

## THE HEALING POWER OF THE WATERS OF ANAVATAPTA<sup>1</sup>

In most ancient civilisations, waters, especially those from a particular spring or pool considered holy, have been credited with the magical power of healing. Early Indians considered water as "the chief medicine and best healer".<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the Hindus believe that it not only rendered physical purification but also served to cleanse the moral guilt of persons who bathed in the holy waters of sacred rivers and pools. The Buddhists, although they categorically repudiated the latter potency attributed to water, believe that the waters of Anavatapta (Sinh. *Anotatta*), the legendary pool believed to be in the Himalayas, possessed the power of healing and other supernatural powers.

This acquaintance of the Buddhists with the beliefs and concepts associated with Anavatapta lake has not only been reflected in their canonical and commentarial literature, but also in the folk cults and folk literature of the Sinhalese. In this brief paper an attempt has been made to discuss this particular aspect, viz. the healing power of the waters of Anavatapta, with special reference to an inscribed bronze vessel recovered from the vicinity of Ridiyagama tank near Ambalantota in the Hambantota District<sup>3</sup>.

This pot-shaped bronze vessel is 12 cm. in height, and among its elaborate ornamentation one exceptional feature is the group of "eight auspicious symbols" (*astamangala*) of the ancient Sinhalese which adorns the neck of the vessel.

Only a little more than half the neck, containing four symbols, is now left.<sup>4</sup> The other important feature of this vessel is the brief inscription in 10th or 11th century Sinhala script indited in dotted lines with a sharp pointed tool on the shoulder of the vessel (Fig. 1).

Of the eight auspicious symbols only four, namely, elephant-goad (*ankusa*) fly-whisk (*cāmara*), *srīvatsa*, and filled vessel (*pūrnaghatha*) are now left (Fig. 2. a,b,c and d). As pointed out elsewhere,<sup>5</sup> the remaining symbols, the conch shell (*sankha*), auspicious seat (*bhadrapītha*), *āvastika*, or *nandyāvarta* and the pair of fish (*matsyayugma*), must

1. This paper is based on a lecture delivered by the author at the National Archaeological Congress, 1986, held at the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute on 29th November 1986.
2. Kramrisch, 1981: pp. 36 and 37; also see Lily de Silva, p. 84.
3. According to the Register of the National Museum of Sri Lanka, Colombo, (40-137-145) this object was discovered "on the top left bank scheme below Ridiyagama tank on an irrigation channel near Ambalantota". It has been presented to the Museum by Mr. A.M. Carder (?) of Zahira College, Colombo, on 3.5.1940.
4. Karunaratne, 1980: p.230 ff.
5. *Ibid.* pp. 231-232.

have occupied the portion of the neck now missing (Fig. 2, e, f, g and h). The other significant feature of this vessel, as already pointed out, is the inscription inscribed on it. It can be deciphered as *kilakuru behet tel naliya* i.e. the medicinal oil *naliya* (a measure of capacity) of *kilakuru*<sup>6</sup> (Fig. 3). The fact that the vessel is adorned with the *astamangala*, a group of symbols of great symbolical value, and that the inscription clearly states that it was intended for measuring oil, is of considerable importance for our discussion.<sup>7</sup>

The eight auspicious symbols, namely, *āsrīvatsa*, *cāmara*, *ankusa*, *matsyayugma*, *svastika*, *bhadrapātha*, *sankha*, and *pūrnaghata*, comprising the *astamangala* have been consistently used by the Sinhalese from about the 3rd or the 4th to the 12th century A.D. in a meaningful way. This *astamangala* symbolically represents the mythical lake Anavatapta. The Ruvanweliseya *astamangala*<sup>8</sup> expresses this concept most adequately. Since I have discussed this question elsewhere<sup>9</sup>, only a brief account is presented here.

The *astamangala* from the Ruvanweliseya is a stone slab 3 ft. square, sculptured in low relief (Fig. 4). Along its sides there is a border of about 4.5 inches in width, in which the following eight objects are depicted at the four corners and in the middle of each side. In the centre of the upper side there is a *srīvatsa* followed by a *cāmara* in the upper right hand corner, and an *ankusa* in the middle of the right side, a *matsyayugma* in the lower left hand corner, a *svastika* in the middle of the lower side, a *bhadrapātha* in the lower left hand corner, a *sankha* in the middle of the left side and a *pūrnaghata* in the upper left hand corner. The four symbols, *srīvatsa*, *ankusa*, *svastika*, *sankha*, all located in the centres of the four sides, are each flanked by a pair of animals, viz., elephants, bulls, horses, and lions respectively. In between the symbols, there are eight rosettes. In the centre of the square framed by the above-mentioned border of symbols and animals, there is a large fully opened lotus. Apart from the eight auspicious symbols incorporated in to this piece of sculpture, the other details agree with the description of the mythical lake Anavatapta as described in Pali and Sanskrit texts such as *Monorathapūrāni* and *Abidharmavibhāsa Sāstra*. According to the latter authority, the four holy rivers of India, *Gangā*, *Sindhu*, *Vaksa* and *Sītā* flow forth from the four gates or outlets, namely Golden Elephant Gate in the east, Silver Ox Gate in the south, Crysoberyl Horse Gate in the west and Crystal Lion Gate in the north respectively.<sup>10</sup> The Ruvanweliseya *astamangala*, which is a highly stylised version of an aerial view of the lake, conforms to this description.

