The Cave Monasteries of Sri Lanka: An Archaeological Study of the *Mayuragiriya* Ancient Temple in *Monaragala*

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Abstract: The cave monasteries of Sri Lanka are integral to the island's Buddhist heritage, providing valuable insights into the monastic life and religious practices of ancient Sri Lanka. This study focuses on the *Mayuragiriya* Ancient Temple, located in the *Monaragala* District, which serves as a prominent example of such monastic sites. The *Mayuragiya* monastery dates back to the Anuradhapura period. By the 12th century, the monasteries in this southern region of the country had entered a golden age, partly due to the decision of the regional ruler of the *Udundora*, Queen Sugala to use this monastery for the safekeeping and veneration of the Buddha's tooth relic and alms bowl. Thus, these relics were kept there for approximately 75 years. The *Mayuragiriya* Ancient Temple consists of two cave monasteries: *Amaragiriya* and *Mayuragiriya*. The temple's archaeological evidence, including remains, stone pillars, murals, inscriptions, and a network of tunnels underscores its significance as a center for monastic life and religious worship. A notable feature of the site is the 18-foot (riyan)-long reclining Buddha statue, which is a significant religious icon in Sri Lankan Buddhist culture. The primary objective of this study is to investigate the historical, architectural, and cultural significance of the *Mayuragiriya* cave monasteries, examining their role in safeguarding the Sacred Tooth Relic, as well as their function as centers for meditation, religious education, and spiritual practice. To achieve this, field and literary surveys were employed as methodologies. Additionally, the research addresses the ongoing challenges of preserving these ancient sites and emphasizes their enduring relevance in understanding the evolution of Sri Lankan Buddhism.

Keywords: *Amaragiriya*, Cave monasteries, *Udundora*, *Mayuragiriya*, Queen Sugala

INTRODUCTION

Cave monasteries in Sri Lanka hold significant cultural, religious, and historical value, serving as important centers of Buddhist practice and education. These monasteries, often carved directly into rock

faces or located within cave systems, emerged as vital components of monastic life on the island. The establishment and development of cave monasteries in Sri Lanka can be traced back to the introduction of Buddhism in the 3rd century BCE, during the reign of King *Devanampiya Tissa* (Oldernberg, 1879). The arrival of Mahinda, the son of Emperor Ashoka of India, marked the beginning of Buddhist influence in Sri Lanka, and after accepting the *Mahameghavana* Garden in Anuradhapura, the group including Mahinda Thera worked to prepare the headquarters of the Buddha Order. This star in ting points later became the main center of Buddhist civilization. After spending time in Anuradhapura, the group including *Mahinda Thera* came to *Cetiya* mountain (*Mihinthalawa*) for the rainy season. This was the beginning of the preparation of caves to house the monks (Gunawardhana, 2009). *Mahavamsa* mentioned that King *Devanampiya Tissa* made sixty-eight rock cells near the *Kantaka-cetiya* and on the full moon day of the month *Āsālha*, the king came and gave the rock cells to the *Theras* as a concentrated offering (Geiger, 1912).

The cave monasteries in Sri Lanka flourished during the *Anuradhapura* period (377 BCE – 1017 CE), a time of significant royal patronage for Buddhism (Bandaranayake, 1974). According to the architectural classification presented by Senake Bandaranayake, there are mainly two types.

I.   Secular buildings

II.   Religious buildings

The type of religious buildings can be mainly classified into two main categories, monasteries and complex building forms. Such as,

I.   Cave monasteries

II.   *Mahavihara* monasteries (Organic monasteries/ central monasteries)

III.   *Pabbatha Vihara*

IV.   *Panchayathana*

V.   *Padhanagara*

VI.   Hospital monasteries and *Tampita Vihara* (Gunawardhana, 2009).

Cave monasteries were the first and main monastic traditions in Sri Lanka, because of the preparation of the natural caves for the monks. This, which first started in *Mihintale*, by the time spread all over Sri Lanka, including *Vessagiriya*, *Sithulpawwa*, Sigiriya, and Dambulla. The simplicity of the natural caves and the fact they are spread in a macro background in many parts of Sri Lanka were the reasons for the selection of the early monasteries. The main feature of these monasteries is that they are built on a rock-caves on top of the huge mountains and the caves in the natural lands were selected for living (Gunawardhana, 2009).

The *Mayuragiriya* ancient temple, which is also known as Monaragala *Purana Raja Maha Viharaya* or *Kandēe Viharaya* is a prominent example of an ancient cave monastery in Sri Lanka. The *Mayuragiriya* ancient temple is home to two cave monasteries: *Amaragiriya* and *Mayuragiriya*. The history of the *Mayuragiriya* temple dates back to the BC period (Bandara, 1997). According to the *Mahāvamsa*, the site is also a religious location with a deep connection to the *Udundora*, the capital of the *Atadahas Rata* in the ancient Ruhuna kingdom. It mentions that 'General *Rakkha* and his subordinates arrived *Nigroda Maragalla* (*Maragala*), after the war near the village *Uddannadwara* (*Udundora*) to defeat Sugala devi and take the Bowl and Tooth relics, which were the symbols of the royal inheritance' (Sumangala Thero, 1967).

