

Social Conditions Reflected in Sanskrit Inscriptions of Sri Lanka

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Sri Lanka possesses one of the largest collections of inscription in South Asia, nearly four thousand of them dating from the 3rd century BC. Beside inscriptions written in Sinhala language in its various stages of development, a few inscriptions written in Sanskrit and Pali have also been found. Scripts used in these Sanskrit inscriptions are Sinhala, Grantha or Devanagari. Some inscriptions which have been written in another language and consist of Sanskrit verse/s (śloka/s) or prose portions are remains in the same scripts in which the particular inscription is written.

The oldest inscription in Sanskrit (Kuccaveli rock inscription-about 7th century AC. (EZ.III.1933, pp.158-161) hitherto found in Sri Lanka has been written in the Grantha script while the longest inscription in Sanskrit (Abhayagiri slab inscription about 9th century AC. (EZ.I.1912, pp.1-9) has been written in the Devanagari script.

An inscription in fragmentary form, belonging to 12th to 13th century AC., however, provides information of a secular nature. Almost all the other inscriptions written in Sanskrit deal with topics relating to Buddhist Culture.

Sanskrit inscriptions found in Sri Lanka provide the major source of evidence for the socialization and the popularity of Mahayana Buddhism in Sri Lanka. The Tiriyāya Rock inscription found close to town of Trincomalee consisting of 10 verses (in *Nardataka* metre) and the last verse in *Upajāti* reveals the popularity of Mahayana Bodhisattva concept in Sri Lanka and brings to light valuable information pertaining to trade relations between the two countries, India and Sri Lanka. Founders of the Girikaṇḍika Cetiya, where the inscription is found, are described as two merchants named Trapuṣyaka & Vallika (Pali: Tapassu & Bhallika or Tapussa-Bhallika) who had arrived from India. They may be identified with Tapassu & Bhallika who came from Ukkala (Utkala=Orissa) offered food to the Buddha and became *Dvevācika* (pronouncing two words viz. Buddha & Dhamma) disciples. At a later time the Buddha accorded them the highest position among the lay disciples. (Mvp. p. 8)

The Tripitaka reveals that the two merchants originally belonged to Ukkala (Orissa, in India) and that they were in the habit of visiting the Buddha from time to time. (An.I.p.26)