



The oldest lunar calendar found in Sri Lanka- Historical overview of the moon transit

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Abstract

Evidence of the use of astrology for life's purposes dates back to ancient times. Sri Lankan genealogies as well as inscriptions confirm that this practice, which was used in ancient India, especially in Egypt, Babylonia and other Middle Eastern countries, was also practiced in Sri Lanka from ancient times. It is clear that in the third century BC, before the establishment of the Sangha Sasana in Sri Lanka, the religious leaders as well as the Brahmins, who were the state priests and teachers, performed the astrological functions required of the common people by the rulers of this country. The earliest evidence of this is the mention in the Mahavamsa that the city of Anuradhapura was built in nakshatra of Anura. **Nakshatras** ("lunar mansions", Sanskrit: नक्षत्र, IAST: *Nakṣatra*), or sectors along the ecliptic.

Samanthapasadika also points out that Mahinda Thera came to Sri Lanka earliest time. The Mahavamsa and the Thupavamsa state that the auspicious time for the construction of the Ruwanweli stupa in the first century AD was the most important evidence that the rulers as well as the monks used the favorable time for certain activities of Buddhism after the propagate Buddhism (Mahavamsa 29:1; Thupavamsa 140). What is done in astrology is to identify the position of the asteroids and the auspicious effects of them on man. An important evidence that Sri Lankans were keenly interested in the location and activity of asteroids is the writing of a lunar eclipse in the tenth century AD in an inscription found at the *Kapararama mula* in the Abhayagiri temple in Anuradhapura. The way in which astrology spread in this way is still used in all aspects of the lives of the people of Sri Lanka to this day and it is very clear that Sri Lankans are so interested in astrology. Accordingly, astrology has a special place among the advanced sciences in Sri Lanka.

But here we have to pay attention to how the people of that time were aware of the lunar month pattern seen in the prehistoric cave paintings drawn in the caves at places like Narakamulla in Baticlue, Eastern province Sri Lanka. Europe, Africa, and the Middle East have unearthed paintings and engravings based on the moon and the sun. However, no prehistoric cave paintings have been identified or researched in Sri Lanka based on the lunar calendar. This research paper aims to further illustrate the painting

that was created to identify the lunar month pattern drawn in a cave in the Narakamulla area of the Batticaloa District.

Introduction

On April 4, 2019, I had the opportunity to participate in the exploration of the Narakamulla area. It was one of those moody times where I would break into endless soliloquy with myself. Professor Sumanasiri Wawwage, Working Director of the Central Cultural Fund at the time and Professor Dananjaya Gamalath, Archaeology Director of the Central Cultural Fund of the Ampara and Batticaloa and Professor Postgraduate Institute of Archeology also participated in the expedition. The journey had to cross a very difficult road, clearing the jungle, clearing the road and getting on a tractor to get everyone into the forest. Another scary situation here is that the area is frequented by wild elephants and bears. As I have read, Archaeologist Chakravarthy Ellawala Medhananda Thero was the first to explore this area in 2009. We drove a long distance by tractor, parked at one point and continued into the jungle. However, after traveling about eight kilometers, a cave was found. What makes it even more special is the fact that it is spread over a large area and a thirty feet long reclining Buddha statue can be seen in the cave. The statue was completely destroyed by treasure hunters and natural disasters. Further examination of the cave revealed several inscriptions in Brahmi script. There is ample evidence of monks meditating here during the historical period. Apart from that I could see some paintings while further observing the cave ceiling. Was drawn to an incredible painting. It is simply a painting drawn in a circle like a cart wheel. Further my eyes caught on its square divisions. There I came to the conclusion that prehistoric man had divided the days according to the lunar journey. I think this is one of the oldest lunar art in Asia.