The *Mahāvamsa* states that when the *Thupārāma* pagoda was building *Sāmanera* Sumana went to King Ashoka and brought the Bowl relics, according to the invitation of *Mahinda Thera* (Geiger, 1912) and the tooth relic was brought to Sri Lanka from *Kalinga* by a woman belongs to the *brahman* caste during the reign of king *Sirimeghawanna* (Sumangala Thero, 1967). The *Patra* relic was not only a sacred object but also a royal object until the Kandyan period. Furthermore, the owner of the tooth relic was the ruler of the country as a tradition. So, the rulers were particularly interested in the safety of the Tooth relic. When the kingdom was changed, a new Temple of the Tooth Relic was built. *Rājāvaliya* states that King *Nishshankamalla* considered acquiring the Tooth Relic as an important task in obtaining royal inheritance. So, he fought for it and built a new Temple of the Tooth Relic (Premananda thero, 1959). The information in these chronicles reveals the historical significance of the *Mayuragiriya* ancient temple. The archaeological remains of the temple of the tooth relics, inscriptions, rock-cut caves, and the *Amaragiriya* and *Mayuragiriya* cave temples highlight the archaeological significance of this site as a monastic complex. This paper explores the historical, architectural, and cultural significance of the *Mayuragiriya* ancient temple.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

According to the legends, this temple dates back to King *Devanampiya Thissa* (307-267 BC) and *Arahat Mayurapada Amaruppala* meditated in the caves in *Maragala* mountain with about five hundred great arahants. Another legend states that *Ananda Vanarathana Thero*, the chief incumbent of *Mayurapada Parivena* (*Mayurapada* Monastery) who authored the *Pujāvaliya* during the reign of King *Parakramabahu* II of *Dambadeniya* (1236-1271 AD), lived in the *Amaruppala Viharaya* (Amaragiriya) located in this mountain range, by then the temple came to be known as *Mayuragiriya* temple and the name of *Monaragala* had created from this name (Rathnayaka, 2008).

The *Maragala* mountain range, where the *Mayuragiriya* temple is located, has a remarkable historical background. According to *Mahavamsa* during the reign of *Vickramabahu,* the monks came to *Ruhuna* with the Tooth and Bowl relics. By the time *Manabharana* was the owner of the relics and after he died, the ownership of the relics had passed to *Sugala devi* during the reign of King *Parakramabahu I* who had a war with *Sugala devi* for the relics. Furthermore, the *Mahavamsa* cited that there was a war in the *Uddannadwara* (*Udundora*) and *Nigrodha Maragalla* (Maragala) (Sumangala Thero, 1967). As well, *Dalada Pujāvali* mentioned that relics were safekeeping at the *Amaragiriya* (Mayuragiriya) mountain in the *Udundora* during this war period (Sugathapala, 1929).

Udundora was the capital of the *Atadahasrata*, which is a part of the *Ruhuna* Kingdom. Prince *Manabharana's* younger brothers, *Kithsirimegha* and *Siri Vallabha*, who ruled *Ruhuna*, divided the administrative regions into *Atadahas Rata* and *Dolosdahas Rata* by limiting the *Walawe* River (Sumangala Thero, 1967). The ruler of the *Atadahas Rata* is located centered in the upper valley region of *Hada Oya*, the capital of the *Atadahas Rata* was *Uddannadwara* or *Udundora* (Prasanna, 2018).

The *Mayuragiriya* ancient temple has a great historical background among Buddhist temples in *Uva Wellassa* and it is one of the prominent cave-monastic sites in the *Monaragala* District, and it is thought to have been active during the *Ruhuna* Kingdom (ca. 3rd century BCE to the 11th century CE).

STUDY AREA AND METHODS

The *Mayuragiriya* ancient temple is located north of *Monaragala* town, in the *Uva* Province of Sri Lanka. Considering the absolute location of Monaragala *Rajamaha Vihara*, the North latitude is

6°54'13"N and the East longitude is 81°19'25"E. This *Rajamaha Vihara* is located about 4 km north of *Monaragala* town.

Although the *Monaragala* district has a dry zone climate, the temple is located near the *Monaragala* hill range and in the middle of a thick forest, so the climate is quite cold. Even though the average annual rainfall of *Monaragala* is 600-2000 mm, this mountain range receives an annual rainfall of 2500 mm.