6. I am indebted to Mr. A.S. Hettiarachchi of Ganetenna, Hingula for the identification of the fourth letter of this inscription as "ru".
7. The importance of this vessel as "*naliya*" — a unit of measurement of capacity, will be discussed in a separate paper.
8. Bell, 1900, p. 3; *Sp. Zey.*, vol. VIII, pl. XLIV; also see Karunaratne, 1980, p.81, n. 21.
9. Karunaratne, 1971: p. 61 ff; 1978: p. 109.
10. *E.B.*, 1961, s.v. Anotatta, Anavatapta.

Moreover, according to the *Sirikālakanni Jātaka*, Siri (Skt. *Srī*), the goddess of prosperity and fecundity, has her bathing place in the eastern bank of the Anavatapta.<sup>11</sup> In this relief under consideration, *srīvatsa*, the sign manual of *Srī*, has been depicted as being sprinkled with water by two elephants in the eastern side of the lake. The *srīvatsa* flanked by two elephants symbolically represents the *Srī-Lanksmī* figures of *Sāñchi* and *Barhut*, where the goddess is shown as being bathed by two elephants of the quarters. This clearly shows that this piece of sculpture is a representation of the mythical lake Anavatapta in symbolic form. In this scheme the lake, reputed to be a lotus pool (*padmākara*), has been indicated by the large fully opened lotus flower, while the four rivers flowing around the lake have been represented by the lotuses on the border. The incorporation of the *astamangala* symbols in this stylised figure of Anavatapta is also in conformity with this theme of Anavatapta, the bathing place of *Srī*. Elsewhere, I have pointed out that the *astamangala* concept developed in association with the figure of *Srī*<sup>12</sup>.

In place of the lotus of the Ruvanweliseya *astamangala*, the Polonnaruwa *astamangala*<sup>13</sup> has a shallow depression representing the lake. In the centre of the Weligama *astamangala*<sup>14</sup>, on the other hand, there is a quarterfoil lotus, of which the centre and the four petals have been fashioned into shallow depressions, thus ingeniously combining the lotus and the depression (*pātāla*) representing the lotus lake (*puskaranī*) Anavatapta. In short, the ancient Sinhalese used this group of *astamangala*, even in its simplest form, to represent the mythical lake, Anavatapta. Hence, it is quite legitimate to consider the Ridiyagama *kalasa*, adorned with the eight auspicious symbols around its neck like a necklace, as a replica of the magic lake, Anavatapta. In this instance the cavity of the globular vessel is analogous to the lotus or its derivatives, the shallow depressions in other *astamangala* representations.

The association of this vessel with the *astamangala* so as to symbolically represent the magic lake Anavatapta is very significant. The inscription upon it specifically mentions that this object had been intended for measuring or storing some kind of medicinal oil. If the assumption that this vessel is a replica of the Anavatapta lake is accepted, then the medicinal oil which this vessel was intended to measure or store can be equated with the waters of the magic lake. In this connection both Pali and Sinhalese literature as well as the popular cults of the Sinhalese shed a flood of light on the practice of healing and beliefs in the magical qualities of the water of this lake.

11. *The Jataka* ed. V. Fausboll, London. (1883) jataka No. 382.

12. Karunaratne, 1978, p. 113.

13. Karunaratne, 1971: p. 54, pl. II, fig. 2; 1984: p. 174.

14. Karunaratne, 1973: p. 53, fig. 1.



Fig. 1. Ridiyagama Astamangala Kalasa (bronze) now in the Colombo Museum.  
Courtesy Director of National Museum, Sri Lanka.

The water of this lake is credited with magic power. It is particularly associated with Śrī, the goddess of beauty, prosperity and fecundity.<sup>15</sup> On the day on which Queen Mahāmāyā conceived the Bodhisatta, she saw in a dream the lake Anavatapta. The goddesses of the four regents (*cattāro mahārājā*) bathed her in the waters of Anavatapta in order to remove the human taints in her person (*manussa gandha haranattam*) and make her a fitting recipient of the life monad of the Bodhisatta.<sup>16</sup> The four holy rivers of India flow out of its four animal-headed gargoyles. It is said that divine beings daily supplied sixteen potsfull of water of this lake to king Asoka.<sup>17</sup> Among the items sent by king Asoka for the consecration (*abhisekopakarana*) of king Devanampiyatissa, waters of lake Anavatapta and River Ganga are specifically mentioned.<sup>18</sup> These accounts highlight the glory (śrī), prosperity, well being, divine power and power of purification, ability to confer sovereignty<sup>19</sup> and even divinity associated with the waters of Anavatapta.

In addition to these magical qualities, the waters of Anavatapta are also considered as having the power of healing. This curative power of Anavatapta water concerns us most, for the vessel under consideration, in our eyes, appears to be a symbolic replica of the magic lake, and it had been undoubtedly intended for measuring some kind of medicinal oil.

