

# Impact of Sanskrit on Sinhala (A brief survey)

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## Introduction

Among the countries that have contributed to the Sanskrit literature, next to India, Sri Lanka occupies the most prominent place. It is seen that in the sphere of national education, at different eras in the history of this country Sanskrit literature has played a prominent place. Even at the present time Sanskrit occupies an important place in the Pirivena Education in Sri Lanka. From recent times Sanskrit is being included in the school curriculum of Sri Lanka. The influence of Sanskrit is immensely felt not only on the Sinhala language and literature but also in the field of fine arts including art and architecture, drama and music as well.

Among the Indo-European family of languages, Sinhala belongs to the Indo-Aryan branch. Sinhala is written in a script which is a descendant of the ancient Indian Brahmi script. Evidence has been found to prove that even in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C., Brahmi was the script that was used in Sri Lanka for inscribing inscriptions, before the Sinhala script was developed into a literary-worthy form.

According to the renowned Sri Lankan Professor, O. H. de A. Wijesekera, the reason behind this may be the island's dependency on India. "While it cannot be denied that Ceylon in its long history of twenty-five centuries has maintained itself as a separate political and economic entity, in literary and cultural matters it has largely been dependent on India. Its religion is Theravada Buddhism, which originated on the sub-continent, and was subsequently introduced to the island in the time of Asoka, and its secular arts and sciences too came from the same source, at least in the early period."<sup>1</sup>

## The Present Situation of Sanskrit Studies in Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, at present, Sanskrit is a compulsory subject in Pirivenas (traditional educational Institutions conducted in Buddhist temples specially for monks, but open for lay male students as well), which is taught for 5 years (equivalent to Grades 6-10 in schools). In general, any student can apply for Sanskrit as a subject in both the examinations of General Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level) (Grades 10 & 11) and (Advanced Level) (Grades 12 & 13) of Sri Lanka. After completion of 6 years in the particular course of study, taught in Pirivenas, with