

SENARAT PARANAVITANA AS A WRITER OF HISTORICAL FIC- TION IN SANSKRIT

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1. INTRODUCTION

Senarat Paranavitana (1896 - 1972), a renowned epigraphist, archaeologist and art historian since 1926, had earned worldwide professional recognition for his extensive and insightful research. Exceptionally noteworthy are his services as the Archaeological Commissioner of Sri Lanka (1940 - 1956) and Professor of Archaeology of the University of Sri Lanka (1957 - 1965). His long and eventful career as a writer on epigraphy, history, art and literature culminated in the publication of three extraordinary books, which form the subject of this paper. They are:

1. CEYLON AND MALAYSIA, 1966 (CM)
2. THE GREEKS AND THE MAURYAS, 1971 (GM)
3. THE STORY OF SIGIRI, 1972 (SS)

[All three published by the Lake House Investments Limited, Colombo 2, Sri Lanka]

These books not only claimed to be based on data obtained from a vast collection of Sanskrit documents "discovered" in lithic records found in Sri Lanka but also included the "original texts" in the Appendices. A few years before their publication, Paranavitana had announced the "startling discovery" of these "unique documents" in several public talks. Several papers also were subsequently published in prestigious academic journals in Sri Lanka and abroad.

In these he explained how, in **June 1964**, he accidentally came across a number of historical documents in Sanskrit, engraved between lines in Sri Lankan inscriptions. He called them interlinear inscriptions and described the 'discovery' as follows:

In June 1964, I undertook the examination of the slab-inscription found in the Abhayagiri-vihāra....., of which a very fragmentary reading has been published in Article 19 of the first volume of the *Epigraphia Zeylanica*. ... While subjecting the record to an intense scrutiny, I noticed that the indistinctness of the original writing on this slab has been caused not only by the weathering that stone had undergone but also by the presence of subsequent writing in very minute characters shallowly incised in between and over the lines of the record for which the stone had been prepared.

Closer examination revealed that these interlinear scribblings are in the script of the twelfth or thirteenth century, others show the writing that was in vogue in the fifteenth century. The scribblings of later date have been executed on those of earlier periods. This process has been repeated several times, and at first sight this writing appears as a jumble of crisscross lines scratched on the stone with no purpose. Intense observation enabled me to recognize the forms of letters here and there, and the writing from one period became distinguishable from that of another by the difference in the size of letters and their form as well as by the depths to which they have been incised.

After a few days of struggling, it was possible to decipher a few words here and there. These established that this later writing, incised on the Sinhalese inscription of the tenth century, was in the Sanskrit language. Persistent efforts continued for weeks resulted in the decipherment of a continuous passage which revealed that these later palimpsests - as we may call them - give accounts of historical events.

The discovery of these interlinear writings of a later date on this slab was followed by the examination of other inscribed slabs which were originally meant for Sinhalese records of the ninth to fifteenth centuries. A document incised on one stone has been repeated on several others. Due to this, the gaps in the recording of a document on one stone could be filled in with the version recorded on another. It was thus possible to decipher some documents in full. (GM pp. 5-6)

The first such document which Paranavitana claims to have discovered, deciphered and collated is a beautiful poem of 24 verses, two in the ornate Śārdūlavikrīḍita and Upajāti meters and the rest in śloka. It was allegedly entitled "*Sundarīvr̥ttānta*" (The Story of Sundarī).

Over a relatively brief period of six and a half years from June 1964 to January 1971, he had put together for publication a baffling volume of prose documents in Sanskrit, which he claimed were incised between lines and all over as many as 33 Sinhala inscriptions, located in various parts of the Island. (Listed in GM p. 127 and SS. P. v-vi). They are as follows:-

- (i) In CM are found three appendices of two printed pages (21x 13cm) each:
1. The story of Sundarī (All in verse except for four lines in prose)
 2. Successors of Mahinda IV (In prose with two verses at the beginning and end)
 3. An account of Kulottuṅga (Entirely in prose)

(ii) In GM, published within seven years of the "startling discovery", is to be found a comprehensive text in Sanskrit prose, which Parnavitana presents as the *Yavanarājyavṛttānta* (The Story of the Greek Kingdom). This extremely well organized document is a comprehensive book of twenty - three chapters running in print to 45 pages (24x18cm).

(iii) SS, published in the course of the following year, gives a similar continuous and comprehensive text dealing with King Dhātusena and his two sons Maudgalyāyana and Kāśyapa. In thirteen chapters and two appendices it runs to 127 typed pages (24x18cm).