The healing power of the waters of Anavatapta is recounted in the Sumana-Sāmanera Vatthu of the *Dhammapadattakatha* <sup>20</sup>. The relevant portion of the story is as follows: The Elder Anuruddha, the preceptor of Sumana Sāmanera, was afflicted with a gastric ailment, and when inquired of by his pupil as to what would cure him of his illness, the Elder is reported to have said that the waters of the lake Anavatapta alone could do this. Sumana Sāmanera who was endowed with miraculous powers, then undertook the difficult task of obtaining a potsful of water from Anavatapta lake. Anavatapta Nāgārājā or Pannaga, the serpent king of the lake, tried to prevent the novice monk, Sumana, from taking water from his lake. But the little monk managed to get the required water with the force of his miraculous powers, and Elder Anuruddha was cured of his illness. The same novice monk, it is said, brought water from Anavatapta for the use of the Buddha. Here it is said that the vessel in which he carried Anavatapta water for the Buddha's use was gifted for that purpose by the well known female lay devotee, Visakha.

15. *The Jataka*, No. 382.

16. *The Jataka* vol. 1.

17. *Mahavamsa*, v. 24.

18. *Mahavamsa*, xi 30.

19. Karunaratne 1990: pp. 75-100.

20. *Dhammapadattakatha*.

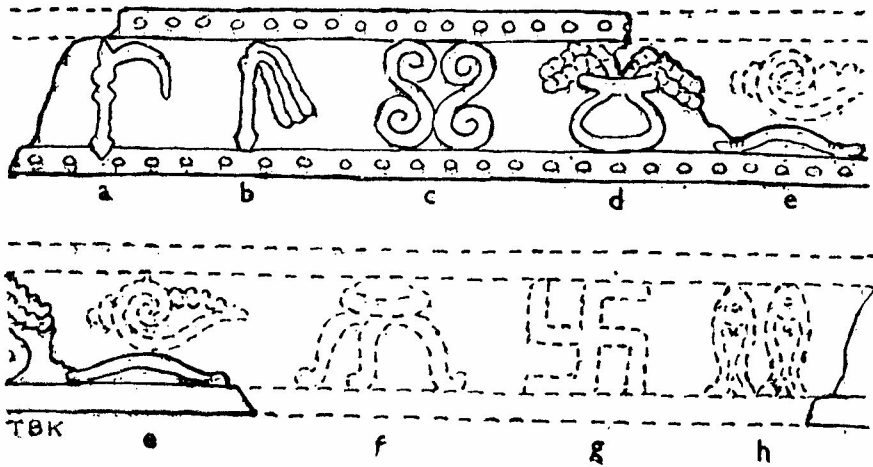


Fig. 2 The Eight Auspicious Symbols that adorn the bronze kalasa from Ridiyagama. The identification of Symbols: (2 a). Ankuśa, (2 b). Cāmara, (2 c). Śrivatsa, (2 d). Pūrnaghata, (2 e). Śankha, (2 f). Bhadrāpīṭha, (2g). Svastika, (2 h). Matsyayugma. The reconstructed portions have been indicated by broken lines.

These legends about the Lake Anavatapta, as presented in the Pali commentaries, seem to have exerted a lasting influence on the beliefs of the Sinhalese and this influence is reflected in their art, architecture, and literature as well as in their folk cults. However, it is the healing power of the waters of Anavatapta that has caught the imagination of the ordinary Sinhalese. In this connection it must be mentioned that in Sinhalese culture the practice of magic (*mantra gurukam*) and healing (*veda hedakam*) and even propitiation of astral divinities and beliefs in astrology go hand in hand, as is evidenced by the use of "chanted oil" (*māturū tel*), "chanted water" (*māturū diya*), "chanted sand" (*māturū vāli*), etc. both by the exorcist (*kattadiya*) and the village physician (*vedarāla*). Moreover, in the magico-religious cults such as *bali* (propitiation of astral divinities) and *tovil* (propitiation of demonic beings) *kahadiya* i.e. water mixed with powdered turmeric (*curcuma domestica valet*) and considered as an effective purifying agent, is invariably used. As it will be shown in the sequel, the origin stories of this germicide are always connected with the waters of the magic lake Anavatapta, which the ancient Sinhalese symbolically represented by the *astamangala*.

As already pointed out, *kahadiya* and *nānudiya* — the latter a kind of shampoo — are among the many requisites used in popular cults and rituals of the Sinhalese. The folk myths recounting the legendary origin of these accessories invariably associate them with the waters of the mythical lake Anavatapta. *Vadigatantrayāgaya*<sup>21</sup> gives the following account of the origin of *kahadiya*. In the remote past, Manikpāla, the queen consort of King Mahasammata, was afflicted with an illness caused by the evil action of Vasavatu, the Evil One. The four guardian gods (*sataravaram deviyo*), in order to rid the queen of her illness, scooped out gold from the earth and fashioned a pot (*rankotale*) and handed over the vessel to Sakraja, who, taking it in his right hand, threw it into the sky. The golden vessel immediately floated through the sky in the direction of Himalaya forest and approached the mythical lake Anavatapta, avoiding the menacing serpents who guarded the lake. On reaching the lake it dipped in the water and, filling itself with the magical fluid, ascended the sky again and through this aerial passage came to the Oddisa Risis, who were assigned to perform the sacrifice (*yāga*) that was to cure the queen of her illness. It is this water from lake Anavatapta that was used in the *yāga* performed for Queen Manikpāla.

