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A STUDY ON CULTURAL ASSIMILATION INDICATED FROM MOSAIC ART IN SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this research paper is to explicate how the Mosaic art in Sri Lanka indicated the cultural assimilation of Sri Lankan society and foreign societies, through the collected data from field research method and library survey method. A piece of art work created by placing coloured segments of tiles, porcelain, glass, stones, minerals, shells and coins in a pattern to create a picture is called Mosaic art. In the world this art tradition has developed in various periods according to the subject and features. Mosaic art in Sri Lanka could be considered as a limited source which has great significances from archaeological, art historical, and historical aspects. Most of Mosaic art in Sri Lanka belongs to 19th century and early part of 20th century. Karagampitiya Subodharama Viharaya, Maduwanwela Walawwa, Richmand Castle, Rankoth Viharaya (Panadura) and Vijayananda temple (Galle) are some places which have Mosaics. Mosaics could be considered as a material which provides information about Social, Economic and Cultural relationships between Sri Lanka and foreign countries. The subject matter of the Mosaics in Sri Lanka vary from the illustration of floral designs, animal figures, geometrical designs, auspicious objects, domestic and other objects, English letters and digits. Hence, through these Mosaic illustrations could be identified cultural assimilation between Sri Lankan society and foreign societies as it represented specific socio-cultural values belonging to Sri Lankan and foreign societies.

KEY WORDS: *Mosaic art, Cultural Assimilation, Archaeological significances, Limited Source*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to Mosaic art

Mosaic is an art form that uses small pieces of colored stone and glass, called tessera (plural: tesserae), to create designs or pictures set in cement. In antiquity, mosaics were created exclusively to decorate architectural surfaces such as floors, walls, and vaults and examples have been found in a wide variety of contexts, including palaces, houses, baths, mausoleums, synagogues, and churches (Olbrantz. 2009, p.p:03).

There are various definitions given to "Mosaics". The New Encyclopaedia Britannica (2010) defined that, Mosaic is an art, surface decoration of small coloured components, such as stone, mineral, glass, tile, or shell closely set into an adhesive ground. The mosaic pieces are usually small squares, triangles, or other regular shapes (called tesserae), which applied to the surface, frequently a wall or floor, which has been prepared with mortar or adhesive to receive the design (The New Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2010, p.p:345).

New Standard Encyclopedia defined Mosaic as a permanent decoration formed with small pieces of such materials as glass, stone or tile. Mosaics are primarily architectural ornaments applied to ceilings, walls and floors of buildings. They are also used to decorate such objects as bowls, table tops and ashtrays (New Standard Encyclopedia, p.p:542).

Further, Piermattei (n.d.) stated that, Mosaic is intended as a technique of decorating an architectural surface using pebbles, small worked stones, terracotta, pasta vitrea juxtaposed and fixed on a layer of plaster and other formations to the exterior of a smooth surface decorated with geometric motifs and/or with figures. Mosaic decoration is particularly adapted to large smooth surfaces like pavements, walls, vaults and ceilings (Piermattei, n.d.). Apart from that, the technology of creating mosaics could be categorized as the direct method, the indirect method and the reverse method. Further, any combination of these methods could be used on a floor to create mosaics (Olbrantz. 2009, p.p:03).

1.2 Historical Background of Mosaic Art

The origins of the mosaic art form are very ancient and date back to the 4th and 3rd millennium BC where a mosaic decoration created with small terracotta wedges painted in red, white and black was found in the Mesopotamian area (Piermattei, n.d.).

After the early fourth century, Christians began decorating churches with mosaics. They introduced the use of glass tesserae which were often backed with gold and thus had a shimmering quality (New Standard Encyclopedia, 542). Further, mosaic art form has developed in various periods according to the subject and features.

1.3 Mosaic Art in Sri Lanka

There are limited examples related to mosaic art form in Sri Lanka. Those are Subodharama Viharaya at Karagampitiya, Maduwanwela Walawwa, Richmond Castle, Vijayananda Temple at Galle and Rankoth Viharaya at Panadura. Apart from that mosaics can be seen at the floor of some temples and houses and tombs in Sri Lanka.

Mosaics at Subodharama Viharaya in Karagampitiya can be seen at the image house and at the sathsathige. The temple has an extended history from the time of king Parakramabahu VI (1412 - 1467 AD) and it faced on several changes during the colonial period of Sri Lanka. There are mosaics on the floor of chanting hall, corridors and in front of the doors of Maduwanwela Walawwa. Maduwanwela Walawwa was established during the period between 17th and early 20th century. Richmond Castle was built during the period of 1900 - 1910 AD and Mosaics of Richmond Castle can be seen on its parapet wall. Mosaics at Vijayananda Temple in Galle could be seen at the entrance, compound around the stupa and on the pinnacle of stupa. Mosaics at Rankoth Viharaya in Panadura could be seen on the bell tower.

