

# Identify the statues of Goddess Tārā in Sri Lanka and Evaluate the Importance with Trade

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**Abstract-** The influence of the Mahāyāna encouraged the practice of worshipping Bōdhisattvas within the Sinhalese Buddhist rituals. The feminine principle was not venerated in Buddhism until the 4<sup>th</sup> C.E and Goddess Tārā probably entered Buddhism around the 6<sup>th</sup> C.E. The Śhakti of the Avalōkitesvara is called as Tārā. The Mihitalē inscription of king Mihidu IV describes her as *Minināl* (Gunawardna, N 2017:185-190). The Sinhales Buddhist called her as *Biso Bandara*. Tisara Sandeśha treats her as *Tārā Bisō*. She is known as the mother of liberation. She represents the virtues of Success in work and achievements. Two types of Tārā are identified as the ascetic and the princely types. As it is mentioned in the Sādanamālā Prof. Chandrā Wickramagamagē mentions that there are 108 type of Tārās. The date and the period of the beginning of worshipping of the Goddess Tārā are not yet found out. The worshipping of Avalōkitesvara had been introduced to Sri Lanka during the 3<sup>rd</sup> C.E. The worshipping of Tārā got inherited as a consequence of the spread of the Mahāyāna Buddhism from India. Tārā is considered as a Buddhist savior Goddess. She is also popular in Tibet, Nepal, Mongolia and India. Most widely known Tārās are Green Tārā, White Tārā, Red Tārā, Black Tārā, Yellow Tārā, and Blue Tārā. The statues of the Avalōkitesvara Buddha's as well as that of the Goddess Tārā's have been found in many of the ancient sea ports in Sri Lanka. The mariners and merchants who were the frequent visitors may have left these statues as souvenirs. The worshipping of the goddess Tārā became famous during the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup> C.E. in Sri Lanka.

**Index Terms-** Statues, goddess Tara, famous, trade

## I. INTRODUCTION INCLUDING BACKGROUND

It is well known that, unlike Brahmanism, Buddhism looked favourably upon trade activities (Bōpeārachchi. O. 2015: 162). The worship of female deities prevailed in ancient Sri Lanka (Amaratunga G & Guanawardana N 2019, vol iii, issue vi: 203). Information with reference to this cult can be seen in the *Mahāvamsa* as early as the time of Jetthatissa II (328-337 C.E.). Mahayāna Buddhism believed that the Bōdhisattva Avalōkitesvara was venerated as a protector of mariners. He also protected people from the eight perils. The Mahāyāna Buddhist pantheon comprises of a large number of Tara (the saviouress), the female counterparts of Bodhisattvas. Many are regarded as being associated with Avalōkiteshvara (Prematilleke .L. 1995:46). The Pāla rulers in India patronaged the Mahāyāna Buddhism. The Buddhist University at Nālandhā had been developed by the kings of Pāla.

The kings of Pāla have patronaged the universities of Odanthapurī and Vikramaśhilā. (Basnāyaka. H. T 2002:322). During this period, many Buddhist sculptures, including the Bodhisattva and Tārā statues have been found in Bihār and Bengāl. Tārā is originally a Buddhist goddess because her distinct features mainly appeared in the Buddhist texts and sculptures (Shastri 1925:12). Some scholars however, claimed that the Buddhists borrowed the conception of Brahmanical Tārā which is identical with the goddess the Durgā (Dasgupta 1967: 117).

The name Tārā means carrying across, helping over a difficulty, rescuing and saviouress (Shin Jae Eun, 2010: 17). The Ārya Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa is probably one of the early Buddhist texts containing an elaborative description of Tārā. The goddess Tārā is closely associated with Avalōkitesvara in its initial stage (Shin Jae Eun 2010: 17). As mentioned in the the Ārya Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa the goddess Tārā is noted as the personification of Karunā of Avalōkitesvara and seated in the Paryankāsana, should have a side glance towards Avalōkitesvara. She holds a blue utpala, she wears all the ornaments and displays varada mudrā. Here complexion is noted here as golden and having thin waist, she is neither too young nor too old (Ghosh 1980:11). In my introduction, I rather prefer to give a brief idea about the Tārā figures which we have come across from the Indian subcontinent. The earliest statue of Tārā is found at the north wall of the main temple of Nālandā. It is found out that Tārā, standing on the left side of Avalōkitesvara. Her figure is badly damaged but fortunately the stalk of the utpala which in her left hand is preserved.