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21. *Vadigatantrayāgaya*, p. 14.

In a variation of the same myth,<sup>22</sup> it was Sakraja, (Pāli: Sakka) the king of the gods, who ordered the Earth Goddess Mihikata<sup>23</sup> to procure *kahadiya*. She went in search of it to Anotatatta (Anavatapta) and the *yakkhini* Ayilakkhandi, resident of Anotatta, gave her a golden kettle full of turmeric water (*kahadiya*). Here the *kahadiya* is directly associated with the waters of Anavatapta. In short, *kahadiya* used in rituals today is considered an effective substitute for the waters of the mythical lake Anavatapta.

According to a third version of the same myth,<sup>24</sup> Queen Mānikpāla bathed in the waters of Anavatapta after the application of *nānu* (*nānu*), in the preparation of which water from Anavatapta was the most important component. Thus, for the Sinhalese a pot (*kalasa*, *kotala*) filled with *kahadiya* or *nānu* is symbolic of the magic lake, Anavatapta. Hence, the employment of *astamangala*, which is a symbol representing lake Anavatapta, on a vessel used for measuring some sort of medicinal oil, can be considered as done on purpose. The medicinal oil that was measured or stored was in all probability considered as endowed with the magical qualities of the waters of the lake Anavatapta itself.

Even if I digress somewhat from the main point of the discussion, I think it is not inappropriate here to refer to the use of *nānu* (*nānu*) in association with a ritual for propitiating planetary deities mentioned in a 12th century inscription. King Nissankamalla's Siva Devala Padara inscription<sup>25</sup> refers to the practice of anointing him with *nānu* while he sat on a seat specially set apart for the purpose at a ritual of propitiating the planetary deities (*grahasānti*). This association of anointing with *nānu* at a *grahasānti* ritual is important since the planetary deities of the Sinhalese are directly connected with *astamangala*. I have elsewhere shown that the eight planetary deities, namely, Rivi (Sun), Kivi (Venus), Kuja (Mars), Rāhu (the ascending node of the Moon), Sani (Saturn), Sandu (Moon), Buda (Mercury) and Brhaspati (Jupiter) hold as their respective emblems, *srivatsa*, *cāmara*, *ankusa*, *matsyayugma*, *svastika* or *nandyavarta*, *bhadrapātha*, *sankha* and *pūrnaghata*.<sup>26</sup> The *astamangala*, whether as eight different symbols or as an eight cornered diagram (*atamanagala yantaraya*) is to this day used in the *grahasānti* rituals of the Sinhalese.<sup>27</sup> Since *astamangala*, in whatever form, is a symbolic representation of the mythical lake Anavatapta, it can be assumed

22. Nevill, 1954: p.326; Silva, 1981: p.108.

23. In Buddhist mythology and iconography, *Mahikanta* (Sinh. *Mihikata*) is closely associated with the filled vessel (*pūrnaghata*). On the occasion of the Enlightenment of the Buddha, when Mara challenged his claim to the adamant throne (*vajrāsana*), Mahikanta, the Earth Goddess, emerged from earth carrying a *pūrnaghata* and vouchsafed his claim.

24. *Vadigatantrayāgaya*, p. 11.

25. *E.Z.* vol. II, p. 170.

26. Karunaratne, 1971: p. 58-61. pl. V.

27. Karunaratne, 1984: p. 197-99.

that *navagraha mandala* in a *grahasanti* is virtually a recreation of the magic lake Anavatapta, in this instance the *grahas* being regarded as the guardians of the lake. In short, the *nānu me* ritual performed over King Nissankamalla at a *grahasanti* is equivalent to his being anointed or bathed with waters of the Anavatapta. As already mentioned, propitiation of planetary deities, performance of *bali* and other magical practices were considered as curative rituals closely allied to the indigenous system of medicine of the Sinhalese.

In all the accounts of Sumana Sāmanera obtaining water of the lake Anavatapta, the vessel in which the magical fluid was brought has been given a prominent place. A relief from Nagarjunakonda depicting the episode shows the novice monk triumphantly holding aloft the pot filled with waters of the lake Anavatapta.<sup>28</sup> In some of the redactions of this legend, as recorded in *Vadigatantra Yāgaya*, this emphasis on the importance of the pot is further displayed. In one account it was the four guardian gods (*sataravaran deviyo*) who fashioned the pot.<sup>29</sup> When Sakraja threw it to the sky, the pot itself, without the intervention of a miracle-performing monk, floated through the sky and procured the waters of the magic lake. In this instance the miraculous power rested with the pot itself.