Porcelain, ceramic, stone and coins are used as materials for mosaics in Sri Lanka (Embuldeniya. 2017, p.p:185). Especially, fragments of porcelain tableware such as, saucers, plates, and bowls are mostly used for mosaics. Further, that could be recognized floral designs, animal figures, geometrical designs, auspicious objects, domestic and other objects, letters of English alphabet and numerals are created from mosaic art form in Sri Lanka by using circular, triangular and some other shaped fragments (Embuldeniya. 2017, p.p:185).

Created features of specific figures, included artistic features such as; outline for figures, using different shaped and different sized fragments to form the shape and structure of figures, engraved the porcelain fragments to indicate special features, created the figures of animals and objects with their identical features are some special characteristics of mosaics in Sri Lanka (Embuldeniya. 2015 a, p.p:160-165, Embuldeniya. 2017, p.p:185)

Apart from that Mosaic art form provides information on contemporary society of colonial period in Sri Lanka and socio-economic relationships of Sri Lanka. Concerning the trademarks that indicated at fragments which used for mosaics could be identified the countries that exported porcelain products to Sri Lanka (Ex:- England, Holland) and the trademarks of porcelain products exposed the trade relationships (Embuldeniya. 2017, p.p:186 - 187).

Further, the types of porcelain products that used in particular period could be recognized from studying the fragments of porcelain products.

Furthermore, studying colours, designs and borders of porcelain products, letters, symbols and illustrations on porcelain products could be identified the representing culture, language and technologies of contemporary society of 19th century and early part of 20th century. Likewise, colonial influences, trade relationships, features of mosaics, theme of mosaics, types of the places where mosaics can be found, symbolism, cognitive pattern and cultural assimilations are archaeologically significant aspects of mosaics in Sri Lanka (Embaldeniya. 2017, p.p:187).

2. OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this research paper is to explicate how the Mosaic art in Sri Lanka indicated the cultural assimilation of Sri Lankan society and foreign societies. Apart from that this research explain the significance of Mosaic art, as it is a limited source in Sri Lanka.

3. METHODOLOGY

Field research method and library survey method were used to collect data for this study. Especially, the field research method was highly emphasized throughout the research. Further, comparative study was conducted to identify the cultural assimilations indicating from the mosaic art in Sri Lanka by studying the similarities and differences between mosaic art in Sri Lanka and foreign countries.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Cultural Assimilation Indicated from Mosaic Art in Sri Lanka

Assimilation, the process whereby individuals or groups of differing ethnic heritage are absorbed into the dominant culture of a society (The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2010, 644). Cultural Assimilation happens when two cultures or groups of people influence one another. Hence, cultural customs, traditions and religious practices can all be assimilated between two or more cultures.

Artistic features, influence and cultural assimilation could be seen among the mosaics of Sri Lanka, as mosaic art form provides information on contemporary society of colonial period in Sri Lanka and socio-economic relationships of Sri Lanka during the colonial period. Mosaic artist of Sri Lanka assimilated features of foreign traditions and created mosaics with combination of foreign and Sri Lankan cultural features. Concerning about the mosaics of Sri Lanka that can be seen artist of Sri Lankan mosaics has assimilated artistic features and techniques from European paintings and foreign mosaics.

Therefore, mosaic illustrations of floral figures, animal figures, geometrical designs, auspicious objects, domestic and other objects, letters of English alphabet and numerals portrayed the cultural assimilation of specific socio-cultural values belonging to Sri Lankan and foreign societies.

Letters of English alphabet at mosaics of Sri Lanka emphasizing the cultural assimilation. Ex:- Letters of English alphabet at Maduwanwela Walawwa and Richmond Castle. At the Maduwanwela Walawwa the English words of “WELCOME”, “JANUARY” and “GOOD LUCK” are created from mosaic art form. The parapet wall of Richmond Castle which is with the name of “Richmond Castle”; is decorated with Mosaics. Further, the words of “INDEOFIDEMUS” created at the parapet wall of Richmond Castle from mosaic art form.

Logo with lion and the Latin words of IN DEO FIDEMUS (We trust in God) of Richmond Castle is another example for cultural assimilation indicating from mosaics of Sri Lanka. Further, two special components of mosaics could be seen at the two entrances of sanctum at the Image house of Subodharama Viharaya in Karagampitiya. One component is consisting with two lion figures and a figure of flower vase (Figure 01). Other one consisting with two unicorn figures and figure of a flower vase (Figure 02). Therefore, these two components are also emphasizing the cultural assimilation of mosaic art in Sri Lanka as the figures of lion and unicorn consists at the British Royal Coats of Arms.

Apart from that, numerals indicated at mosaic art of Sri Lanka emphasizing the cultural assimilation. Ex:- Figure of clock with roman numerals at Subodharama Viharaya in Karagampitiya (Figure 03) and Hindu - Arabic numerals (1ST JANUARY 1905, 15 8 96) at Maduwanwela Walawwa

Moreover, mosaics of Sri Lanka emphasizing some domestic and other objects which are not belongs to the ancient culture of Sri Lanka. Ex:- figure of clock with Roman numerals at Subodharama Viharaya in Karagampitiya (Figure 03), figure of Flower Vase at Subodharama Viharaya in Karagampitiya and figures of Bottle and Glass at Maduwanwela Walawwa (Figure 04).