The entire drinking water requirement of *Monaragala* City is met by the water springs of the *Maragala* mountain range. There are many water springs around here and *Maragala Oya* flows nearby. The water pumping station is located on the slope of the other part of the mountain range where the temple monastery is located.
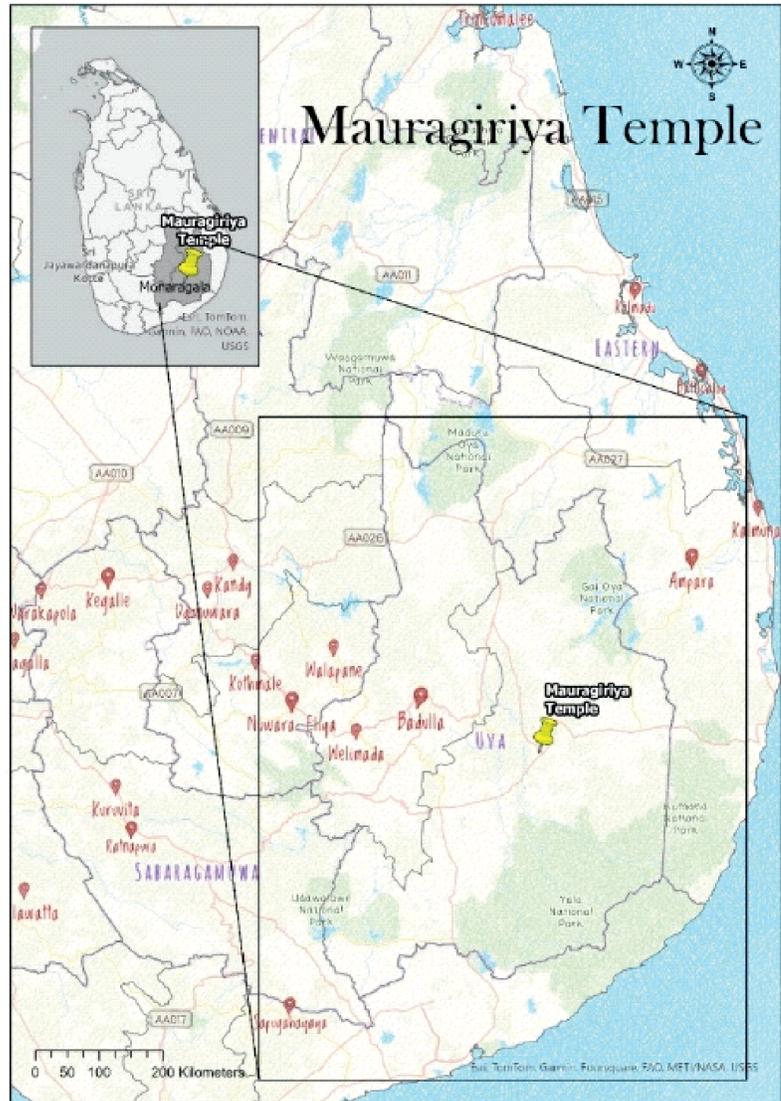
The monastery site is located in the *Maragala* mountain range of Monaragala. The *Maragala* mountain range near *Monaragala* town has been identified as a special ecological zone in the Lower *Uva* (Jiulehela, 2018).

Map; Location of the Mayuragiriya ancient temple

The *Maragala* mountain range, known as the Green Lung of Lower *Uva*, is a unique ecosystem with rich biodiversity, with an area of about 25 square kilometers.

METHODS

This research employed a literature review and a field survey as primary methods for data collection, ensuring a comprehensive examination of both tangible and intangible aspects related to the history and archaeology of cave monasteries. A qualitative approach was adopted to analyze these elements, integrating historical sources with direct field observations.

Literary Survey: To establish historical and contextual foundations, a detailed literature review was conducted, drawing on primary and secondary sources available in libraries. Primary sources included ancient texts, inscriptions, and archaeological reports, while secondary sources comprised scholarly articles, books, and prior studies on Sri Lankan monastic traditions. These resources provided insights into the historical significance, architectural evolution, and cultural impact of cave monasteries, forming the theoretical basis for the field survey.

Field Survey: An archaeological field survey was undertaken to examine the material remains associated with cave monasteries. This method proved efficient in validating historical accounts through direct observation. Fieldwork incorporated structured interviews and participant observation to document oral traditions and interpretations by local custodians and scholars.

SITE EXPLORATION AND DATA COLLECTION

The field survey primarily focused on the archaeological remains of the cave temples and their surrounding landscapes. Due to dense forest coverage, direct access to certain structures was restricted, limiting comprehensive documentation of all architectural elements. Nevertheless, observations were systematically recorded through photographic documentation, sketches, mapping, and descriptive notes, ensuring the preservation of visual evidence for further analysis.

Challenges in Fieldwork

One of the primary challenges encountered was limited visibility and accessibility, as many remnants of the monastic complex were covered by thick forest. This obstacle necessitated a reliance on comparative analysis, using available documentation and historical records to reconstruct missing details. The difficulty in recording some remains highlights the importance of remote sensing techniques and potential excavation efforts for future studies.

The collected field data, including photographs and observational notes, were systematically analyzed to identify patterns related to architectural features, material composition, and monastic layout. Comparative analysis with previously recorded archaeological findings helped verify the authenticity and establish chronological frameworks.

By integrating historical literature with archaeological field data, this study successfully reconstructed aspects of cave monastery development despite environmental constraints. The combination of qualitative analysis, primary sources, and on-site documentation enabled a clear understanding of monastic traditions, structural adaptations, and cultural significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the inscriptions in, *Maragala* Mountain, Monaragala Mountain, *Seemapahura, Rachchitha* Mountain, *Katugaha Galge* (Rock House), and *Sensungala*, the caves in these places dating back to the period of King Devanampiya Tissa (Dhammananda Thero, 1966). Also, there are two types of inscriptions in Mayuragiriya such as cave inscriptions and rock inscriptions

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Table 1: The details of Inscriptions