The *Hatadiatamangalaya*<sup>30</sup> gives another aspect of the pot. According to this version, when sweat fell from the forehead of Sakraja (a sure sign of his impending death) Viskamdevi (*Viśvakarmā*) ordered the beautiful female potter (see note 23) who emerged from the bottom of Mt. Meru to bring him a pot. She obtained some clay

28. Longhurst, 1938: pl. XXVI (a).

29. It is very significant that in this instance the Four Regents (Pali. *cattāromahārājā*) Sinh. *sataravaramdeviyo*) of the four cardinal directions have been mentioned as fashioning the pot. When the Buddha was without a vessel to receive the offerings made by the two merchants, Tapassu and Bhalluka, it was the Four Regents who offered four stone bowls (Skt. *patra*, Pali. *patta*), which the Buddha transformed into one bowl displaying three lines around its mouth - a reminder of the three bowls incorporated in the fourth. In this context it may be pointed out that the alms-bowl of the Buddha himself was an offering he received from the representatives of the four cardinal points of the compass, thus implying a cosmological significance (See Coomaraswamy, p. 19).

30. *Hatadiatamangalaya*, p. 18.



Fig. 3. The inscription indited on the shoulder of the Ridiyagama astamangala kalasa

from the sea shore and, kneading it on her palm, created a golden pot with seven ridges and twelve spouts.<sup>31</sup> As it will be shown in the sequel, this pot with seven ridges and twelve spouts is a cosmic symbol.

In another redaction of the story of Sumana Sāmanera, when the monk approached the lake Anavatapta, the serpent king residing in the lake surrounded it with his coils, seven in number, and covered the lake with his expanded hood.<sup>32</sup> The iconographic similarity of the pot with seven ridges mentioned above and the Anavatapta lake encircled by seven coils of the serpent king is quite evident. The fact that the pot used in obtaining the water (in this instance *kahadiya*) of the Anavatapta lake bears identical features of Anavatapta is no mere coincidence. In other words, it is a true replica of the magic lake encircled by the seven coils of the serpent king. Now that the Ridiyagama *atamāngala kalasa* too has been shown to be a replica of the Anavatapta lake (i.e. the classical type), this assumption is much more tenable.

31. *Hatadiatamanagalaya*, p. 19.

දර හතයි කෙමී දෙළසයි රන් කොන	ලේ
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පුර වාලයි පැන් මුනිඳුන්ට පුද ක	ලේ
නැර අසන් කවී මුල කහදිය කොන	ලේ

Seven ridges and twelve spouts the golden pot displayed,  
 And to all divinities the vessel had been dedicated;  
 Filled with water, the pot was offered to the Blessed One;  
 Listen with intent to the poem on the origin of the *kahadiya kotale*.

The beautiful female potter (*kumbhakāri*) referred to in this connection is none other than the Earth Goddess (*Mahikāntā*, *Mihikata*) commented on in note 23 above.

32. *Hatadiatamāngala*, 1964: p. 18.

එමස් ලොලේ සිටි නාරජ එම වී	ට
මුවන් කළේ දළ දරණ වෙලා සි	ට
ගණන් කළේ සන් දරණෙකි විල ව	ට
එමැද තුළේ වැසූ නයි පෙණ ගොබය	ට

The Serpent King, waiting to prey on the monk,  
 Coiled up and primed his fangs.  
 Seven coils could be counted around the pond  
 Nestled in their midst and covered by the serpent's hood.

However, further elucidation is necessary for the understanding of the relationship between the image of Anavatapta lake encircled by the seven coils of the serpent king, Anavatapta nāgarāja, with that of the *kahadiya-kotale* consisting of seven ridges, and the Ridiyagama *kalasa* adorned with the *astamangala*, all of which I explained as of cosmic significance. Elsewhere I have shown that the mythical lake, Anavatapta, which, as already pointed out, is closely linked with the *astanmangala*, is associated with the mythical origin of the world system from the Cosmic Lotus. The following is a brief account of this myth as recounted in *Kapaupata*—the Origin of the World Cycle—and other texts<sup>33</sup>.

It is said that at the end of a world cycle (*kalpa*), the entire world upto the heaven of the Brahmas, was submerged by a deluge. After the lapse of a long period of time, a lotus plant arose from the depths of the cosmic sea and this lotus plant brought forth a thousand petalled flower, the sweet scent of which permeated the entire world. With the passage of time, due to the action of the sun, the water subsided and the foam and silt that accumulated around the stem of this lotus flower, solidified to form the world mountain Meru. Subsequently, the earth itself arose and plants and other forms of life covered the earth.

The Brahmas from the highest heaven descended on earth and populated it. They were the first human beings on earth. In course of time, among men of this newly formed earth, the four castes appeared. Mahasammata, the foremost among the *ksatriyas*, became their king. For the benefit of the four castes Brahma created the *astamangala*, the eight auspicious symbols, and according to one account it was drawn after the plan of the summit of Mt. Meru. Thus, according to these myths the world evolved from the Cosmic Lotus that arose from the primordial waters.