Another example for cultural assimilation indicating from mosaics of Sri Lanka is the shape of horseshoe which can be seen at the Maduwanwela Walawwa. Shape of horseshoe is concerning as a wish fulfilment symbol of European culture. Further, at the Maduwanwela Walawwa the shape of horseshoe is created with the words of “GOOD LUCK” (Figure 05) and the shape of horseshoe included with geometrical designs.

Similarly, the figures of auspicious objects included in mosaics at Subodharama Viharaya in Karagampitiya emphasizing that, mosaic art of Sri Lanka illustrating Sri Lankan culture, as concerning Chathra (Umbrella), Dhaja (Flags), Sesath, Chamara (Fly-whisk/Hand fans) and Punkalasa (Prosperity Pot) (Figure 06) are prosperous objects.

Besides, when concerning about the geometrical designs, that could be believed its represents the figure of lotus; as the figure of lotus (Padma) directly connected with the Sri Lankan art history. Middle section of geometrical designs at Subodharama Viharaya in Karagampitiya and the geometrical design at the chanting hall of Maduwanwela Walawwa are the examples for representing the figure of lotus figure. Also, at Subodharama Viharaya in Karagampitiya can be seen a figure of hand which is holding three lotus flowers and two lotus buds. These three lotus flowers and two lotus buds are created with the natural features.

In addition, mosaics of animal figures are indicating the cultural assimilation. There are various figures of mammals, reptiles, birds and fish at Subodharama Viharaya in Karagampitiya and figures of elephants, tuskers and fish at Maduwanwela Walawwa. The animal figures found in the mosaics of image house at Subodharama Viharaya in Karagampitiya are tusker, horse, lion, bull, rabbit, goat, animal from deer family, unicorn, cock, hen, peacock, peahen, parrot, duck, goose, pigeon, cormorant, turkey, fish, and cobra. Apart from that special features are indicated from engraving the porcelain fragments and the figures of animals and objects created with their identical features. Ex:- Mosaics of lions' and horse hairs, bulls' hump, leopards' skin, various shapes of legs and feet, ears, eyes, mouths and tails, various types of beaks, wings and feathers, various shapes of eyes, mouths, legs, feet, comb, and crest can be seen at Subodharama Viharaya in Karagampitiya (Embaldeniya. 2017, p.p:185). Therefore, the mosaic artist assimilated the European art and foreign mosaics when creating the figures of animals from mosaic art form.

Nonetheless, the figures of Elephant, Tusker, Horse, Bull, Cobra and Fish are directly related to the Sri Lankan culture. Ex:- The figures of Elephant, Tusker, Horse, Bull are included in the Moonstone and ancient carvings. The figure of cobra is

considering as a figure which belongs to the safe guard of water. Likewise, the figure of unicorn is emphasizing the European culture and the cultural assimilation indicating from the mosaic art of Sri Lanka as it is included in British Royal Coats of Arms.

Apart from that, in the world mosaics are mostly used for churches and synagogues. But, in Sri Lanka mosaics could be found from Buddhist temples and Walawwa or mansions. This is an important archaeological fact which could reveal the cognitive pattern of 19th century and early part of 20th century. Hence, this is emphasizing the cultural assimilation through combination of Sri Lankan and foreign culture as most of mosaics in Sri Lanka belongs to 19th century and early part of 20th century.

5. SUGGESTIONS

At present mosaics are weathering due to lightning of oil lamps, carelessness, lack of proper cleaning, new constructions, some human activities, and lack of awareness on mosaic art tradition. Therefore, should be taken a proper conservation programme to preserve mosaic art in Sri Lanka.

6. CONCLUSION

Corresponding to the above mentioned facts that could be realized mosaics in Sri Lanka has archaeological significance. Further, archaeological significance of mosaics in Sri Lanka is connected with the aspects of art history and history. Therefore, according to the collected data that could be revealed mosaics in Sri Lanka has developed with cultural assimilation.

Hence, this research will expound the cultural assimilation indicated from mosaic art in Sri Lanka as significant archaeological evidence especially based on the reasons of mosaic art can be recognized as a limited source in Sri Lanka, and as for the date mosaic art is not considered as significant archaeological evidence in Sri Lanka.

7. FIGURES



Figure 01
Mosaics at Subodharama Viharaya,
Karagampitiya



Figure 02
Mosaics at Subodharama Viharaya,
Karagampitiya



Figure 03
Figure of Clock
Mosaics at Subodharama Viharaya,
Karagampitiya



Figure 04
Figure of Bottle and Glass
Mosaics at Maduwanwela Walawwa



Figure 05
Figure of *Punkalasa* (Prosperity Pot)
Mosaics at Subodharama Viharaya,
Karagampitiya



Figure 06
Figure of Horseshoe with text of
"GOOD LUCK"
Mosaics at Maduwanwela Walawwa

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