradition), and the Padhānaghara tradition (meditation monastery tradition). Each of these three monastic traditions has different characteristics, and the monks who represented each of these monastic traditions also represent different Buddhist traditions. Monastery features indicate that there were monks who respected the Mahāyāna tradition in the Pabbatārāma and monks who respected the Theravāda tradition in the Padhānaghara. But each of the monasteries in the Mahavihara tradition represented the Mahāyāna as well as the Theravāda tradition, and in some cases mixed features.

Among the three monastic traditions listed above, the main focus of this research is on the major monastery tradition. It is revealed that the meditation monastery monks, especially those who practiced pure Theravāda practices gave prominence to meditation and designed architectural elements to suit their meditative needs while designing the environment created in the monastic tradition. This research basically identifies the monks' attempts to design the architectural elements to suit those meditative needs.

Introduction to the Padhānaghara Tradition

There are numerous ideologies and concepts regarding the Padhānaghara tradition. According to the Sinhala dictionary, 'Padhāna' gives the meanings of annihilation of demerits, courage for meditation, and the effort for mental concentration.[1] The *Amāvatura* of the Polonnaruwa era states *"Me padhanin pahava isuru kulehi ipidu"* which means previously mentioned courage for meditation.[2] As noted by Aṭuvācārya Buddhaghosa Thera in the *Visuddhimagga* "*Vīrya caitasikaya karaṇakoṭagena avaśeṣa citta caitasikayo vīrya keretnui padāana nami*" which means other *cetasika*-s place a major role in enhancing *viriya cetasika*.[3] So it is an obvious fact that Padhāna has got a definite meaning within the religious texts.

The word Padhānaghara is derived from the combination of *padhāna* and *gharaya*, in which *gharaya* stands for house. Accordingly, the house which supports giving courage for meditation can be called Padhānaghara.[4] According to the *Pūjāvaliya* written in the Dambadeniya period, these sorts of monasteries were named *Piyangal*.[5] The word itself is evidenced in some stone inscriptions.[6]

The *Cullavaggapāli* of the *Vinayapiṭaka* which provides laws about building hermitages for monks. Under the *Senāsanakkhandhaka,* contained in the subtopic of the *Cullavaggapāli*, Lord Buddha has preached five types of hermitages.[7] Among them, Padhānaghara can be categorized under the *pāsāda* category.

Instead of the word Padhānaghara, *Piyangal* and double-stage buildings have been used. On special occasions word, *Tapovana* denotes the meaning of Padhānaghara.[8] The most prominent structure to identify this particular building type is the double-

stage building interconnected with a stone slab.[9] Throughout Sri Lanka, these sorts of buildings can be found in the following places.

1. Thantirimale
2. Veherabendigala
3. Western Monastery in Anuradhapura
4. Riṭigala
5. Mihinthale Kaḷudiya Pokuṇa
6. Nuwaragala
7. Meṇikdena
8. Nāgolla
9. Māḷigatenna
10. Araṅkele
11. Kiralāgala
12. Amuṇukola
13. Sīthākotuwa
14. Budugala

From the above-mentioned list, Veherabendigala Padhānaghara is considered to be the oldest. It belongs to the 3rd century B.C. - 6th century A.D. period. This tradition is considered as belonging to the Anurādapura period.

Scholars have many definitions regarding the applicability of the Padhānaghara tradition. As mentioned above the meaning of words denotes that these monasteries were used by hermit monks. Debates have arisen regarding the applicability of the double stages of this tradition. According to Prof. T.G. Kulatunge, the front stage must have been used by the senior monks to advise the novice monks. Also, he shows that the staircases beside the stone bridge which connects the two chambers must be used for the convenience of the entering and exiting of the monks.[10]

The second question that arises pertains to who lived in the monasteries of this tradition. There are numerous ideologies regarding this. Prof. Paranavitana puts forth the idea that according to the meanings of the words, there might have been *Āraṇyavāsī* or *Pāṃśukūlika* monks in these monasteries.[11] But Ven. Walpola Rahula does not agree with Paranavitana's idea as he argues that *Āraṇyavāsī* or *Pāṃśukūlika* monks did not just live in these frontier monasteries. Rahula brings out the idea that as mentioned in the *Mahāvaṃsa* the incident of *Āraṇyavāsī* monks in the Abhayagiri monastery during King Sena II (886-901 AD), shows that these monks were residing even in the urban monasteries.[12]

When considering the elements, there are some common features of this entire monastery tradition. They are,

1. The main entrance and access
2. Sub-entrances
3. Parapet
4. Double-stage
5. Chapter house

6. Alms hall
7. Conduit or ponds
8. A system of latrines and lavatories
9. Other architectural features (staircases)

The basic plan of a Padhānaghara can be understood via the above-mentioned elements. It is important to consider that these features differ and are unique from place to place.

