

REINTERPRETATION OF VAHARALA AND THE REVELATION OF ECONOMIC RELIGIOUS AND LITERACY CONDITION OF THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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Introduction

Inscriptions of Sri Lanka which belongs to the 5th century to 8th century AD bears the word Vaharala called vaharala inscriptions. This word Vaharala also appears in various forms such as Vaharala, Viherila, Vaherila, Viharala and Viharalaya. So Epigraphists and Paleographers have given various meanings to interpret it. In this attempt those interpretations are firmly investigated and try to submit a clear meaning in accordance with the conditions of the inscriptions. The social and economic conditions of the country are been investigated here in the contemporary society as well. In most of the occasions earlier investigators did not consider the social factor which is revealed by the Vaharala inscriptions, because the irregularities of the inscriptions prevented them going for further studies. In this attempt the Buddhist meritorious activities of the monasteries also been inspected.

Materials and Method

The method of this research basically depends on the published Vaharala Inscriptions. All the available inscriptions are being studied to have a clear meaning and as materials stamp pages of those were used to prove the opinion.

Discussion

H. C .P. Bell, former commissioner of the Department of Archaeology interpret Vaharala as monasteries. In some occasions Veherila

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also used for the Vaharala and it helps to reveal the same meaning. Prof. S. Paranavitana's view is as slaves of the monasteries at that time. To prove his opinion he gave many examples from chronicles and literary sources. There was slavery in Sri Lanka at that time. But vaharala appears with the word cidavi means, caused to be cut. Here Prof. Paranavitana interpreted it as the release from the slavery. He pointed out that this was a public meritorious activity at that time and people engaged in such kind of activities to show their faith for their religion. As Paranavitana's view this word vaharala has been taken from *Wrushala* in Sanskrit language and *Vasala* in Pali Language and the word varasala or varahala derived from *Wrushala*.

At the middle of the debate Mr. D. J. Wijerathna, former commissioner of the Department of Archaeology pointed out that the word Vaharala means not the slaves but cutting down timber of the monasteries for the purpose of fuel and other requirements of the Viharas. According to his view the word cidavi always appear with Vaharala.

Prof. Nandadeva Wijesekara admits Prof. Paranavitana's and D.J. Wijerathna's views. According to him the slaves of the monasteries may have collected and provided timber for pyres and requirements of monasteries and that tradition may have inscribed in Vaharala inscriptions.

The most powerful interpretation for *Vaharala* was forwarded by Prof. Sirimal Ranawella. According to him Vaharala means monastery tickets which were provided by the devotees to the monasteries. Prof. Ranawella has proved his view by giving enough facts from literary sources. Dhampiyā Atuvā Gatapaaya and Dhammapadaṭṭakatava are main references which helps to prove Prof. Ranavalla's interpretation. In the above references appear some words as "bhujissé katva", means freed from slavery but not mentioned as vaharala cidavi. So Vaharala Cidavi means cause to cut monastery tickets. In the sassavaṭṭupparāṇa a phrase appear as "vihāraṇ gaṅtva salaka Bhaṭṭaṇ cindāpetvā" means a meals ticket which is caused to be cut on behalf of one's own name. It helps to prove the Prof. Ranavella's explanation. Same instances appear in Rasavāhini as "vihāraṇ gaṅtva salaka Bhaṭṭaṇ attano nāmena cindāpetvā". As material evidences appear in

Aṭkanda Vihara Rock Inscription which explains “de vahirila cidivi vake icho lahabataki icho” means two monastery meals tickets which are caused to be cut for vakka bhata and pakkhika Bhata. Here vakka bhata and pakkhika Bhata are two kinds of meals which are given in regular intervals. It proves the interpretation of Prof. Ranavalla clearly.

Dr. Malini Dias has given an interpretation that compulsory service for the monasteries at that time mentioned in these Vaharala inscriptions. But it is somewhat controversial because Buddhist monks also offered vaharalas and according to the Vinaya rules Buddhist monks cannot be slaves in any kind of fields. So Dr. Dias’s view is questionable.

Prof. Anura Manatunga also given an interpretation as “not the freeing of slaves employed at a monastery but freeing from the bondage of worldly life and monk at a Buddhist establishment”. As a Buddhist monk freeing from all kinds of slavery has no means of freeing again by making *Vaharala* inscriptions. So his explanation is doubtful. Prof. Valpola Rahula Thero admits Prof. Paranavitana’s explanation.

Anyhow all those scholars tried to give their explanations by using literary and material structures. Finally Prof. Sirimal Ranavalla’s explanation can be proved without any hesitation by literary and material evidences.

Furthermore, according to our investigations the minimum expenditure of a vaharala is hundred Kahapanas. Most of the Vaharala inscriptions mentioned which was caused to be cut of spending hundred kahapanas and persuade us to think that the normal masses also are capable of spending such amount of money. The financial situation of that period is better because the people of all kinds of sectors in the society offered Vaharalas.

Another matter of these inscriptions is the literary factor. Those Vaharala inscriptions which can be found in all parts of the island persuade us to think that normal masses of the country caused to cut Vaharalas proved that they had enough knowledge about reading and writing. That means their literacy level is very high. The paleographical evidences also prove their high literacy.

Conclusion

Vaharala means monastery tickets which were given by the devotees at that time. The masses of the country in those three centuries had better knowledge of language and the method of establishing an inscription on stone surfaces. People had enough money to spend their day to day life including meritorious activities.

Keywords: inscriptions, monasteries, slaves, meals tickets

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