

## THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION AND PRESENT USAGE OF THE GUARD STONES IN ANCIENT SRI LANKA

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The guard stone is an essential feature found on either side of the entrance to the religious or royal buildings in ancient Sri Lanka. Other important features are the “Moonstone” and the “Wing stone”. During the first phase of the history of the guard stone it was simply a plain slab of stone and later on it was developed and made more beautiful by making fine carvings to these stones. Among those carvings a prominent place was given to the figure of male the name guard stone. Other types of the carved guard stone are the full pot, human figures, devotees, dwarfs and the king cobra etc.

**Keywords:** Guard stone, Dwarf, *Abhayagiri Viharaya, Sanka, Padma*

### Introduction

The Guard Stone is one of the important features stones at the entrance to the religious or royal building of ancient Sri Lanka. Other associated features are the moonstone and the wing stone. At the beginning the guard stone was a plain slab of stone carved on the top and erected on either side of the entrance. Later it was developed to a well carved guard stone by skilled craftsmen. The guard stone was so named because it exhibits a standing male figure and was at the entrance to the building.

### Objectives

The Objectives of this research is to examine and identify the historical evolution of the guard stone and its present usage.

### Methodology

Methodology of the research was the study of primary sources and field study. Chronicles and Vinaya Commentaries also have been used. Mainly *Mahavamsa, Deepavamsa, Vansathappakasini* and *Samanthapasadika, Vinayatta Katha* have been used. To study about guardstone field study have been used to find archeological sources. For the study about the present usage of the guard stone, the over where the *Sanka* and *Padma* guard stones situated at Abhayagiri monastery of Anuradhapura has been used.

## Description



**Figure 1.** Abhayagiri Monastery

The Abhayagiri monastery has been built by king Valagamba in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C and there two guard stones belongs to the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. At present these two guard stones are being used for worshipping.



**Figure 2.** Plain Guard Stones (2-4 A.D)

Following stages can be identified in the historical evolution process of the guard stone initially the guard stone was a plain slab a stone in quadrangular shape and it was gradually developed by making its upper part to a semi circular shape and adding carvings of different figures and symbol into it.



**Figure 3.** Ornamental Full Pot Guard Stone

Then the Ornamental full pot who known as pot of plenty was carved on it there are two types of Ornamental full pot guard stone. One is a guard stone which Ornamental full pot placed on it. In the other guard stone the full pot is carved in it. A bunch of lotus flowers has been placed on the full pot to decorate it. The Ornamental full pot is believed as the symbol of prosperity.



**Figure 4.** Dwarf Figures Guard Stones

Next stage is the guards tone with dwarf figures. Dwarf figures are in deformed shapes and with short limb. This dwarf is called "*Bahirava*" a genie who guards the treasures and other religious artefact. There are two types of dwarf figure called "*Sanka*" and "*Padma*" These names were given to them according to the shape of the crown they are wearing *Sanka* is having a conch shell on his crown and *Padma* has a lotus flower in his crown.





**Figure 5.** *Sanka and Padma Guard Stones*

According to the concept of *Kuvera* who is believed as the in charge god of the wealth, *Sanka* and *Padma* are the guards who protected the treasures of *Kuvera*. Following features are visible in a dwarf figure guard stone.



**Figure 6.** *Sanka and Padma with Kuvera*

- The dwarf has dressed only to cover the lower part of the body.
- They are wearing a beautiful crown.
- Holding a stripe of coins with one hand.
- A sacred thread across the shoulder.
- A pot led belly.
- Short limbs.

The next stage of evolution of the guard stone is the guard stones with figure of great king gods named *Dvutharasta*, *Viruda*, *Virupaksha* and *Vaishravana*. These four great king gods are believed as the guardians of Buddhism in Sri Lanka and they are also called as caved leaders.



**Figure 7.** God King Guard Stone

Special features of these area leader guard stones;

- The thrice bent posture.
- The attire and crown are that of a king god.
- Cobra hoods over the head.
- Holding an ornamental full pot with one hand a sword with the other hand.
- The figure of the directional animal can be seen by one side of the guard stone.

Directional animals are;

- Lion - North
- Elephant - East
- Bull - South
- Horse – West

One or two dwarf figure are at the foot of the area leader. As a whole they are leader guard stones have been finely carved they are very attractive. I have discussed the different stages of the historical evolution of the guard stone with its developments.

My study has been mainly focused to identify the ways of present usage of *Sanka* and *Padma* guard stones. For this purpose, a special attention has been given to the two guard stones with *Sanka* and *Padma* guard figures. Lying at the Abhayagiri monastery Complex in Anuradhapura built by King Valagamba in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.

At present two temple of god have built near these two guard stones People are in the habit of worshipping these place to get rid of the sufferings due to ill effects. Some people are praying vows and some are using this as a place of swearing in.

## Conclusion

The Historical Evolution of the guard stone was from a plain slab of stone to a present guard stones with well carved Standing male figure. There are guard stones with dwarf figures too. Two dwarf guard stones in Abhayagiri Monastery names *Sanka* and *Padma* are being worshipped by people and used as place of swearing in by certain people. They may have the belief that they (*Sanka* and *Padma*) have certain divine powers of blessing. Abhayagiri Monastery in Anuradhapura is the only famous place for *Sanka* and *Padma* guard stones.



**Figure 8.** Entrance to the Vatadage

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