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Inscription	*translation*	*period*	*reference*
Cave inscriptions			
1. Khatha dinasha lene shudashane shagasha	The *sudharshana* cave of the lord Dinna was given to the Sangha.		(Bandara, 1997) (Amarawansha thero, 1969) (Medhananda thero, 2008)
2. Pushagutha therena mashithe lene dasha dishasha shagasha paribogaye dine	The cave created by *Pushyaguptha Thero* was given to the Sangha in the ten directions for consumption.		(Bandara, 1997) (Amarawansha thero, 1969) (Medhananda thero, 2008)
3. Mithagutha therasha dane agatha anagatha shagasha dine	The alms of the *Mithraguptha* there were given to the Sangha who arrived and did not arrive.		(Bandara, 1997) (Amarawansha thero, 1969)

|			
4. Khatha damarakithena karapithe shagasha	The cave was built by lord *Dharmarakshitha* given to the Sangha.		(Bandara, 1997) (Amarawansha thero, 1969)
5. Khatha nagasha lene shagasha dine	The cave of lord *Naga* was given to the Sangha		(Bandara, 1997) (Amarawansha thero, 1969)
6. Agidewa putha upashaka shumanaha lene shagasha	The cave of the *Upasaka Suamana*, son of the *Agnideva* given to the Sangha		(Bandara, 1997) (Medhananda thero, 2008)
7. Katha naguliya lene shagasha dine	The cave of the lord *Langali* given to the Sangha		(Bandara, 1997) (Medhananda thero, 2008)
8. *Naga therena karapithe chathudisha shagasha lene*	The cave which was built by Naga Thera given to the Sangha in the four directions.		(Bandara, 1997) (Medhananda thero, 2008)
9.… *chamara putha aya abayena kara pithe lene agatha anagatha chathudisha shagasha…*	The cave which was built by Prince *Abhaya*, son of the Chamara given to the Sangha who arrived and did not arrive from the four directions.		(Bandara, 1997) (Medhananda thero, 2008)
10. *Shupadite…. Shaga khathasha sanena…. Rithe… (destroyed)*			(Bandara, 1997)
Rock Inscriptions			
11. *Siddha ma (ba…) mara maha lina* tarapeya maha ma (-) (-) salavarada maha vaba ra daka vava ta hasa eka karaha satara amana ca da arama ha laba vasa paha lisa rakajakadi naka hasa di karaya aramasa ca ga (ta) vava ca mati vava la acala vava (-) aligama janavilagamahi palasa (-) da ha ca abimatanaba vasaya	Hail, *Maha…mara*, the chief secretary who resides in *Abimatana* (had dedicated) the two harvests by the tank named *Daka*, one harvest from the yield by the causeways of channel named Aga, four *amunas* and one *karisa* (and) fifteen (*karisa*) from the tank named *Hela* in the village *Karajah*i, harvest from *Naparajadi naka*, having caused fifteen (portions) from *Aramasa tank, Mati tank, Acala tank an*d villages of *Sila* and *Janavila* and the village content to the great (Bikkus of the) *Salavarada Maha Vihara*.	4th – 5th CE	(Somadewa, Raj. Wanninayake, Anusha., 2021)
12. *Savinima……………. Kina karavi kaha (vana)………. Savasatanata pati*	*Savinima*……have……*kahavana*…ay the merit this act for all beings.	4th CE	(Somadewa, Raj. Wanninayake, Anusha., 2021)

The above cave inscriptions, which are about offering the caves for the monks, can be dated to the early Anuradhapura period. Because the writing way and the information are similar to the cave inscriptions belonging to the 3rd century.

For example, the *Mihinthale* and *Vessagiriya* cave inscriptions included the words "*Shagasha, chathudisha shagasha, agatha anagatha chathudisha shagasha*" and the names of the persons who offered the cave for the monks (Paranavitana, 1970). *Medhananda Thero* mentioned inscriptions related to the *Mayuragiriya* ancient temple (fig.2). The inscriptions are written in Early Brahmi letters, confirming the above statements that the temple dates back to BCE. But any of the inscriptions haven't mentioned who offered this temple to monks

and except for the remains of the Temple of the Relics, there is no written evidence about the relics. Furthermore, the 9th inscription mentioned a prince named '*Abhaya*' and about job titles such as Lord *Dinna*, Lord *Dharmarakshitha*, Lord *Naga*, Lord *Langali*, and a Chief. The early cave inscriptions

also mentioned the officials, who were offered caves for monks. So, it is clear these monasteries date back to the early Anuradhapura period.

Field observations
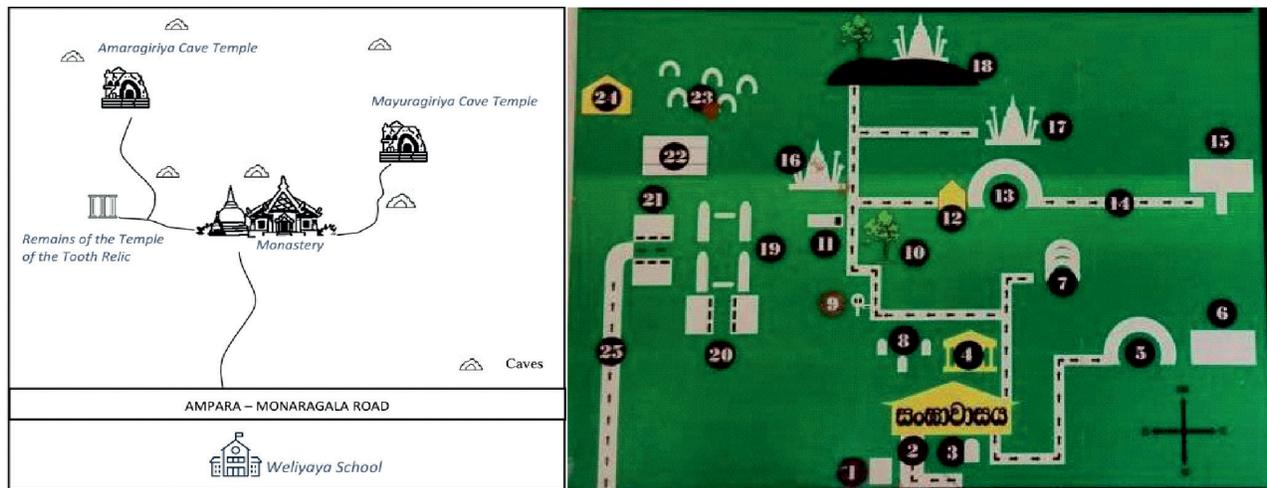
Map 2: Site map of the Mayuragiriya ancient temple