II IDENTIFICATION AND DESCRIPTION OF THE TEXTS IN SANSKRIT

Parnavitana gives vivid accounts of how these texts happened to be found in different versions and how it was possible for him with careful scrutiny to collate a set of continuous correct, coherent and comprehensible documents. The sheer volume of the material he avowedly examined is indeed astounding. Even the edited- down versions which he has published at the end of each of these three books after cleaning up the texts of repetitions and errors are stupendous.

According to Parnavitana, these texts collated from many hundred lines of 'interlinear inscriptions' either contained lengthy excerpts from or references to Sanskrit treatises on the history of the ancient world. These "treatises" are introduced by him with the following bibliographical data:-

Paramparāpustaka by a Sthavira named Bhadra belonging to the spiritual succession Mahā Mahendra - sthavira, (written during the reign of Vikramabāhu (1111 - 1132), son of Śrī Vijayabāhu); the author is said to be a disciple of the Head of the Sangha of Śrī Vijaya and a student of the Abbot of Abhayagiri monastery of Anurādhapura

Māgharājyavṛttānta - a text preserved in the archives of Śrī Vijaya until obtained from there and caused to be incised on rock in Sri Lanka by Parākramabāhu VI

Sundarīvṛttānta, written and incised at the same time as the Abhayagiri Inscription of Mahinda IV

Suvarṇapuravaṃśa, compiled in Śrī Vijaya during the reign of Mahāsena of Srī Lanka in 777 of the Buddhist era and enlarged and brought uptodate in the eleventh century by Mānābharaṇa, son of Samaravijayottuṅga of Śrī Vijaya

Rajavaṃśapustaka by Mahā-Buddharakṣita of Abhayagiri fraternity Anurādhapura (written from the 24th year of the reign of Mahāsenā to the 3rd of that of Srī Meghavarṇa), based on an earlier Sinhala version; said to belong to the Abhayagiri fraternity and hence condemned by the Mahāvihāra monks (GM p.8)

Yavanarājyaṅgīyavṛttānta by Buddhapriya (father Sinhala and mother Malay and proficient in Greek, Persian and Arabic), written in the twelfth century mainly based on the *Rajavaṃśapustaka* and supplemented with information from books, merchants and envoys and incised on stone during the reign of Māgha

Śilālekhaṇa - saṅgraha, by Sumaṅgalācārya, a compilation of Sri Lankan inscriptions available in the reign of Parākramabāhu VI

Śilālekhaṇa - saṅgraha by Śivaśarmā-paṇḍita, a corresponding collection of Indian inscriptions consulted by Sumaṅgalācārya

Siṃhagiri-vistara by Buddhamitra alias Ānanda-sthavira of Suvaṇṇapura in the reign of Parākramabāhu VI

Siḥgirivitarā, guide book on Sīgiriya whose account of the rock was translated by Ānanda-sthavira and included in *Siṃhagiri - vistara*.

Paranavitana also claimed that these records had vital information culled from the following works, which, though lost now, were once in the libraries of Abhayagiri monastery in Anurādhapura and the archives and the royal library of Suvaṇṇapura (Palembang in Sumatra, Indonesia), the capital of Śrī Vijaya empire:

Mugalansirita and Ambaheraṇa - salamevan- sirita in Sinhala, "discovered" in the library of the Mahārājā of Suvaṇṇapura

The ancient Rājāvali (extinct in Sri Lanka even by the reign of Parākramabāhu VII but found only in Suvaṇṇapura)

Equally interesting from a literary point of view is that these "interlinear inscriptions" were said to contain opinions on several matters attributed to Garuḍācārya (= Guruḷugomi, the author of *Amāvatura* and *Dharmapradīpikā*) who is reputed to have read the Brāhmī inscriptions of Aśoka. Also referred to are scholarly pronouncements by an Alexander alias Rumi-vāṇija. According to Paranavitana, scholars at the time of Parākramabāhu VI agreed that Rumi-vāṇija (i.e. Roman merchant) was the *nom-de-plume* of Buddhapriya. (GM p.11)

With such bibliographical and critical comments and observations, Paranavitana had dressed up his texts to be real. It is not surprising, therefore, that there are serious scholars like Wimal Balagalle who refer to these texts for valid historical data. Hence the need for a thorough re-examination.

