

SRI LANKA  
Stamp  
Bulletin No. 53

Commemorative Issue

**MUSEUM CENTENARY**



1977. 01. 01

Philatelic Bureau,  
Posts & Telecommunications Department,  
SRI LANKA.

Ministry of Posts &  
Telecommunications,  
Duke Street,  
Colombo 1,  
Sri Lanka (Ceylon).  
1977.01.01.

TO commemorate the centenary of the Colombo Museum on 1st January, 1977, the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications will issue a set of stamps depicting three of the foremost antiquities in the Colombo Museum. These are connected with Buddhism and Hinduism, the two main religions which have influenced the culture and civilization of Sri Lanka since early historical times.

The Colombo Museum was established on 1st January, 1877, during the tenure of office of the British Colonial Governor, Sir William Gregory. From its inception it has served as the nation's repository of objects pertaining to its cultural and natural heritage. Its collections are primarily confined to Sri Lanka and over the last 100 years a rich collection of material has been acquired through field collections by the museum staff, through donations from the public and through purchase.

Research and publications have kept pace with the growth of the collections. The Colombo Museum has been recognized internationally as an important research centre and the Museum research bulletin, *Spolia Zeylanica*, which was commenced in 1904, is received by more than 400 exchange partners all over the world.

The Colombo Museum maintains one of the oldest libraries in the island, and in fact, the museum library also celebrates 100 years of its

existence and service to the scholars and scientists of the country. Its collection is over 500,000 books and periodicals and 3,500 palm leaf manuscripts.

The Colombo Museum belongs to the group of museums established in many South-Asian countries in the latter part of the nineteenth century under British occupation. It is not older than the Indian Museum, Calcutta, but is almost contemporaneous with the National Museum (Raffles Museum) Singapore. It is, however, older than most museums in this region.

The three stamps depict the following antiquities of Sri Lanka :—

### **Maitreya Bodhisattva**

This exquisite standing bronze, 46.5 cm. in height was found at a place to the South of the Thūpārāma dagāba near Basavak-kulam. It is in *tribhaṅga* (thrice bent) pose giving the figure suppleness and balance. The face bears a serene and a benign expression. The head bears an elaborate headdress ; the neck has two necklaces ; the abdomen an ornate girdle and the waist, an elaborate waist band or *Kati-sūtra*. Arms and hands bear armlets and bracelets and anklets on the ankles. The drapery is a cloth from waist to ankle and the figure is bare above the waist. The right hand is in *katahasta mudrā* and the left hand is in *varada mudrā* (granting a boon). This bronze is assigned to about the 6th century A.C.

According to Theravāda Buddhists *Maitreya* is the future Buddha and is at present in *Thusita* heaven awaiting the opportunity to be born in this world to attain Buddhahood. The worship of *Maitreya Bodhisattva* thus dates back to early historic times.

## Goddess Tārā

This unique standing bronze of Goddess Tārā, the consort of Bodhisattva Avalokitēsvara is one of the largest of the Buddhist bronzes discovered in the island. It has been found at a place between Trincomalee and Batticaloa and was removed to London by Sir Robert Brownrigg and gifted to the British Museum. It is elegant in its simplicity with only a headdress and bereft of any ornaments. Its drapery is only a plain cloth from waist to ankle and is bare above the waist. The body is slightly in *tribhaṅga* attitude. Face is serene with eyes lowered. The fullness of the chest and arms are characteristic. Waist is narrow and the hips are broad. The left hand is in *vitarka mudrā* (discourse) while the right is in *varada mudrā* (granting a boon). It is 143.75 cm. in height and of about the 7th - 8th century A.C.

The identification of this bronze is in dispute. Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy considers it as of *Pattini*, "the Goddess of chastity and controller of diseases such as small-pox, measles, etc.". On the other hand Dr. Senerat Paranavitana is of opinion that it could be *Prajñā pāramitā* (personification of Transcendental Wisdom) or even a slave. The general opinion is that it is of Tārā.

The Colombo Museum has only a replica of this magnificent statue.

These two antiquities, i.e. the images of Bodhisattva Maitreya and Tārā relate to the Mahayana school of Buddhism which was introduced to Sri Lanka in the early centuries of the christian era.

## Sundaramurti Svāmī

This is perhaps the finest bronze among the collection of Hindu bronzes in the Colombo

Museum. It was found together with 24 other Hindu bronzes buried in the ruins at the Śiva Dēvālēs Nos. 1, 2 and 4A at Polonnaruva in 1908 by Mr. H. C. P. Bell, the Archæological Commissioner. The facial expression, gestures and the tension of the body eloquently expresses " the ecstasy and the quality of breathless rapture at the vision of Śiva and his Court ". He is represented here as a youth in bridal dress.

*Sundaramurti Svāmi*, one of the great Tamil psalmists, is considered to have lived about the 8th century, his birth place being Tiruvarur, near Negapatam. According to his story on the occasion of his marriage Śiva in the guise of an aged Brahman barred the way of the wedding procession and proved that Sundaramurti was in fact his slave. The marriage was thus stopped and the boy followed the aged Brahman. The Brahman on reaching a Śaiva temple disappeared and subsequently appeared in a " glorious vision accompanied by Pārvatī and Nandi ". This statue is 62.6 cm. in height and is considered to be of about the 10th-12th century A.C.

The bronze of Sundaramurti Svāmi is connected with Saivism which was the predominant religion of the Cola rulers who subjugated the island for brief spells in mediæval times. Under the patronage of the Cola rulers Hindu shrines were established for the worship of Hindu gods, goddesses and saints ; the remains of which are seen even today in various parts of the island in the shape of artistic and architectural monuments left by the Hindu culture which had a considerable influence on the culture of Sri Lanka.

## TECHNICAL DETAILS

<i>Date of Issue</i>	..	1977. 01. 01.
<i>Denominations</i>	..	Cts. 50, Re. 1/- and Rs. 5/-.
<i>Designer</i>	..	P. Wanigatunga.
<i>Colours</i>	..	Dark Blue, Light Blue and Yellow.
<i>Format</i>	..	Vertical.
<i>Size</i>	..	36 mm. × 26 mm.
<i>Printers</i>	..	VEB Wertpapierdruckerei, G.D.R.
<i>Sheet composition</i>	..	100 stamps per sheet.
<i>Paper</i>	..	Glossy chromo stamp paper without watermark 104 g.s.m.
<i>Gum</i>	..	Synthetic.

### Official First Day Covers

The Philatelic Bureau will provide a specially designed First Day Cover and a Special Postmark.

### Terms of Sale

Overseas orders for the supply of the new stamps and first day covers should be addressed with full particulars to the Director, Philatelic Bureau, 4th Floor, Ceylinco House, Colombo 1, Sri Lanka (Ceylon), and should be accompanied by Mail Transfer, International Money Order or Bank Draft payable to the Director, Philatelic Bureau.

### Advance Information

A further set of stamps depicting the Crown and Throne of the last Kings of Kandy preserved in the Colombo Museum will also be released on 1977.01.18, to mark the Centenary Year.