1. Rock inscription	2. South gate
3. Rock inscription	4. Audience hall
5. *Mayuragiriya* Cave Temple	6. Rock inscription
7. A Cave	8. *Sīma Malakaya*
9. Old Latrine	10. *Bodhi* (Bodhi Tree)
11. Stone bed	12. Remains of *Natha devala*
13. *Amaragiriya* cave temple	14. Tunnel
15. *Viharamulla* temple	16. Remains of a Pagoda
17. Remains of a Pagoda	18. *Balumgala* (Rock)
19. Remains of the Temple of the Tooth Relics	20. Western Gate
21. North gate	22. *Mayuragiriya Aranya* (temple)
23. Caves	24. Present temple
25. *Sri Dalada* street	

AMARAGIRIYA CAVE TEMPLE

The *Amaragiriya* cave temple is located on the left side of the monastery as shown in map 2 and is the oldest cave temple in the monastery. According to the legends, this cave temple was established by King *Wattagamini Abhaya* (104-89 BCE) (Rathnayaka, 2008). There is evidence within the cave, concerning a roof although the ruins of stone foundations are visible. Additionally, there are signs of small rock ponds. On both sides of the ponds, two statues were placed, that were made out of marble. It is believed that these statues represent a king and a queen, or Mahayana Bodhisattva figures, though their hands and feet are not visible. Inside the temple, two carved limestone statues can be identified; one is a seated statue, and the other is a standing statue. The standing statue is fixed onto a stone plinth and secured with three stone pegs, not having any additional support.

The interior of the cave, which once had paintings and statues of the gods and the Buddha, has unfortunately been damaged due to the actions of treasure hunters. Looking at the current state of the

site, it is clear that much of our cultural heritage is slowly being lost. For example, the seated statue has been completely removed from its stone base, leaving only the upper part of the statue. After studying the remaining pieces, it is clear that the statue's robe was very intricately designed. Besides these statues, there were also representations of the gods of *Kataragama* and *Vishnu* in the cave. Unfortunately, those statues have been destroyed. Additionally, the Dragon Pantheon has also been destroyed by treasure hunters, who are believed to have used explosives to damage the statues. The impact of these explosions is visible on the remains.

Upon focusing on the moonstone at the entrance to this temple, although the traditional artistic features typically associated with moonstones are absent, it is evident that the design reflects the shape of a lotus flower, with distinct lotus petals.

At the front of this cave temple, a series of stone steps can be observed on a large rock. The small depressions on the rock suggest that a roof may have been erected above. Additionally, the rock features a stone bed and a drainage system designed to channel rainwater away. Beyond this, there is also an inscription related to the cave temple. Upon entering the forest from the edge of the stone platform at the *Amaragiri Vihara*, one can observe the remains of a stupa. The dome of the stupa has been looted and destroyed by treasure hunters. Currently, it is completely covered by dense forest and appears to have undergone no restoration efforts. Furthermore, as one moves through the thick forest toward the mountain peak, one can also see other remnants of stupas and some other caves.

MAYURAGIRIYA CAVE TEMPLE

The *Mayuragiriya* cave temple is located on the right side of the monastery and it is larger than the *Amaragiri* cave temple. An inscription in Brahmi script is placed on a rock near the temple entrance. According to the description plate indicates that King *Mahanaga*, who ruled Anuradhapura from 555 to 567 AD, constructed this temple and consecrated a considerable portion of land to it.

The interior of the cave is tall enough for an average person, around 5 feet, to walk without bending. As one moves from the entrance towards the rear, the height of the cave gradually decreases. The rock inscription on the left, along with the moonstone, lamps, and stone pillars in the *Bodhi* courtyard, suggests the presence of residential structures in the area. Folklore reveals that around 500 *arahants*, including *Mayurapada Amarappala*, who attained arahant ship after receiving teachings from *Maharahant Mihindu*, resided in the *Mayuragiri* cave temple in *Monaragala* (Rathnayaka, 2008).

The paintings on the cave walls reveal that they were created on a stone surface made up of several layers. Some paintings are also found on the clay walls inside the stone caves. According to *Rahula Thero*, the head monk of the temple, both clay and a layer of lime have been applied to these walls. Another notable feature of these paintings is that each type is confined to a specific section. Straight lines demarcate the different painting types, and the artwork is neatly organized, making it easy to interpret.