III NAGGING DOUBT ON AUTHENTICITY

There is ample evidence that Sanskrit has, for millennia, been an integral part of the intellectual heritage of Sri Lanka. Its use in monastic and scholarly circles is borne out by epigraphical and literary records. Yet, the volume of Sanskrit writing in the Island, as attested by extant literature, is quite meagre in comparison to what is found in Pāli and Sinhala. As such, Paranavitana's self-proclaimed discovery of such substantial texts did generate as much interest as scepticism. The first reaction of those who read them in Sanskrit has been that it sounds too good to be true.

A massive discovery, which, if authentic, would have brought Sri Lanka the same high degree of prestige and attention in the scholarly world as that of the Rosetta Stone or the Dead Sea Scrolls has been shrouded in doubt. The scepticism results from six significant factors: namely, space, time, methodology, replication, content and assumptions:-

1. SPACE: The total rock surface in thirty - three sites where these texts are said to be incised in several versions is grossly inadequate to accommodate even the voluminous conflation which Paranavitana has published, unless, of course, they were incised on rock in about the same letter point used in print (i.e. font size 10-12).

On the Jetavana Sanskrit Inscription which is engraved on a rock slab of 4' 4" by 3' 3" he claims to have deciphered as many as two hundred lines of "interlinear inscriptions" (CM p. 44). That would average to four lines per inch or 6 mm. per line. The densest of the documents he claims to have examined had eight lines compressed into five inches. (CM p. 30) Even if the letters were of the size that were found in the graffiti of the Sīgiriya Mirror Wall, a single version of Paranavitana's 'finds' would call for a surface of 500 square feet or 50 square meters.

The multiple copies, he speaks of, would thus demand a rock surface of several thousand square feet or hundreds of square metres in the thirty-three Sinhala inscriptions where these documents are alleged to be found interlinearly.

The sheer absence of such space for this mass of writing creates the first and most serious doubt on the authenticity of Paranavitana's claim.

2. TIME: Paranavitana claims that the first document was accidentally "discovered" in June 1964. ("It was a strange experience, on a quiet night in June 1964, to read the names of these leaders of Greek thought

in a Sanskrit passage scribbled on a stone pillar bearing an inscription in the Sinhala script of ninth century" - GM p. i). By 11 October and 4 November, learned discourses on the contents of a significant volume of these "recently discovered historical documents" are delivered at Peradeniya and Colombo.

He also claimed that "most of the passages from *Yavanarājyavṛttānta*....and the account of Dhimitra based on the *Paramparāpustaka*" were read "while he was Professor of Archaeology at the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya" (GM p. vi), that is before the end of 1965. He describes the nature of the task he had undertaken in very clear terms:

Hundreds of hours of concentrated attention have been devoted to the reading of these documents. The discrimination of these documents from writings incised earlier as well as later in the same place as these was not an easy task. This arduous labour and that of preparing the documents for publication, were undertaken and carried out under many difficulties. (GM p.i)

In 1966, two chapters were written in CM, based on three texts. By December 1969, the reading of documents pertaining to Greeks had been completed (Ibid.). By 1970, the impressive text of the *Yavanarājyavṛttānta* was sent to the press. In January 1971, Paranavitana fell ill and was hospitalized. But by that time the 128 page text included in SS was ready to be handed over to the publisher. The book itself was published in 1972.

The reading of several parallel texts, collating them for variant readings and editing, extracting relevant texts for publication, preparing coherent confections, having them typewritten and proof - read and finally type- set and approved for printing are daunting tasks even in the case of legible palm leaf manuscript. But a prodigious task made far more complex due to the unusual character of these Sanskrit texts, as claimed by Paranavitana himself, would have called for a much longer span of time. On his own admission, he had to struggle "for two weeks with what at first appeared to be a hopeless task" to decipher the twenty-four stanzas of *Sundaīvṛttānta*.

Even if Paranavitana devoted religiously eight hours each day to this task alone during the 80 months between June 1964 and January 1971, he could not have accomplished what he claims he had done. His own record when he was younger and not saddled with either teaching or statutory

presence at meetings and functions belies its feasibility. A much more straight forward and less complicated task like deciphering, translating and annotating 685 Sigiri Graffiti (roughly 1400 lines in Sinhala verse) took him considerably more time. In his own words,

It was in 1928, the present writer examined these documents for the first time.... When he first undertook the study of those graffiti, the writer would have congratulated himself if he had succeeded in deciphering only a hundred of these verses. It took him above five years to achieve this result, and even then he was not quite satisfied with the texts. By 1937 he had gained enough confidence in the results of his study to publish something of them. (Sigiri Graffiti pp. ix - xii)

The two volumes of Sigiri Graffiti were published in 1956, that is after 28 years from commencement of interest or 20 years after he gained enough confidence in his study.