The historical background, dispersal, applicability, and structural elements of the special architectural feature Padhānaghara have been thoroughly studied. The next intention is to conduct a macro study of this feature relating to the Anuradhapura western monasteries, which is one of the major Padhānagharas in Sri Lanka. Under that, the location of the western monasteries, entrance and environmental conditions, the origin of western monasteries and other historical factors, and architectural specialties will be studied. It will further discuss how monks who live in these Padhānaghara monasteries fulfilled their meditational necessities.

The Western Monastery Complex

The western monastery complex is situated near the Lolugaswewa junction in the Lolugaswewa Grāmaniladhāri division which is located in the Anuradhapura Divisional Secretariat division of the Anuradhapura district. The absolute location of this western monastery complex is 8.3611°N and 80.3725°E. Elevation from the sea level is 98m or 322 feet. When considering the entrance, this place can be reached by traveling 1 1/4 Km towards Northwest from Ihala Halmillewa, 1 1/2 Km towards north from Pahala Halmillewa, and 1 1/2 Km Northeast from Kaṭukeliyāwa. When traveling from Anuradhapura town, via the center of Anuradhapura town along with the tank bunt of Basawakkulama, the Lolugaswewa area is reached after passing the Māpā Palace. Even though this might have been one single complex in the past, now the buildings are diffused as a result of modern settlements. For the usefulness of the archaeologists, the buildings belonging to this complex are named from A - H. According to that system of categorization, 8 regions belonging to the Padhānaghara tradition can be observed today.

The area belonging to the western monasteries Padhānaghara can be identified as an agricultural area in the present and the environmental condition of the area shows that it belongs to the dry zone and geographically the peneplain zone. When considering the flora, there are many timber sources including 'Asathu Bo', 'Kohomba', 'Halmilla', 'Milla', shrubs and grasslands. Even today there is a calm and quiet environment around the western monasteries complex with extensive forest cover. With the smaller number of lay settlements in the past it likely created a very suitable place for meditating monks.

Historically, it was in the west of the Anuradhapura citadel. The oldest literary source regarding the Anuradhapura town development is found in the tenth chapter of the Mahāvaṃsa. Its 88 and 89 stanzas give signs about the features which King Paṇḍukābhaya located in the western direction.[13]

> He laid out also four suburbs as well as the Abhaya-tank, the common cemetery, the place of execution, and the chapel of the Queens of the West, the banyan-tree of Vessavana and the Palmyra-palm of the Demon of Maladies, the ground set apart for the Yonas and the house of the Great Sacrifice; all these he laid out near the west gate.[14]

According to this, it is clear that after the 6th century BC there had been buildings including a cemetery in the area of the present western monastery premises. Furthermore, it It is clear that the applicability of the monastery complex is inevitably connected with the cemetery area as the area of the cemetery was important for the meditating *Pāṃśukūlika* monks in the Padhānaghara tradition.

Anuradhapura western monastery is neither located very close to the citadel nor at a long distance. So, the western monastery cannot be considered as a provincial Padhānaghara complex such as Riṭigala. According to the Mahāvaṃsa, during King Sena II's reign (833-853 BC) the *Pāṃśukūlika* monks who resided in the Abhayagiri *Vihāra* had been removed from the Abhayagiri chapter. Prof. Priyashantha Gunawardana's idea is that the monks who resided in the Anuradhapura western monastery must be the *Pāṃśukūlika* monks who left the Abhayagiri chapter.[15] Even so, Anuradhapura western monastery can be considered an active residential place for meditating monks from the middle era to the end of the Anuradhapura kingdom.

The western monastery is a place that has several buildings residing apart due to the present-day settlements. As mentioned above, for the easiness of studies these monasteries had been named and divided into 8 blocks from A to H. Architectural similarities as well as differences can be observed and identified in these monasteries. Field observations have been specifically used to study these characteristics. When considering the architectural features, these are a few elements that can be observed mainly in the western monastery complex.

1. Nature of the parapet (**Plate No.1)**
2. Nature of the main entrance and sub-entrances (**Plate No.2)**
3. Double-stage building (**Plate No.3)**
4. Nature of the located staircase (**Plate No.4)**
5. Nature of the conduit or pond (**Plate No.5)**

When studying the western monastery it is important to consider the nature of the parapet among the other characteristics. Under modern conservations, there are several monastery complexes with parapets. The western monastery named 'A' is not yet formally conserved. Particular features of the stone parapet can be observed and it is evident that quadrangular stone slabs have been used to create the parapet. In addition, they are polished to some extent. Parapets can be easily identified in the C, G, and H monasterijes, and they're also polished and can be observed. The parapet of the Padhānaghara of B, D, and E areas cannot be observed as they are not yet conserved. These parapets must have been mostly used to specifically portray the monastery as a holy place as well as for security. But due to the negligible height of the stone parapets of those conserved Padhānaghara, it is questionable whether they were used for security.