Another image of Tārā, belonging to the 6<sup>th</sup> century has been found in Nālandā. Although, the face and the bust of the figure are damaged, the figure shows that she is seated in the paryankāsana. It is well decorated with ornaments while holding an utpala in her left hand and exhibiting the varada mudrā with her right palm.

The Chinese monk Xuangzang noticed that the worship of Tārā had been widespread at Nālandā and its adjoining are in the first half of 7<sup>th</sup> century (Beal 1994(viii) :103). From the 6<sup>th</sup> century onwards, it could be traced the nascent forms of Tārā had often appeared as the lotus, bearing the female image in the caves at Aurangābad.

An image from the cave at Ellōrā, dated from the late 6<sup>th</sup> century may have shown an initial evolvement of the Tārā figure in Deccan. She stands on the right side of Avalōkitesvara while holding a lotus bud instead of an utpalā in her left hand. Moreover, her right hand does not exhibit the varada mudrā, but it merely

shows the back of her right hand, whereas Avalokiteśvara displays the varada mudrā. She was casted in the role of savior from the eight great perils shipwreck, conflagration, enraged elephant, brigand, pouncing lion, serpent, prison and demon which were initially associated with Avalokiteśvara (Mitra 1957:20). The reliefs of Astamahābhaya Tārā and Avalokiteśvara had mainly been found in Deccan from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> century. A life sized figure of Tārā, standing in a graceful posture on a double petal lotus, while holding the stalk of an utpala in her left hand and displaying the varada mudrā in her right hand are shown. The sculptures of the great perils and the eight small images of Tārā, seated in the mediation posture are depicted on either side of Tārā. From the 10<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the Astamahābhaya of Tārā often appeared in the seated posture. An image of the black stone from Sōmapāda in Deccan, dated back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, is preserved in the Bangladesh National Museum, depicting the Astamahābhaya of Tārā with a narration. A typical image of Tārā is illustrated in the central figure. She is seated in lalitāsana on a lotus pedestal, holding half opened utpalā in her left hand, while making the varada mudrā by her right hand.

Many artifacts have been found during the 10<sup>th</sup> century in Magada, as well as in the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries in Bengal. (Basnāyaka. H. T 2002:324). The compositions of these sculptural artifacts cannot be seen, Owing to the Muslim invasions of the areas of Bengal. Many of the Tārā statues, found in Sri Lanka were brought by the mariners and the merchants who frequently visited Sri Lanka from India.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Most of the work, related to this area have been researched by Von Schroeder. Specially, he has focused his attention on the Buddhist sculptures of Sri Lanka. The books of *Buddhist Sculptures of Sri Lanka* (1990), *The Golden age of sculpture in Sri Lanka* (1991) remain the best contribution ever made in this field of studies. O. Bopearachchi. Specially, has focused his attention on the international trade and the trade between South India and Sri Lanka. His “*Sri Lanka and Maritime Trade Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara as the protector of mariners*” (2015) provided us with basic knowledge. Chandra Wickramagamage’s *Sculpture*, vol. iv, (1990) and Shin Eun Jae’s *Transformation of the Goddess Tara with special reference to the iconographical features* (2009-2010) have been used. The Travels of Fah-Hien (400 C.E. and 518 C.E.) translated by Samuel Beal (1993) have been used in this study. Furthermore, Nandasena Mudiyanse’s “*Mahayana monuments in Ceylon*” (1967), Ananda Coomaraswamy’s “*Memoirs of the Colombo Museum*”, (1014) and Nandana Chutiwong’s *The iconography of Avalokiteśvara in Mainland south East Asia* (1942) have also been used. Other literary sources, taken in to account have been mentioned under the list of references.