The world that evolved from this body of primordial waters and the Cosmic Lotus was conceived as having Mt. Meru, the solidified stem of the Cosmic Lotus, standing in the centre of the world, rising from the ocean. Around this ocean and mountain motif, there are seven concentric circles of mountain ranges (Pāli. *satta pabbata*; Sinh. *satkulapav*), constituting the world system (Skt. *cakravāta*; Sinh. *sakvala*). The primordial waters from which the Cosmic Lotus sprouted forth and evolved into the world system, was actually a lotus lake of cosmic magnitude, the abode of the cosmic serpent Ananta, or Vāsukhī. The well known myth relating the churning of the Milky Ocean by Visnu so as to obtain Ambrosia (*amṛta*), states that among other things that surfaced from the Milky Ocean were Śrī, the lotus goddess, and Dhanvantarī, the divine physician and the author of *Āyurveda*, the art of healing. Dhanvantarī carried in hand the vessel containing Ambrosia (*amṛta*), the elixir that heals and prolongs life and brings about immortality<sup>34</sup>. Anavatapta, the legendary lotus lake of the Himalayas is but a local representation of this cosmic phenomenon.

33. *Vadigatantrayāgaya*, Part 3, pp. 22-24.

34. Dimitt *et al.*, 1978, pp. 97-98.

According to the Buddhist accounts, the Anavatapta lake is surrounded by towering mountains which prevent the rays of the sun from reaching its waters. Hence the designation, Anavatapta meaning "never warmed"<sup>35</sup>. The mountains around the lake, although five in number, are reminiscent of the mountain ranges around the central ocean from which the Mt. Meru rises. On the other hand, the image created by the lake encircled by the seven coils of the serpent king is a more accurate likeness of the *cakravata* with the seven mountain ranges.

The seven ridges (*dārasata*) of the *kahadiya-kotale* referred to earlier, is also a true reflection of this cosmic motif. Incidentally, the *kahadiya-kotale* described in *Hatadiatamangalaya* is same as the ritual vessel known as *pūnāva* or *pūnā-kalava* used in folk cults such as *Devol-Maduva* and *Pūnā-Maduva* of the Sinhalese<sup>36</sup>. Fortunately, a large number of well preserved *pūnāvas* are available and these examples throw more light on the subject. The vessel concerned not only displays the seven ridges (*dārasata*) and twelve spouts (*kemi*) but also serpents (*nāgas*) entwining the spouts and the top as well as the lower portions of the vessel. These cobra figures bring to one's mind the cosmic serpent Ananta of the cosmic waters and the serpent guardians of Anavatapta<sup>37</sup>. The vessel has been dedicated to the divinities, particularly to Devol and Pattini. However, the twelve sprouts, it appears, symbolise the twelve divinities of the zodiac (*rāsi mandala*), who preside over the twelve months of the year. This probable association of the *kahadiya-kotale pūnāva* with the solar zodiac is further supported by the fact that the Sinhalese have been in the habit of decorating ritual vessels with not only the figures of the zodiac (*rāsi mandala*) but also with the planetary deities (*graha mandala*) and the twenty seven constellations (Skt. *sapta vimśati nakśatras*, Sinh. *satvīsi nakāṭ*).<sup>38</sup> In the ritual of *Pūnā-maduva* the vessel is used to dispel *dos* (*misfortune*) resulting from sorcery by enemies<sup>39</sup>. *Śrī* or her sign manual *srīvatsa* emerging from a brimming vessel is a motif frequently met with in ancient India and in Sinhalese art<sup>40</sup>.

35. *Manorathapurani*, P.T.S. ed, Pt. IV, p. 109 ff; *Butsarana*, 1958, pp. 45-47.
36. *Hatadiatamangalaya*, 1964, p. 19; Le Mesurier, 1883, p. 165; Obesekere, 1958, pp. 200-201; Coomaraswamy, (1908) 1956, p. 223, *Sri Sumangulasabdakosaya*, sv. *pūnāva*.
37. Coomaraswamy, (1908) 1956, Pl. XXVI, Fig. 6 and p. 223.
38. *Sri Lanka* (a Sinhala monthly periodical) April 1953, p. 9; Coomaraswamy, (1908) 1956; p.230. There is also the possibility that the twelve spouts are associated with the Dolaha deviyo — the twelve gods — namely, (1) Valiyaku deviyo, (2) Vādiyaku deviyo, (3) Kohomba deviyo, (4) Viramunda deviyo, (5) Vanniye-bandara deviyo, (6) Alut deviyo, (7) Mānikkadavara deviyo, (8) Devata-bandara deviyo, (9) Mangara deviyo (10) Kumara deviyo, (11) Irugal deviyo and (12) Devol deviyo. Le Mesurier mentions only eleven divinities (i.e. 1-11). *Pūnāva* is particularly associated with *Devol Maduva* ritual in which Devol deviyo is propitiated. My interpretations in this instance should be treated as tentative.
39. Coomaraswamy, (1908) 1956; p. 223; *Sri Sumangala Sabdakosaya*, sv. *pūnāva*.
40. Marshall *et al.*, pl. XXVIII, fig. 22. b; Karunaratne, 1990. p. 75 ff.