Tithi

Examining the cave painting itself, I realized that it had fifteen divisions. These divisions can be pointed out as follows. The date is one day in the lunar month. The month was divided into two parts, the full party and the lower party. The fifteenth day of the full party is known as *Sukkhapaksha* or *Shuklapaksha*¹ and the lower party as the time party or

¹ Literally meaning "side", a paksha is the period either side of the Full Moon Day (*Purnima*). A lunar month in the Hindu calendar has two fortnights, and begins with the New moon, (*Amavasya*). The lunar days are called *tithis* and each month has 30 tithis, which may vary from 20 – 27 hours. A paksha has 15 tithis, which are calculated by a 12 degree motion of the Moon. The first fortnight between New Moon Day and Full Moon Day is called "Gaura Paksha" or **ShuklaPaksha**, the period

Krishna party. The fifteenth day of the full party is also known as *Purnima* or *Pancha Dasi* and the fifteenth day of the lower party is also known as the month of *Poya* or *Amavaka* day. Apart from this, the middle of the two halves, the 8th day, is considered a less important day. It was also known as the *Pura Atavaka* of the *Pura* Party and the *Ava Atavaka* of the *Ava* Party. In astrology, the Thiti half is called Karana.

Depending on the movement of the moon, the full moon is divided into 30 full or less days. From the end of the month of Poya to the fifteenth day of the month, *Thiti* is known as the *Thithi* of the full party. The dates from the end of the fifteenth month to the end of the month are the 15th party date. So there are 30 points in a lunar month. The full party titles and the *Awa* party titles can be pointed out as follows.

Tithi plays an important role along with nakshatra in Hindus' daily as well as special activities in selecting the *muhurta*. There are auspicious tithis as well as inauspicious tithis, each considered more propitious for some purposes than for others.

There are 30 tithis in each lunar month, named as:

- 1.Prathama / Padyami
2. Dwitiya / Vidiya
- 3.Tritiya / Thadiya
- 4.Chaturthi
- 5.Panchami
6. Shashthi
- 7.Saptami
- 8.Ashtami
- 9.Navami
10. Dasami
- 11.Ekadasi
- 12.Dvadasi
- 13.Trayodasi
14. Chaturdashi
15. Amavasya or (new moon)

The role of the fortune- teller in ancient Sri Lanka

After the arrival of Buddhism, Buddhist thought and aspirations were incorporated into the customs and traditions that preceded the beliefs of the people even before the advent of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Information from astronomers and sources on

of the brightening moon, and the second fortnight of the month is called "Vadhya Paksha" or **Krishna Paksha**.

astrology goes far beyond the arrival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. They were known in different eras as *nakatika*, *mahanakatina*, *ganithaya* etc. It should be inquired here whether astrology, which developed as a subject of the East and the West, was nurtured by the Indian people who migrated to Sri Lanka on several occasions, or whether this subject developed among the Sri Lankans. In the early days divination developed as a separate subject and by this time astrology in educational institutions had developed into a separate subject. In this way, art developed as a school by associating with people and temple pirivenas for generations.

In the early days, most of these astrologers belonged to the Brahmin caste. The name “*ganitaya*” is derived from the motions of the stars, which are also called *nakaththa* because they express both good and bad. That is why the person who knows astrology has mathematics and astrology (Punchi Bandara Sannasgala 1964: 676). The prophets interpret the Jataka commentary verse (Jataka Atuva Gatapadaya: 259) as a prelude to telling the story to the reader (Jataka Atuva Gatapadaya: 259). The first mention of them in the Mahavamsa is the story of a minister of King Vijaya who went to the diviners and prophesied before the arrival of Prince Panduvasudeva (Mahavamsa 8: 14). Thus, it is possible that fortune tellers were among those who came with Prince Vijaya. Another proof of this is found in the Mahavamsa. That is, the Mahavamsa states that the village got its name based on the *nakshatra(nakath)* of Anura during the construction of the Anuradhapura temple (Mahavamsa 10:76). It is clear that astrology was active in this era.