## III. OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

The objective of this research is to identify the relationship of Goddess Tārā with the sea trade. The most of statues of Goddess Tārā have been found either from the sea ports or closer to the coastal areas. The earliest Buddha images and some portable

marble reliefs, found in Sri Lanka, depicting various Buddhist hems, were originally executed in Amarāvati – Nāgarjunakonda and were brought down to the island by pious traders or pilgrims as offerings (Bopearachchi. O. 2015: 163). The caves, the earliest dwellings of the Buddhist monks were offered by the mariners or traders. An inscription, written in the Grantha script, containing eleven lines, dated back to the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, chiseled on a rock surface at Tiriyāya, 29 kilometers north of Trincomalē, records an account of company of sea faring merchants named Trapassu and Bhalluka. The same Sanskrit inscription from Triyāya refers that the merchants who endowed a Mahāyāna Buddhist shrine dedicated it to the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara and his consort Tārā. When the Department of Archaeology undertook an excavation at the site on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1938, the statues of the Buddha, 11 of Bodhisattvas, three of Tārās and a casket stupa, containing four dhāni Buddhas on the circumference were found, buried under a paving stone of the ruined meditation hall (Bopearachchi. O. 2015: 163). The fact of Tiriyāya’s location, the right bank of the Yān oya, one of the main openings to the sea routes of the east, suggests that it may have accumulated souvenirs of mariners and merchants who were frequent visitors to the Buddhist shrine (Bōpearachchi. O. 2015: 164).

## IV. DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH, CARRIED OUT INCLUDING THE METHODOLOGY:

The field survey and the literature review have been selected as the methodology of this research. The following historical sites located in Sri Lanka were visited.

1. Port of Mānnār in the Mānnār district
2. Tiriyāya in the Trincomalē district
3. Vijayārāmaya in the Anurādhapura district
4. Abhayagīrya in the Anurādhapura district
5. Buduruwagala in the Hambantota district
6. The Yatāla museum in the Hambantota district
7. The Mānābharana Rajamahā Vihāraya in the Ampāra district
8. The Colombo museum

## V. RESULT OBTAINED

### The Statue of Tārā, found at the Mānābharana Rajamahā Vihāra



This statue was found by professor Raj Somadēva, during the excavation of the Mānābharana Rajamahā Vihāra at the Uva province in 2012. This has been found near the stone of mahāmēru

of the stūpa. Unfortunately, when the relief was found it had been broken into four pieces. According to the excavation reports the statue had been made of the stone of Kadappā. The right leg of the statue has been damaged during the excavations. This is an unpublished relief. The small hall in the śhirśhamakṭa can be identified. A considerable degree of due attention is deserved to be paid on this particular relief. The height of the statue is 11 cm, width in between shoulders 5 cm and width in between knees is 10 cm. This goddess, wearing her hair in the ascetic style Jatāmakūta. She was venerated as the consort of Avalōkiteshvara. The god Avalōketiśhvara usually wears his hair in the same manner.

#### VI. THE STATUE OF TĀRĀ AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM

This is a glided bronze statue, belonging to the eight century C.E. The right hand of the statue depicts the Varada mudrā. It represents the gesture of charity or gift giving. A lotus had been on her left hand. This statue was found on the East coast of Sri Lanka between Batticalo and Trincomalē near the coastal area. The image is solid cast and would once held semi-precious stone or crystal inlaid eyes. The niche in the head dress would have contained a figure of a Dhayāni Buddha. They symbolize that the Mahāyāna Buddhism was prevalent. Some scholars have misunderstood this statue, to be the statue of goddess Pattini. This reflects the beauty of a woman. This statue goes back to the 10<sup>th</sup> C.E. It is said that Sir Robert Brownrigg has donated this statue to the British Museum by the year 1830 (R. Arangala & S. Lakdusinghe: 2012: 88). Mr. Chinthaka C. Gunadāsa says in his paper article called *Patthini Amma* that this statue has been donated by wife of the Sir Robert Brownrigg to the British museum, having been kept it for a decade. (1820-1830). He further mentions that this statue is the 10<sup>th</sup> valued among the other exhibits in the British museum. This has been insured for 5.1 million US dollars while the statue was taken to the exhibition, organized by the UNISCO at the Common Wealth Countries. The statue is exhibited at the British museum near the Rascal square today, at the entrance of the museum. There are three seated statues; one standing statue of the goddess Tārā at the collection of the Hiu Nevil in the British Museum (R. Arangala & S. Lakdusinghe: 2012: 88) The height is 1½m.