It seems that these paintings were first outlined on the clay surface and then colored as needed. The paintings on the inner cave walls are done in shades of blue, red, brown, white, and black. Since the use of blue is characteristic of the Kandyan period, it can be concluded that these paintings belong to that period. However, human figures with animal heads, such as those of deer, sambar, peacocks, horses, and others, can be seen in these paintings (fig.14). Such representations are not found in any other Kandyan period painting sites. The positions of the hands and legs of these human figures suggest that they are depicted in a dancing posture, which is further confirmed by their clothing. Among

these human figures, there is a clear depiction of an elephant, indicating that these images likely represent a ceremonial event, a *perahera*. Therefore, the human figures with animal heads are likely individuals dancing while wearing animal masks. The *Mayuragiriya* Cave Temple has undergone restoration at various points in history, and it can be inferred that the artistic elements from each period are incorporated into the temple's murals. As a result, the paintings on the walls of the temple reflect a chronological pattern, indicative of the different periods of restoration. A significant number of paintings depicting various images can be observed both inside the cave and on the stone, surface extending in front of the cave. These paintings are thought to represent the "*Mara Parajaya*."

A beautiful dragon pantheon can be seen at the entrance of the cave, with two statues placed on either side of it. The statue on the left holds a dagger in the raised right hand, with a bent left elbow at the waist. The opposite pose is evident in the statue on the right, where the dagger is held in the left hand. These statues are designed in a way that makes them appear to guard the gateway. To the left of the Dragon Pantheon are two additional statues: a side view of a majestic lion and a frontal depiction of a woman. This female figure is commonly identified as the ' Queen *Sugala*' (fig.16). It is believed that the design of these statues reflects the characteristics of art from the Kandyan period.

Furthermore, there is 31.5 feet (18 cubit or riyan) reclining Buddha statue within the cave. The Buddha statue in a reclining posture is considered to belong to the Anuradhapura period. It exhibits unique features characteristic of reclining Buddha images from that era. The Buddha is depicted lying on his right side, with his right arm supporting his head and his left arm along his body. His head is supported by a bolster, and he is shown wearing a thin, body-hugging robe, known as "*siwura*". The posture of the Buddha symbolizes the moment of his passing away and the attainment of Nirvana. The feet of the Buddha statue have been completely destroyed and are currently being restored. The statues representing the "*Suwisi Wiwaranaya*" are arranged in a sequence of 24 statues. Unfortunately, the colors on these statues have been damaged to the point where they can no longer be seen, which is regrettable.

Paintings illustrating the *Sath Sathiya* of the Buddha can also be found on the cave walls, with the *Muchalinda Nagadaranaya* depicted exclusively in statue form. Notably, a clear representation of a serpent figure is identifiable within this scene. In addition to the damage caused to the historical heritage by the activities of treasure hunters, the historical value of the external cave walls has been further compromised by writings made by pilgrims on the walls. Thus, it has been conserved and renewed.

CONCLUSION

The *Mayuragiriya* Cave Temple complex holds significant historical and cultural importance, closely linked to the development of Buddhism. Its strategic placement within the natural landscape of caves and rock formations in the *Monaragala* District reflects its historical significance and ancient origins. The site continues to play a vital role in the religious and cultural landscape of the region, serving as a testament to the enduring relevance of Buddhist heritage across centuries. According to the inscriptions, its origins trace back to the 3rd century BCE, a period pivotal in the establishment of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. The main feature of a cave monastery is located in mountain ranges. Then the top of the mountains and the caves in a natural land were selected for living purposes (Gunawardhana, 2009).

The *Amaragiriya* Cave Temple, one of the oldest within the complex, is traditionally believed to have been associated with King *Walagamba*, who found refuge in this area during his period of exile (Rathnayaka, 2008). During this period, his support was crucial for the survival of the Buddhist community, and his assistance to the monks played a significant role in establishing the temple as an

important religious site. The discovery of early Brahmi inscriptions further highlights the temple's importance in the early stages of Sri Lankan Buddhism. The Cave complex also bears witness to the evolving nature of cave temples in Sri Lanka, and the architectural layout of both *Amaragiriya* and *Mayuragiriya* caves showcases different scales and construction styles, illustrating the changing religious and political landscape of the island through the ages.

The records also reflect the temple's role in accommodating the needs of Buddhist monastics and devotees, shedding light on the social dynamics and support systems within the ancient Sri Lankan Buddhist community. The cave inscriptions and rock inscriptions are mentioned in Table 1 dating back to 2nd BCE. There is an unrecognizable prince named *Abhaya*, who was a possible Ruler in this area during the BCE. With reference names such as "*Khatha Dina, Pushagutha Thera, Mithagutha Thera, Khatha Dhamarakitha, Khathanaga, Agidewa, Upashaka Shumana, Khathanaguli Nagathera*, probably they lived in this area.

The temple also carries a rich legend, notably the connection to the Tooth Relic comprising the remains of the Temple (fig. 15). The disputes over the relic symbolized the power struggles among rulers, and the temple's connection to this sacred object enhanced its significance as a symbol of royal legitimacy. This association highlights the temple's dual role as both a religious and political center, where royal authority was asserted through the display and protection of such important relics. The presence of external defacements, such as scribblings left by pilgrims on cave walls, further highlights the challenges of safeguarding these ancient monuments. These acts of destruction underscore the urgent need for stronger conservation measures, not only from the government but also from local communities and visitors, to prevent further degradation of these invaluable cultural treasures. Some of the restorations have been done by the Department of Archaeology.