The main entrance can be observed next to the parapet. But solid evidence about this parapet is received from the Padhānaghara C. Some evidence of the entrance can also be taken from the Padhānaghara G where the conservations are not yet completed. The most easily accessible conserved entrance for studies is located in the Padhānaghara C. Its main entrance takes the shape of a small cottage. This has been created upon 12 high stone pillars and a stone upper structure on that. This cottage is located in the frontal center of the parapet and in the middle there is a stone door-frame. From that, the double-stage building's front entrance is directly visible. Any type of special carvings cannot be identified in this entrance, or along the cottage or pillars but the upper structure's door-frame straight-line design is added for beauty. In front and back of the main entrance, short roads can be identified and the noteworthy feature is that these roads are perpendicular. The road network of the c0onserved Padhānaghara C serves as an example of this.

The central factor while considering the Padhānaghara is the double-stage building. Also, Padhānaghara can be identified by its name due to this building. This can be seen in all 8 western monastery complexes while this is visible in the already conserved Padhānaghara. Below are mentioned features of double stages that can be commonly identified in all the western monastery complexes.

1. Stone pillars can be seen in the back or the *pāsāda* of the double-stage buildings in the Padhānaghara while the frontal area or the *mālaka* does do not have any stone pillars.
2. Some stone pillars in the *pāsāda* are polished to some extent while some remain as they were abstracted from the rock. **(Plate No.6)**
3. The bridge which connects the *mālaka* and *pāsāda* is highly polished and this can be named the most polished feature of all 8 complexes of the western monastery. **(Plate No.7)**
4. There are several cuts on the lower side of the stone bridge which connect *mālaka* and *pāsāda* to fit pillars to strengthen it.
5. Foundations of the *mālaka* and *pāsāda* are decorated with simple *boradam* designs.
6. There is no water conduit running around the double stages of the A, B, E, G, and H Padhānaghara, yet a part of a beautifully curved water conduit can be identified in one side of the Padhānaghara D. This might have been used more as a pond than a water conduit. Another water conduit running around a building can be identified in the Padhānaghara C.
7. Small gutter with straight-line designs has been used to bring out the water from *mālaka* and *pāsāda*.
8. The staircase leading to the double stages is constructed with stone slabs which are simple yet polished while beside the staircase of the Padhānaghara C a similar design can be identified. Guard stones are created with the staircase but they do not have any design. But a simple decoration had been added by using several straight lines around the guard stone.

The above-mentioned features can be identified in the double-stage buildings of the western monastery Padhānaghara.

When considering the Padhānaghara, another architectural feature equal in importance to the double-stage is the presence of ponds. This feature is common for all 8 western monasteries as large-scale and small-scale ponds can be seen around the monasteries. Large ponds are located around Padhānaghara C and D while a curved pond is in the D complex which has a staircase with equidistant steps to get into the pond. One step has been created to get into the pond in the Padhānaghara B. It is standard conjectural thinking that these ponds were used to supply water to monks and maintain humidity in the western monastery.

Western monastery Padhānaghara's features are created mainly using stone materials. Observations show that these stones were taken from the nearby rocks around the western monastery pressure flaking technique has been used to abstract stones from the rocks in the western monastery and they have been used in three different ways. They are,

1. Using abstracted stone without any alteration
2. Using abstracted stone after polishing to some extent
3. Using abstracted stone after polished

The secondarily created stones as mentioned above had been created into different shapes for use. Carving designs are only used in the urinal slabs. All other features have straight-line designs and they can be seen in,

1. Edges of the guard stones
2. End of the upper structure
3. The upper foundation of the *mālaka* and *prāsāda*

Apart from the straight-line designs, simple *boradam* style has been incorporated into the architectural design.

Another instance where designs were used are the supporting slabs on either side of the staircase at the C western monastery complex. The carvings on surfaces that are visible to the outside are very special as the design depicts a v*imāna* of South India. But all these characteristics cannot be observed in the western monastery.

Sanitary buildings are a major component of the Sri Lankan monastery tradition. It includes features such as latrines, lavatories, and *jantāghara*, and among the sanitary features of Padhānaghara, urinal slabs hold an important place. Among the western monastery complex C, G, and H Padhānaghara-s these urinal slabs can be easily identified.

Among other features of Padhānaghara, artistic designs and carvings are only visible in these designs and are found in these urinal slabs in the western monastery **(Plate No.8)**. Also, an area to keep a water pot for feet has also been identified. Among these, a urinal slab with an artistic carving is found in the Padhānaghara C. The meditating monks who lived in the Padhānaghara might have symbolized the

rejection of materialistic life by applying the carvings to the latrines and lavatories. According to this, latrines and lavatories in the Padhānaghara must have been used not only for function but also to generate symbolism.