#### VII. THE STATUE OF SEATED TĀRĀ AT THE COLOMBO MUSEUM

This statue was found from Talampitiya in the Kurunāgala District, and dated back to the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup> century. This is solid cast and the silver alloyed.



This goddess, wearing her hair in Jatāmakūta, the ascetic style. Avalōketiśhvara usually wears his hair in the same manner. The niche in the head dress would have contained a figure of a Dhayāni Buddha. The height of this statue is 20 cm. The goddess is depicted seated in vīrāsana and displaying the appearance of mediation (dhyānamudrā or Samdhi). The meditative posture, though quite uncommon in the iconography of the female deities of the Mahāyāna pantheon is not altogether unknown. The eyes are shown half closed indicative of mediation, but the facial expression is quite severe and detached. The statue Endowed as it were with all the traditional attributes of the feminine beauty, the figure seems to be elevated far beyond the sphere of sensuality, by virtue of the expert display of deep concentration and immitigable spiritual equilibrium (Prematilleka L. edited 1995:1).

#### VIII. THE STATUE OF SEATED TĀRĀ AT COLOMBO MUSEUM



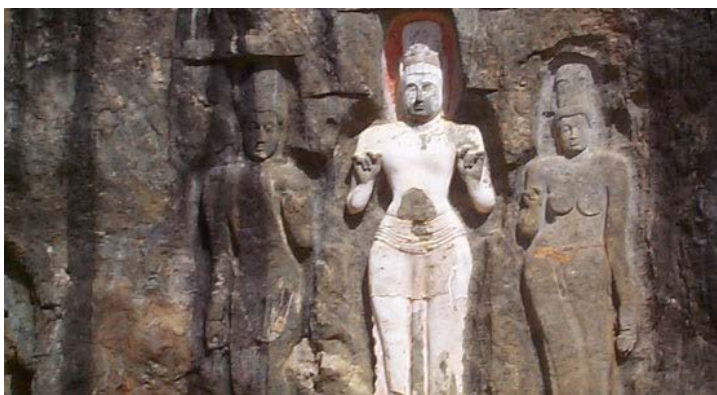
This statue was found near the light house at Männār in 1957 and this goes back to the 10<sup>th</sup> century. This is also solid cast and the silver alloyed. The goddess is depicted, seated in vīrāsana, holding an object which has been constantly described as a snake (Mudiyanse 1967: 56-57; Dohanian 1977: 67-68; Von Schroeder 1990; pl 74A). Her body together with the head is flexed to the proper left, but the face looking up at the opposite direction. This

unusual stance, and the manner in which the attribute is being held, are typical of one particular group of Buddhist goddesses known Pūjā Tārās (the goddesses of offerings) who play a minor role as the attendants of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in a mystic circle, described as Vajradhatumandala (see Bosch 1961: 111-133; Klimburg –Salter 1982; 70-77; Chutiwongs 1990: 27-29).

The image displays the overwhelming stylistic influences from the medieval Northeast India, the stronghold of the Mahāyana Buddhist culture. Nevertheless, the North Indian type of crown, distinctive by the conspicuous knots of lappets seen behind the ears, has been locally modified by the application of a ribbed base and a gathering of pleats at the back. The earrings, too appear to have the form of Makara heads, much favoured in Sri Lanka and south India. The height of this statue is 5.4cm. The decorative motifs on the armlets look quite similar to those seen on the Manjushri image from Tiriyāya. Professor Dohaniyan while pointing out the style as one similar to those found in Bihār and Bengal during the Pāla period says that Sri Lanka may have received it from Magadha and the period may be the 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (Wickramagama .C 1990, 73)

#### IX. THE STATUE OF TĀRĀ AT BUDURUWAGALA

The figure in half relief to the right of the Buddha image on the rock surface at Buduruwagala is the largest figure of Tārā available in Sri Lanka. This is nearly 40 feet in height. Professor Paranavitāna assigns this to the 6<sup>th</sup> century. (Wickramagama .C 1990, 66). According to Dohaniyan this creation could not have been later than the 9<sup>th</sup> century. This is thribanga (erect) standing image. The upper portion of the body is bare. A Dhoty is worn to cover the lower body. Dhoty falls up to the ankle. The head is covered by a turban. The slightly raised hand might be holding the flower of lotus. Facial expressions cannot be identified.