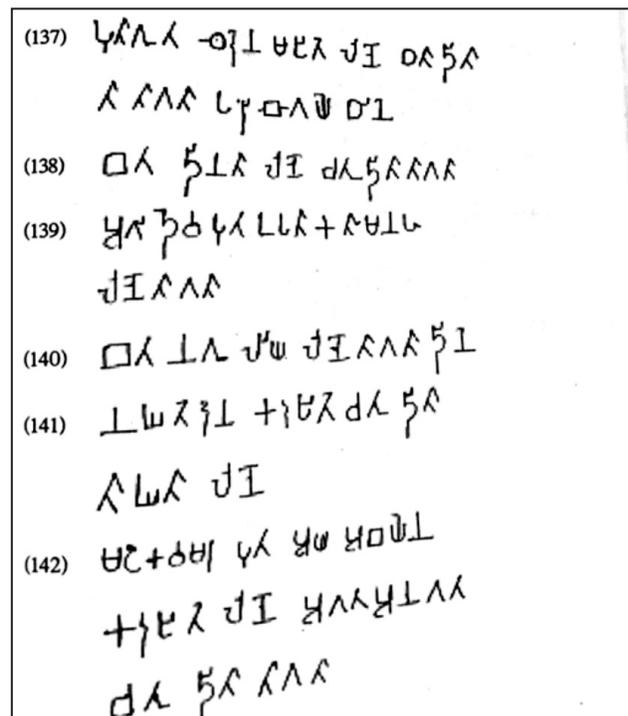**Figure 1: Monasteries in Anuradhapura (Bandaranayake, 1974)**

Figure 2:Cave inscriptions of the Mayuragiriya ancient temple (Dhammananda thero, 1966; Medhananda thero, 2008)

Figure 3: Rock inscription near the Amaragiriya Cave temple

Figure 4: Rock Inscription near the Mayuragiriya Cave temple

D.M.L.D. Dissanayaka

Figure 5: Amaragiriya Cave Temple

Figure 6: statues made by marbles

Figure 7: the destroyed statues by treasure hunters
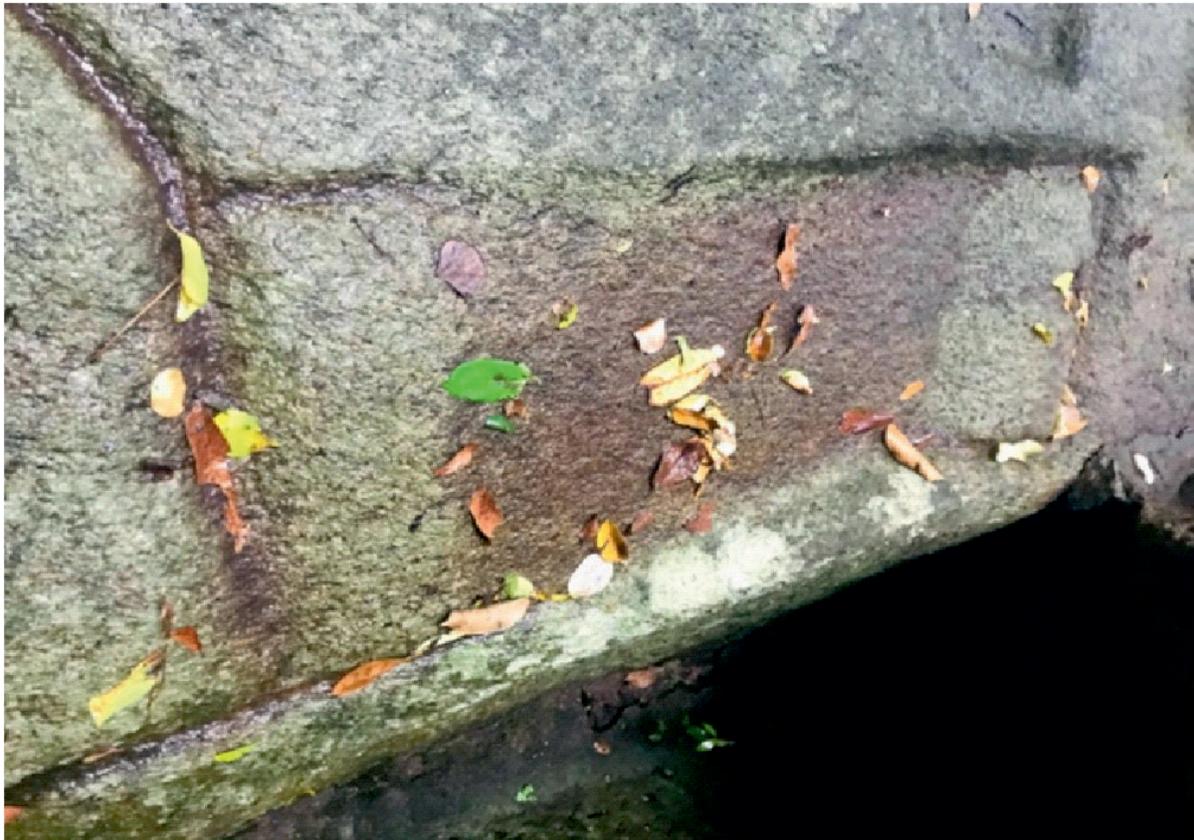