According to the *Sihaba Asna*, Princess Kalinga, the queen of the Wagu king, was accepted by astrologers shortly after her birth. According to the Brahmins, when the princess grows up, she leaves her territory and takes refuge in a lion. The same thing happened when he raised his daughter after hearing the words of *Nimiththa Pataka*. (Kuvani Sihaba Asna p. 16) The Rajavali and the Mahavamsa are referred to as '*Nimiththa Pataka*' instead of '*Bahmana*'. (Rajavali 49)

According to the *Sihaba Asna*, Princess Kalinga, the queen of the Wagu king, was greeted by astrologers shortly after her birth. According to the Brahmins, when the princess grows up, she will leave her area and take refuge with a lion. The same thing happened when he raised his daughter after hearing the words of the kings at the table. (Kuvani Sihaba Asna p. 16) The Rajavali and the Mahavamsa are referred to as *Nimiththa pataka's* instead of the Brahmins. (Rajavali p. 49) Speakers tell of Sinharaja and her marital relationship. (Mahavamsa 6: 2,3) Thus it is clear that the readers of the society at that time had a special faith in the prophecies. It is clear that astrology was developing in society as a science. Another group of migrants who came to Sri Lanka from the history of astrology was said to have had eighteen caste gods, eight caste ministers, eight Brahmins and eight shepherds, and eight tribes of Tharachi and

Kalinga to protect Sri Maha Bodhi (p. 47). According to the Sarathadeepani Discipline, eight Brahmin castes were sent to spray water on the Bodhi tree (Sarathadeepani, p. 8). This group of migrants who came to Sri Lanka was another milestone in the evolution of astrology.

Inscriptions reveal important facts about astronomers. An astrologer is mentioned in an inscription found near the Periyakadu temple. The astrologer and his son are mentioned as the objectives of this inscription. Here it is referred to as "*Parumaka Nakathika*". The astrologer and his son are described in this inscription as "*Parumaka*". C.W. Nicholas points out that the paranoid allusions of the critics of this process were completely substantiated. Hema Ellawala is of the opinion that this occupation was limited to a few educated and privileged people (Ellawala Hema, 1968,133). It is better to be considered an upper class astrologer. Therefore, it is more appropriate to consider the "*nakatika*" mentioned in the second inscription found near the Periyakadu temple as an ordinary astrologer and the "*Parumaka nakatika*" mentioned in the first article as an astrologer of the upper class.

Readers have foretold that a son of Princess Chittara, the daughter of King Pandu vasudeva, will be executed by his uncles, Princess Chittara's brother Abhaya and other brothers. (Mahavamsa 9: 2) For this reason, they kept her in their custody. This prophecy about Princess Chitra was made by the Brahmins of that time even before she got married.

The views expressed by the readers regarding the plight of Viharamahadevi, the queen of King Kavantissa are important. Doladuka gave alms to twelve thousand monks for alms and ate the rest of the nectar himself and drank the water that washed the sword that had beheaded the giant of King Elara's twenty-seven.

According to astrologers, Rajaratnakara mentions the lifespan of King Vasabha as twelve years. Disappointed, King Vasabha summoned the Maha Sangha and inquired about the merits of the auspicious deeds (Rajarithnakaraya p.12).

Literary information about the Tithi

The oldest part of the Mahavamsa shows that the chronology of events in the life of the Buddha or in the legendary part of the history of Ceylon can be accurately calculated in

months and days. These days seem to have passed very steadily from generation to generation.

Fifteenth of the four Poya days, it was called Mahasara Poya because it was an important Poya day. There are four full moon days, full moon poya day (*pura pasaloswaka*), *pura atavaka*, *ava atavaka* and *amavaka*. Accordingly, the day on which the full moon appears is called the full fifteenth day and the day on which the full moon is completely invisible is called the last full moon or full moon. The full moon day is considered as "*Mahasara*" or the important day and the word Mahasara means big. This is why the big Nuga trees and the upper castes are called "*Mahasara*".

The Buddha attained Enlightenment on the full fifteenth day of the month of Vesak. (Mahavamsa 1:12) He attained Nibbana on the same day (Mahavamsa 3: 2). (Mahavamsa 1:19) He left for Sri Lanka for the second time on the Poya day of the month of *Buck* (April) in the fifth year of his enlightenment. (Mahavamsa 1:46) For the third time, in the eighth year of his enlightenment, he visited Ceylon on the full moon day of *Vesak* (May) (Mahavamsa 1: 72-73).