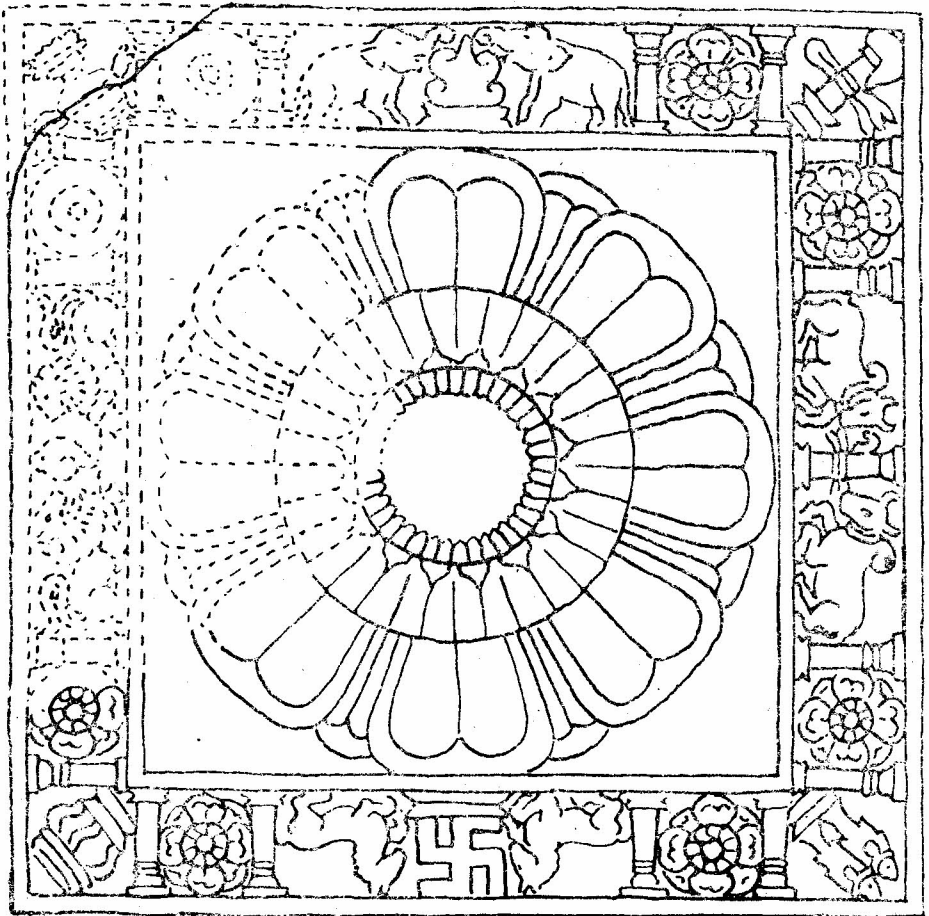


Fig. 4. The Ruvanweliseya Astamangala, now in the Colombo Museum. The damaged portion has been reconstructed in broken lines.

In this comparison of the Cosmic Mountain rising from the Cosmic Sea with the mythical lake Anavatapta and its models, the *pūrnaghata*, and its variants *kahadiya-kotalaya* or *pūnāva* and the Ridiyagama *astamangala kalasa*, there arises the question of the counterpart of the Cosmic Mountain, or the axis of the world, in the latter motifs. In the Pali and Sinhalese accounts of the Anavatapta lake there is no indication of this important feature. However, another myth associated with the lake rectifies this apparent omission. Benjamin Rowland, referring to this myth, says: "One of the legends concerned with the magic lake, called variously Udaya or Anavatapta, relates that from the waters of this pool there arises a great shaft that uplifts a throne to uphold the sun at noon and then sinks again with the setting of the orb."<sup>41</sup>

This shaft rising from the Anavatapta is the parallel of world mountain, Meru, that emerged from the primordial waters. Even otherwise, the stem of the lotus that arises from the centre of the lake is sufficient to signify this shaft rising from the pool, for, as already pointed out, it is the stem of the Cosmic Lotus that transformed into the world mountain, Meru. In a rare list of objects that represent the *axis mundi* mentioned in the introductory verse of the *Dasakumaracarita* of Dandin, the stalk of the cosmic lotus of Brahma (*satadhrti - bhavanambhoruho nāladandah*)<sup>42</sup> is one.

*Pūrnaghata*, the filled vessel, which is the more formal aspect of *kahadiya-kotala* referred to earlier, is a microcosmic representation of the primordial waters, the cosmic mountain and the cosmic pool motif. A perfect example of recreating the axis in association with a *kalasa/pūrnaghata* has been mentioned by Ananda Coomaraswamy. He says, "Inside the vihara was prepared the *indrakhīla*. This was a figure made of rags, supported on a *rukattana* stick (*Alstonia scholaris*) set up in a *kalagediya* (earthen pot) in which the nine gems, gold, rice, etc., had been placed. It was set in the middle of an *astamangala* diagram drawn in rice on the vihara floor, in front of the image and facing it"<sup>43</sup>. The fact that the *kalagediya*, virtually a *pūrnaghata*, was placed in the middle of an *astamangala* diagram symbolic of Anavatapta and that the nine gems (*navaratna*), sacred to the nine planetary deities, and auspicious things had been deposited in it confirms the cosmic symbolism of this configuration. Numerous *pūrnaghata* motifs from which a central lotus, a pillar or a post is shown as issuing forth confirms that the *kalasa* is a microcosmic representation of not only the Anavatapta lake but also the primordial waters from which the cosmic mountain, Meru, rises into the firmament.