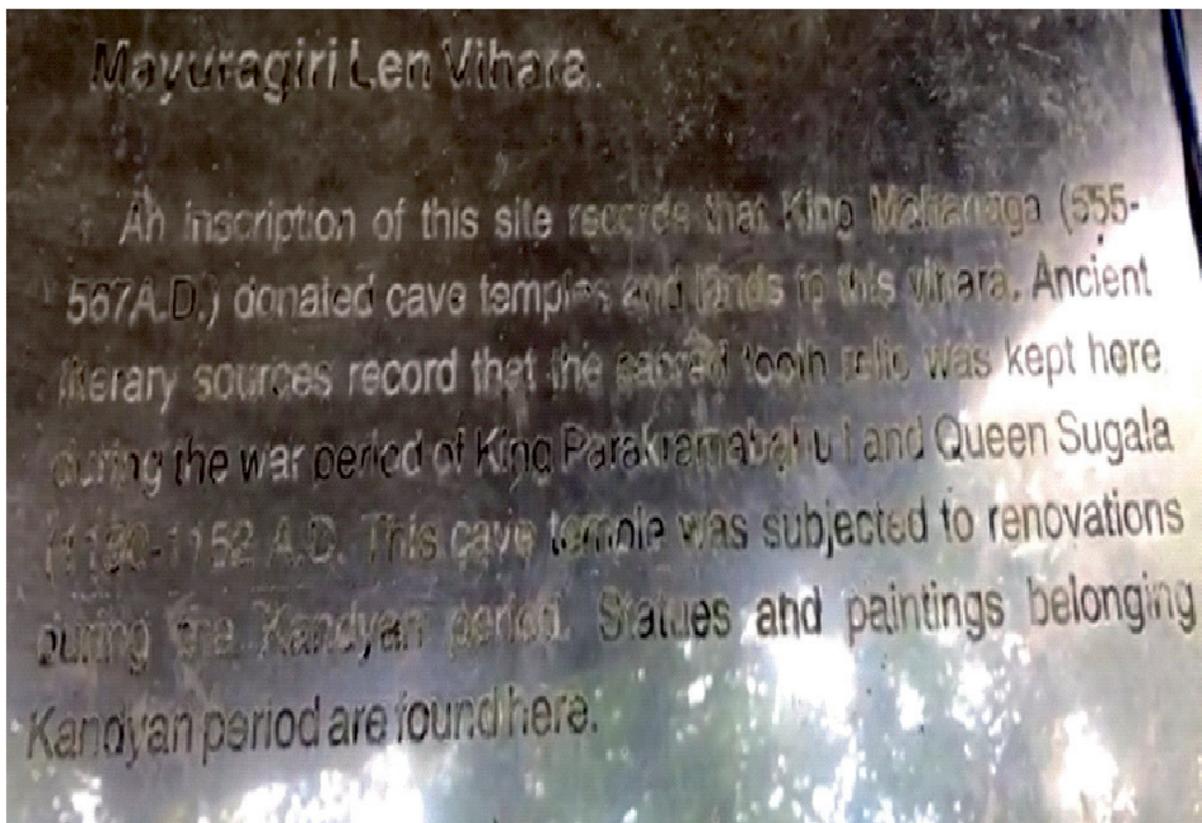**Figure 8: Moonstone**

Figure 9: Stone Bed

Figure 10: Plate of the description of the rock inscription

Figure 11: Mayuragiriya Cave Temple

Figure 12: Paintings 1

Figure 13: Paintings 2

Figure 14: Paintings 3

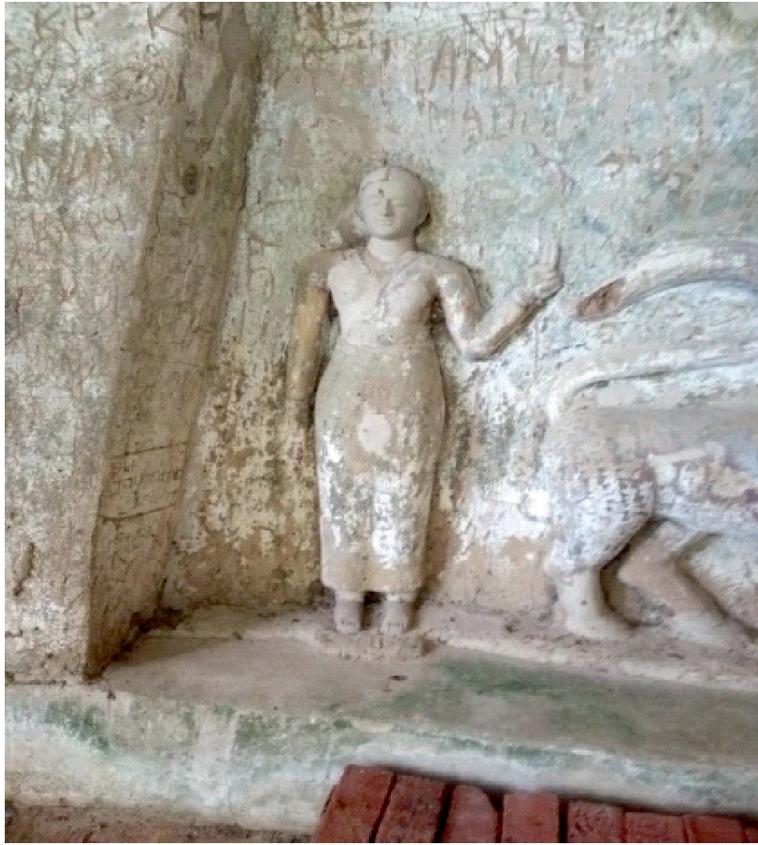

Figure 15: Temple of the Tooth relic

Figure 16 Scribblings left by pilgrims

Figure 17: Steps on a rock near Mayuragiriya cave temple

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