

## **CELEBRATION OF STŪPAS IN SANSKRIT INSCRIPTIONS IN SRI LANKA**

Ven. Dr. Kanumuldeniye Chandasoma <sup>1</sup>

Ven. Galwewe Wimalakhanti <sup>2</sup>

### **Introduction**

The word Stūpa or Caitya is very popular in Asian region. Sir Monier Williams has rendered various meanings on these words. In Sri Lanka, it is easy to find numerous examples on Stūpas stated in Pāli and early Sinhala texts. A very few people investigates evidences from Sanskrit language. Sanskrit is also a religious language in early Sri Lanka. The main purpose here is to examine how Sanskrit inscriptions in Sri Lanka provide evidences to investigate the subject of Stūpa sin ancient Sri Lanka. A number of Sanskrit inscriptions have been composed in Sri Lanka and they can be categorized in many ways. Among them some inscriptions deal with Buddhism.

### **Methodology**

Two Sanskrit inscriptions are mainly considered for this research namely,

- Tiriyāy Rock Inscription.
- Kuccavēli Rock Inscription.

In addition, Pāli and Sinhala literature could be examined where necessary.

### **Discussion**

At first Tiriyāy Rock Inscription is considered. The village called Tiriyāy is situated 29 miles away from Trincomali and wherefrom a small hill can be seen from one mile. This small hill is named as Kandasāmimalai whereupon the remains of a Buddhist shrine, specially a Round Relic House (Vatadāgā) and the said inscription can be seen. The Tiriyāyinscription is

---

<sup>1</sup> Senior Lecturer, Department of Languages, Bhikṣu University of Sri Lanka.

<sup>2</sup> Lecturer, Department of Social Sciences and Comparative Studies, Bhikṣu University of Sri Lanka.

supposed to have been composed in the end half of seventh century or the beginning half of the Eighth century AD. Except the final line of the Inscription, others are totally 11 verses. The last line of this inscription is 'abhāvassavbhāvassarvadharmah' - All Dharmas are transitory'.

The inscription in Sanskrit is important. It states a Stūpa called Girikandi was erected by a group of merchants. And the traditional assumption is that bretheren-Trapuśya and Bhalluka who offered the first Dāna to Buddha constructed this Stūpa. Therefore, it can be believed that the Stūpa was constructed during the life time of Buddha. If the fact that the said two merchants have constructed the Stūpa is accepted as true it is the first Stūpa in Sri Lanka built. But this assumption is controversial on account of many reasons. In Pūjāvali, composed by Buddhaputra Thera, chief incumbent of Mayurapāda Pirivena in Danbadeniya period (1220-1283 AD), Buddha's hair relic has been deposited in this Stūpa. Even in the account of Pūjāvalī, the author has mentioned very significant details of the Stūpa. Moreover the word *Girihandu* in Sinhala and *Girikandika* in Sanskrit it is very similitude. As S. Paranavitana reveals the word *Hirihanduis* paraphrased as *Girihañdu-vehera* in the work *Visuddhimārga-sannaya* of Parākramabāhu II. Therefore it is better to assume that the Stūpa at Girikanda is most ancient in Sri Lanka.

The components of the Stūpa are also important to realize the ancient monastic style and its locations. Primarily a Round Relic House (*vataḍāgā*) around the Stūpa was put up in about 8<sup>th</sup> century AD. And a compound of the Stūpa has been put up just below by 3 feet. Outside the compound a wall has been erected with 10 feet and 3 inches. Furthermore, a moonstone, a pair of guard stones and balustrades at the entrance and the flight of steps leading to Stūpa were constructed.

Again Girikandika Stūpa is noteworthy for having tree kinds of sacred Nobles like the Lord Buddha, Avalōkitesvara and Manjuśrī. The latter two names are prevalent only Mahāyana Buddhist tradition. Thus in Sri Lankan Stūpas Mahāyana concepts as Bōdhisatvas have been described in ancient time. The first verse of the inscription is as follows

1. avirata bhakti yuktaḥṛdayairavadātagunaih  
prathamatarapradānaguṇamūrttibhirēkagurau  
bhagavatisākyaṛājatīlakēsugatesutarām  
adhigatadhātu(ge) jvalatisammukhamēvamunau.

‘Those who have un-finished devotion and pure hearts with unpolluted virtues, have given the first Dāna (alms) to Great Teacher. The Excellent One is the ornament of *Sākya* kings from whom having obtained relics that were deposited in the *Caitya*. It ever shines brilliantly in the presence.

Secondly Kuccavēli Inscription is very significant. Its author’s aspiration is to gain *Buddhahood* by giving release to human kind. So that he made a sketch of *Stūpa* on a rock. This Inscription has been established at Kuccavēli, a small village in 21 miles away from Trincomalee town. Also Kuccavēli is very close to a village, called Kaddukkulam. On a rock-stone in the coast of sea, an area of about four feet square has been divided into 16 parts and in one division of which a *Stūpa* has been carved. The Inscription which is of 8 lines (two verses) has been inscribed in the left corner of the *Stūpa*. It is believed that the Inscription has been incised between 5 and 8 AD. One verse is as follows,

anēnadhukhamvyapanīyasarvam  
puṇyēnalōkasyasukhamsamagram  
dātumprabhurjanmanijanmanisyām  
sadākṣamāvīkaruṇānvitō’ham.

1. May I be able to liberate all worldly beings from all miseries by these meritorious deeds? May I be able to confer all happiness in each and every birth of Samsāra. May I be kind and patient forever.

It can be believed that this Inscription has been established during a period in which influence of Mahayana tradition has been arising in the country. The writer is willing to be kind for whole world and he wanted to release whole world with the merit that he had earned by sketching a *Caitya* (*Stūpa*) on the rock.

## Conclusion

Two inscriptions in Sanskrit incised in ancient Sri Lanka. Consequently following conclusion can be drawn as

- Mahāyāna Buddhist concepts were prevalent in ancient Sri Lanka.
- Sanskrit was popular among Buddhists.
- GirikandikaStūpa is considered to be the one of the most ancient in Sri Lanka.
- Stūpas were decorated with other shrine-components like Vatadāgā, moon stone, balustrades.
- Avalokiteśvara and other Bōdhisatvas are venerated.
- a variety of Pūjās has been held for worshipping.

**Keywords:** Sanskrit inscriptions, Girikandika, Kuccavēli, Stūpa, Chaitya

## References

- A Sanskrit English Dictionary. (1976) Sir. MonierMonier Williams. MotilalBanarsidas.
- EpigraphiaZeylanica Vol. iii. S.Paranavitana. Kuccavēli Rock Inscription. Oxford University Press. P.158-161
- EpigraphiaZeylanica. Vol. ivp.314-315
- Pūjāvaliya (Sinhala). (1953) Ed. Pt.WēragodaAmaramōli. Rathnākara Book Depot.