The right side of the statue of Tārā is the Avaloketiśvara Buddha. Professor Parnavitāna had identified the figure to the right corner as that of Sudhana Kumāra (Wickramagama .C 1990: 66). Demonstrating a yogi outlook, Tārā in Tribanga posture expresses the kataka mudrā with the half raised right hand.

#### X. THE TĀRĀ AT VIYAYĀRĀMAYA IN ANURĀDHAPURA

Inside a Makara Torana at the Vijayārāma, two figures of a couple can be found. Professor Dohaniyan has identified the male figure as Avalōkitesvara and the female as Tārā.

(Wickramagama .C 1990, 66). He ascribes the sculpture to the 9<sup>th</sup> century. One couple is sculpted in a posture in sambanga, while the other sculptured in thribanga. The right hand of the male rests on the shoulder of Tārā. The upper portion of the body of Tārā is bare. A Dhoty is worn to cover the lower body with a belt, going round the waist. Dhoty falls up to the ankle.



*The Tārā at Viyayārāmaya in Anurādhapura*

Professor Dohaniyan considers that this female figure to be that of Nīla Tārā. He believes that this belongs to the latter part of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Tārā Dharanis or the Copper palates have been found from this site (Coomarsawarmy A.K. 1914:7)

#### The Tārā statues found at Tiriyāya



*(Courtesy of Osmund Boppearachchi)*

In the year 1983, when the Department of Archaeology under took an excavation at Tiriyaya, several Avalōkitesvara Buddhā's and Tārā's statues were discovered. The fact is that Tiriyāya, been situated on the right bank of the Yān Oya, one of the main openings to the sea routes of the East, may have left souvenirs of mariners and merchants who were the frequent visitors to the Tiriyāya Buddhist shrine. This is a glided bronze statue. Varada mudrā is made with her right hand. This represents the charity or gift giving. Her left hand carried a lotus. The upper portion of the body is bare. A Dhoty is worn to cover the lower body. Dhoty falls up to the ankle. A belt can be seen going around the waist. The facial expressions cannot be identified.



(Courtesy of Osmund Boparachchi)

This figure was also found at the above mentioned excavations in 1938 at Tiriyāya. The distinguished feature in this statue was Varada mudrā being depicted not from the right hand but from the left. Her right hand is raised and might have held a lotus which cannot properly be identified. A dhoty which is relatively shorted is worn to cover the lower part of the body. A neckless is also available.

#### XI. THE TĀRĀ STATUES AT THE ABHAYAGIRIYA MUSEUM

At present three statues of Tārās are available at the Abhayagriya museum, and out of which two of them depict the standing posture, while the other, depicting the sitting posture,



This statue was found near a foundation while excavating a Padānagara to the North Eastern side of the Ruwanwālisāya (site no 08). The two hands are raised, while the right hand carrying a

lotus. Abhaya mudrā is illustrated with the left hand of the statue. A crown the North Indian style visible. The height of the statue is 145mm, Width of the shoulders 40mm and the size of the waist is 12mm. The upper portion of the body is bare. A Dhoty is worn to cover the lower body. Dhoty falls up to the ankle. A belt can be seen, running around the waist. The facial expressions cannot be identified.

#### XII. THE SEATED STATUE OF TĀRĀ AT ABHAYAGIRIYA



This statue was found at the excavation of the Dīgapāshāna area at Abhayagriya. The goddess is depicted, seated in vīrāsana and displaying the posture of meditation (dhyana mudrā or Samādhi). The meditative posture, though quite uncommon in the iconography of the female deities of the Mahāyana pantheon is not altogether unknown. A Dhoty is worn to cover the lower body with a belt round the waist. Dhoty falls up to the ankle. The head of the state has not yet been found. The height is 50mm and the width of the knees is 58 mm. This sculpture is a princely type Tara statue and from the iconographic feature it is much more similar to the Tārā statue, found at the Mānābharana Rajamaha Vihāra.

