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***Sigiriya Paintings: Understanding the subject matter of paintings in the context of cityscape***

Sigiriya is one of the World Heritage Sites in Sri Lanka. It is a royal city with a massive rock at the centre where the palace was built on. Ruins of the palace, remains of the gigantic lion staircase, beautiful paintings, well planned gardens, strong ramparts, wide moats and overall cityscape of Sigiriya are well known in Asian Art and Archaeology. With the help of well written chronicles and archaeological evidence all these constructions of Sigiriya have been assigned to King Kassapa 1 (477-495 AD) who was the sole king ruled the country from this particular city.

The present paper is an attempt to understand the paintings of Sigiriya in the context of its cityscape. These paintings are mainly found on the two inter-connected caverns of the western rock cliff as elegantly executed female figures. There are twenty three life size female figures, single as well as pairs. Interestingly, these ladies are nude in upper part of their bodies and half of the lower part is covered by clouds. These figures have been interpreted differently by various scholars, but all these interpretations can be broadly based on three assumptions, i.e., they were court ladies, Apsaras or celestial beings and anthropomorphic symbols of cloud and lightings.

All these interpretations have been considered against the cityscape of Sigiriya by the present paper. The writer inclined to believe that these paintings were representations of Apsaras, as initially pointed out by Coomaraswamy, and argue in detail in support of this idea. Further, this will show why Apsaras were executed on the Sigiriya rock and point out its relevance to the overall city planning of Sigiriya.