Even though solid evidence of a *jantāghara* has not yet been found around the Anuradhapura western monastery, equipment which looks like stone basins of *jantāghara* has been identified from the Padhānaghara G. and evidence about these stone basins can be found in the *jantāghara* in Ritigala and Abhayagiriya.[16] It is unable to be confirmed whether they had a *jantāghara* since other features related to *jantāghara* cannot be found in these areas. Sometimes the features of a Padhānaghara might yet be able to be found when the conservation processes are finished.

Another major feature observed when studying the monastery complexes under the Padhānaghara tradition of Anuradhapura western monastery is the specificity of its water management. As the Anuradhapura area gets rain only during a specific period of the year it is important to use the water with frugality. The water which falls into the non-upper structural *mālaka* are directed towards the pond or conduit via gutters and drains. There was an advanced system for sanitary and water management practices in the western monastery.

Several features can be identified in one of the monasteries used by meditating monks who used to reside and engage in religious activities in this western monastery complex. This Padhānaghara complex was built during the era when Anuradhapura architecture became popular. But the carvings and designs can only be seen in the latrines and lavatories of this tradition while main buildings have only simple designs including *boradam* desings. Sometimes stone pillars extracted from the rocks have been used even without being polished and the picket marks are still visible in those pillar structures. Also, it is assumed that the walls of these monastery complexes are used as promenades (*caṅkamana*) while the ponds and small ponds are arranged for the use of monks. The most important feature is that unlike metropolitan monasteries (*mahāvihāra)* and mountain monasteries (*pabbatārāma*) monastery complexes which were located in the adjoining area of Anuradhapura, this area did not have any sub-buildings including shrine rooms, *bodhighara*, hospitals, refectories (*dānasālā*) and etc. It indicates that the monks who resided in this monastery did not have a great necessity for those structures. Padhānaghara was rich with features that were essential for a minimalist life of meditating monks.

Conclusion

According to this study, it is clear that when the Anuradhapura monastery construction reached its height there were other monastery traditions that originated and became very popular in the isolated and adjoining areas in Anuradhapura. Among these Padhānaghara there must have been Theravāda monks who respected their previous monastery tradition as well because with the Mahāyāna influence there was extraordinary monastic construction at Abhayagiri, Jetavanārāma, and some *pabbatārāma*-s. But the Padhānaghara monks valued and protected their *Pāṃśukūlika* monasteries using the traditional way in the face of the rapidly changing

societal forces and they built their hermitages considering only the basic necessities of the life.

Plate No.1: The parapet, Monastery Complex A

Plate No.2: The main entrance, Monastery Complex C

Plate No.3: Double stage building, Monastery Complex C

Plate No.4: The located staircase, Monastery Complex D

Plate No.5: The pond, Monastery Complex B

Plate No.6: Stone pillars in the *Pāsāda*, Monastery Complex G

Plate No.7: The bridge which connects the *Mālaka* & *Pāsāda*, Monastery Complex D

Plate No.8: Urinal slab, Monastery Complex C

Endnotes

[1] Sinhala Shabdakoshaya 1987: p. 674
[2] Amāvathura 1948: p. 31
[3] Visuddhimagga 2000: p. 16
[4] Sinhala Shabdakoshaya 1987: p. 674
[5] Pujāvaliya 1954: p.731
[6] EZ. vol.1. 1912: p. 44; EZ.vol.1 1912: p. 88; EZ.vol.2 1928: p. 29
[7] *"Vihāraṃ aḍḍayogañca - pāsādaṃ hammiyaṃ guhaṃ*
pañcalenaṃ anuññāsi - vihāre seṭṭhi kārayi"
Cv. 1956: p.260
[8] Bandaranayake 1974: p. 102
[9] Wijesuriya 1998: p. 531
[10] Kulathunga 1993: p. 27

[11] Paranavitana 1957: pp. 20-21
[12] Rahula 1956: pp.195-197
[13] *"Kārentho'bhirami rājā - ratikhiḍḍā samappito*
    dvāragāme ca caturo - bhayavāpiñca kārayi"
    "Mahāsusānā ghātanaṃ - pacchimarājiniṃ tathā;
    vessavaṇassa nigradhaṃ - byādhaidevassa tālakaṃ"
     Mahāvaṃso, 1993: 10th chapter, 88-89 *gāthā*
[14] Geiger 1912: p. 74
[15] Gunawardhana 2009: p. 79
[16] Chandānanda 2012: p. 38

Abrivations

AD   Anno Domini (Common Era)
Cv.   *Cullavaggapāḷi*
Ed.   Edition
EZ   *Epigraphia Zeylaniaca*
p.   Page
pp.   Pages
Tran.   Translation
Vol.   Volume

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