#### XIII. THE THIRIBANGA TĀRĀ STATUE AT ABHAYAGIRIYA



(Courtesy of Osmund Bopearachchi)

The statue holds the stalk of an utpalā in its left hand and displaying the varada Mudrā in the right hand. This goddess, wearing her hair in the ascetic style of Jatāmakūta. The Avalōketiśhvara usually wears his hair in the same manner. The niche in the head dress would have contained a figure of a Dhayani Buddhā. The height is 186mm, width of the shoulders is 48mm, width of the waist is 18 mm. The upper portion of the body is bare. A Dhoty is worn to cover the lower body. Dhoty falls up to the ankle. A belt can be seen going around the waist. The facial expressions cannot be identified.

This Statue is much more similar with that of the same in the London museum. As Ārya Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa mentions, goddess Tārā holds a blue utpala. She wears all ornaments and displays varada mudrā. The statue carries a thin waist, while depicting neither too young nor too old appearance (Ghosh 1980:11).

#### XIV. THE HEAD OF THE TĀRĀ STATUE AT THE YATĀLA MUSEUM



(Courtesy of Osmund Bopearachchi)

This goddess, wearing her hair in the ascetic style of Jatāmakūta. Avalōketiśhvara usually wears his hair in the same manner. The figure of a Dhayani Buddha in the head dress cannot be identified. The lower part of the body has not yet been found.

#### XV. THE HEAD OF THE TĀRĀ STATUE AT YATĀLA MUSEUM



(Courtesy of Osmund Bopearachchi)

Although, this goddess, wearing a high hair, it cannot be clearly identified. The eyes are opened. The authenticity of the Statue of Tārā cannot be found out with these few iconographic features available. The figure of a Dhayani Buddha in the head dress cannot be identified. The lower part of the body has not yet been found.

#### XVI. CONCLUSIONS

The great artistic activities of all spheres commenced by the Indian Emperor Asoka in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century B.C., lay the foundation of the Indian art tradition that blossomed forth into a classical era

during the Gupta Empire (4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D) (Prematilleka L. 1995:1) It was only during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. that the religious metal sculptures were first hear of (Prematilleka L. 1995:1). Some portable items could have been imported from India, but the archaeological remains indicate that there were workshops producing bronze and stone sculptures at Anurādhapura at that time (Chutiwongs N. & Prematilleke L 1995:4-5).

There are fundamental disagreements in the interpretation of Buddha's teaching between the orthodox Theravada and the heterodox Mahāyāna schools. According to the Buddhist tradition, Tārā was born out of the tears of compassion of the Boudhisattva Avalōkiteshvara. It is said that he wept as he looked upon the world of the suffering beings, and his tears formed a lake in which lotus sprung up, when the lotus opened, the goddess Tārā was revealed. Sri Lanka was the home of the Theravāda Buddhism, the evidences prove that by the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Mahāyāna had gained a decisive victory over the orthodox tendencies of the Theravāda Buddhism (Bopearachchi. O. 2015: 164). The time span of the Mahāyana impact on Sri Lanka extended from 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries ( Chutiwongs N. & Prematilleke L 1995:5). Tārā is still worshipped in Sri Lanka under the epithet of Bisō Bandāra (the queenly goddess), whose image accompanies Avalōkiteshvara in some 14<sup>th</sup> century shrines which are worshiped. (Mudiyanse 1967: 43-45, Von schroeder 1990:pls. 137d-F)( Prematilleke L edit 1995:46). It cannot be concluded with certainty whether these sculptures were creations of Sri Lanka or imported from the Pallava territory. Many of the Tārā statues, found in Sri Lanka were brought by the mariners and merchants who frequently visited Sri Lanka from India. No images of Tārā were found on the west coast. All the other known images have so far been attested only in the South and East coasts of the island.

## XVII. RECOMMENDATIONS



This statue is recognized as Tārā by the Yatala Musium in Tissa Maharama. It is difficult to ascertain exactly whether this statue is exactly that of goddess Tārā herself with the few iconographic features, available. Hence the statue deserves to be renamed.

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