The foregoing account touched on three levels of motifs representing the cosmos. They are (i) the origin of the world system (*cakravāta*) from the Cosmic Lotus that arose from the primordial waters, heralding the birth of a new world cycle (*kalpa*), (ii) the Anavatapta lake and (iii) *pūrnaghata*, the filled vessel, in general and in its variants, Ridiyagama *astamangala kalasa*, *kahadiya-kotalaya* and *pūnāva*.

41. Rowland, 1956, p. 41.

42. *Dasakumaracarita*, 1936; see the introductory stanza.

43. Coomaraswamy, (1908) 1956, p. 72; Silva, 1981, pp. 57-79.

Characteristics of the three Cosmic Motifs	The Three Cosmic Motifs		
	I	II	III
	Cakravata the World System	Anavatapta the mythical lake	Kalasa the ritual pot
1 Water element	Primordial Waters engulfing the world at the beginning of an aeon. The place of origin of the Cosmic Lotus	The Lotus pool, source of the four sacred rivers of India	Holy water <i>Kahadiya</i> <i>Nanudiya</i> Medicinal oil
2 Axis mundi	The stem of the Cosmic Lotus, Mt. Meru	The lotus of the lake  Pillar rising from the lake	Lotus adorning the pot  <i>Rukattana</i> stick representing <i>indrakhila</i>
3 Serpent guardian	Ananta/Vasukhi the Cosmic Serpent	Anavatapta nagaraja or Pannaga, the the serpent residing in the lake	Serpent figures adorning the pot
4 Seven rings	Sattapabbata, the seven mountain ranges around Mt. Meru	Towering mountains around Anavatapta  Seven coils of the serpent king wound round the lake	Darasata, the seven ridges on <i>pūnāva kalasa</i>
5 Presence of Sri	Srī emerging from the Milky Ocean to the east of Mt Meru	Srī and her bathing spot at the eastern gate of Anavatapta	Figure of Sri/srivatsa arising from a pot
6 Astamangala (A.M)	Brahma creating astamangala after the plan of the summit of Mt. Meru	Jetavana/Manasara A.M. depicting Sri theme i.e. Proto- Anavatapta Ruvanweliseya A.M. depicting Anavata- pta theme	Ridiyagama kalasa adorned with A.M.  Kalasa placed in the atamangala yantara
7 Healing Power	Appearance of Dhanvantari, the author of ayurveda, from the Milky Ocean <i>Amṛta kalasa</i> surfacing from the Milky Ocean	Healing power of the waters of Anavatapta	Chanted water, <i>Kahadiya</i> , <i>Nanudiya</i> Medicinal oil

Even a cursory survey of these three motifs shows that at least seven salient features such as (a) water or water pool, (b) *axis mundi* featured by Mt. Meru, the shaft, *indrakhila*, the stem of the lotus (*naladandah*), (c) the serpent motif, i.e. Ananta, Vasukhi, Anavatapta Nagaraja, the serpent figures, (d) seven concentric rings, i.e. the seven mountain ranges around Meru, the seven coils of the serpent king encircling the Anavatapta, the seven ridges (*dārasata* of *kahadiya-kotale*), (e) *Śrī* the lotus goddess or her symbols, the lotus, and *srīvātsa*, (f) *astamangala*, both the eight auspicious symbols as well as the diagrammatic form, and above all (g) the healing power i.e. Dhanvantari, the divine physician carrying the vessel containing *amṛta*, the elixir of life, the healing water of Anavatapta, *kahadiya*, *nanudiya*, and medicinal oil, are common to all three levels (chart on page 152). In other words, the mythical lake Anavatapta as well as the ritual vessel *pūrnaghata* and its variations are reflections of the world system as conceived by the Buddhists.

Since the Anavatapta motif (i.e. the lotus lake) is analogous to the body of primordial waters from which the Cosmic Lotus issued forth and evolved into the world system, as conceived by the ancients, it can be said that the waters of Anavatapta are virtually the same as the primordial waters. In the like manner *kahadiya* and *nanudiya* used in folk cults and rituals of the Sinhalese were considered as the very waters of Anavatapta. Since the Ridiyagama *kalasa*, adorned with the *astamangala* symbols, is a veritable copy (*pratibimba*) of the magic lake, Anavatapta, the medicinal oil (*behet tel*) deposited in it too was considered as endowed with all the magical qualities, particularly the healing power attributed to Anavatapta waters.

In short, the water of Anavatapta, *kahadiya* in a *kotale/pūnāva*, the medicinal oil in the Ridiyagama *kalasa*, and as a matter of fact the water in a *pūrnaghata* derive their magical power from the primordial waters that engulfed the world at the beginning of a world cycle - *kalpa*.

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#### ABBREVIATIONS

ASCAR — Archaeological Survey of Ceylon., Annual Report.

E.B. — Encyclopaedia of Buddhism,

E.Z. — Epigraphia Zeulanica,

JRAS, CB/ SLB, (NS) — Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch/Sri Lanka Branch, (New Series).

Sp. Zey. — Spolia Zeylanica.