The history of Sri Maha Bodhi in Anuradhapura is given in the chronicle with all the chronological details. King Devanampiyatissa ordered that a branch of the original Bodhi tree established in Magadha be brought to Ceylon, and Prince Aritta left Ceylon on the second day of the *Vapmasa* (January) *pura* party and miraculously arrived at Kusum Pura, the capital of King Asoka on that day. (Mahavamsa 18: 7-8) The Bodhi sapling which was separated from the main branch on the full moon day of the full moon of that month was brought to Kusum Pura two weeks later, on the full moon day of the month of *Buck*(April). (Mahavamsa 18:64) On the first day of the full moon Poya day in the month of *Unduvap* (December), he sailed from Tamralipti ferry to Sri Lanka (Mahavamsa 19: 21-22) and landed at Anuradhapura on the fourteenth day of the same month. It is clear that this happened on the full moon Poya day.

The first consecration of King Devanampiyatissa (250-210 BC) took place on the day when the moon first appeared in *Unduvap*. (Mahavamsa 11:40) The second consecration was performed by King Asoka's representatives on the full moon day of the month of *Vesak* (May). (Mahavamsa 11:42) The messengers of these delegates left Kusum Pura on the first day of the full moon party.

The closing ceremony of the Mahinda Thera took place on the 15th of November. Work on the Great Stupa in Anuradhapura commenced on this day. (Mahavamsa 29; 1) The foundation stone was laid on the 14th day of the *Esala* (July) month, the day of *Thuduswaka*. (Mahavamsa 29:14) After all the work on the stupa is completed, the relic

treasure festival is held on the full fifteenth day of the month of *Esala* (July). (Mahavamsa 31: 109)

Such a definite date is rare in later parts of the genealogy. King Moggallana I (496-513 AD) is said to have held an annual mass almsgiving on the fifteenth day of the month (Mahavamsa 39:37). (Mahavamsa 41: 80-81) King Keerthi Sri Rajasinghe held a festival in honor of the restoration of the Buddha Sasana in Sri Lanka on the fifteenth day of the *Esala* (July) in 1752 AD. (Mahavamsa 100: 91-92)

The Jataka commentary on *Purnima Day* or *Madi Poya* is also mentioned in the Jataka atuva Gatapada. (Jataka atuva gatapadaya 24) Following the *Madhyamapratipada* also took place on the same day. The principles are stated in the Aryan Eightfold Path, the month of *Visakha Vesak* (May), on the day when the full moon is with me. (Sinhala Bodhi Vamsa: 61)

Full Moon Poya is also known as *Mahasara Poya*. Dambadeniya Asna points out that King Parakumba II (1234-1269 AD) celebrated *Atasil*. The *Maha Sara Poya* here is the Big Poya or the Fifteenth Poya. (Dambadeniya Asna and Kadaurusirita: 125) It is mentioned in the Segiriya cave inscription that King Saddhatissa also celebrated *Atasil* on the day of *Mahasara Poya*, and in the story of the Majjhima Nikaya that King Datopathissa II (650-658 AD) used to take *Atasil* and listen to the Dhamma. (Majjhima sect 409-470)

It is essential for Buddhist monks to know that this is *masapoya*, this is *Pura Atavaka*, this is *pasaloswaka*, this is *avaatavaka* and this is another poya. It is also important to know this, especially for poisoning. Thus the time of the Poya was known by astrology according to the lunar journey. Therefore, even the monks, especially those living in forest sanctuaries, should have known about the movement of the moon. Fa-Hsien's description reads: On the eighth, fourteenth, and fifteenth day of the month, a carpeted chair is prepared. Bhikkhus and lay people come from all over to hear sermons. (Fahien 235)

Conclusion

According to historical sources, if the lunar eclipse was organized in this way, the inspiration for the event must have come from the prehistoric period or from a group of migrants who came to Sri Lanka. However, there are various historical cave paintings about the movement of the sun and moon in many parts of the world, and this cave

painting found in Sri Lanka can date back to that era. But the unique feature here is the artist's ability to comprehend astrology and present it in a geometric pattern.



Narakamulla cave painting

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