3. **METHODOLOGY:** Paranavitana the epigraphist has scrupulously adhered to the prevailing scientific norms of textual and historical criticism in presenting the text of inscriptions deciphered by him. Consistently were used ordinary brackets () to show doubtful texts and square brackets [] to mark tentative readings. Damaged and illegible parts of inscriptions were clearly indicated with dots. Explanatory notes and punctuations were added to facilitate reading. In all texts of inscriptions published in his books as well in periodicals like the *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, *University of Ceylon Review* and the reports of the *Archaeological Survey*, these norms had been scrupulously observed without exception. But the mass of Sanskrit texts, which, if authentic, would have added unprecedented lustre to his career were presented with absolutely no textual criticism. They appear as subjectively determined confluents of several variant readings. They are presented as perfectly continuous documents with numbered chapters!

What is significant is that during this very period, he, with Charles Godakumbura, was preparing for publication by the *Sāhitya Maṇḍalaya* a critical edition of the Sanskrit poem *Jānakīharaṇa* and in this work his standards of textual criticism were impeccable.

Even as the three short appendices of CM appeared, Ranaweera Guanwardhana (R. A. L. H. Gunawardhana) drew attention to this lapse. (*UCR - University of Ceylon Review* - xxv 1/2 pp. 1- 64). But that did not

deter Paranavitana from continuing to publish the rest of the documents also as settled texts without an iota of doubt. Thus deliberately and quite unconscionably, fellow professional epigraphists have been allowed no opportunity to verify his readings and consequently his rendering and interpretation.

4. REPLICATION: The touchstone of any scientific discovery is the possibility of its replication by fellow scientists. It is true that Paranavitana gives extensive information on the rock surfaces where he "discovered" his interlinear inscriptions. He has published samples of the estampages with such hints as "Writing of different periods running horizontally, vertically and diagonally are intermingled", "Sanskrit Text in lines slanting downward from the left", "Text.... Starting at cross on left written in horizontal lines as well as those running diagonally upward. The first ending at cross on right side" (SS Plates I- IV).

No epigraphist has yet succeeded in seeing what Paranavitana had seen, leave aside deciphering any inscriptions or verifying the accuracy of Paranavitana's work.

Ranaweera Gunawardhana in 1967 subjected the same estampages of Abhayagiriya and Bolana slab - inscriptions as utilized by Paranavitana and drew a perfect blank (UCR xxv 1/2). K. Indrapala (1967), S. Kiribamune (1970) and P. E. E. Fernando (1976) have similarly declared that the posited interlinear inscriptions were invisible. D. P. M. Weerakkody referring to these scholars says "Considering their long experience and outstanding achievements in epigraphical studies, their conclusion cannot be taken lightly" (AC - Ancient Ceylon - 6, 1986 p. 259).

I have myself used the currently available enlarging and enhancing facilities for subjecting a document for visual examination and failed to see anything even remotely resembling the texts which Paranavitana has claimed that he could decipher with unflinching accuracy and certainty.

5. CONTENT: Even as the speeches of October and November 1964 were being delivered and their texts published, the contents of Paranavitana's new 'finds' appeared spurious. What he published in CM gave the impression of a *deus ex machina* to extricate him from the difficulties he was encountering in inventing a "Malaysian period of Sri Lankan history". His theory that Kalinga mentioned in Sri Lankan chronicles was none other than Malaysia had been subject to widespread criticism since it was first enunciated in 1960. The so-called interlinear inscriptions now provided all the textual evidence he needed to meet his critics. But the primary weakness in this technique - assuming that it was deliberately so designed - was that

the rich detailed information that they were said to contain was not corroborated by any other source, epigraphical, literary or legendary. Even more significantly, such information contradicted whatever was known on related events and persons from available sources.

6. ASSUMPTIONS: To assign any historical validity to the contents of these texts one had to make several assumptions for which no *prima facie* justification could be established from known facts:

i. Śrī Vijaya Empire had a longer history (i.e. from at least the third century to fifteenth century AC) than is attested by available evidence, which dates it from the seventh to the thirteenth century. A similar longevity is claimed for the presence of Greeks in South and South - east Asia and the pursuit of classical Greek and Latin scholarship in Suvarṇapura and Sri Lanka.

ii Suvarṇapura, as known from a single reference in a Nepali Buddhist manuscript in a caption to a painting of Lokanāthas, was Palembang, the capital of Śrī Vijaya and it was a flourishing centre of learning where scholars proficient in Greek, Persian and Arabic pursued a critical study of history and civilization of Greece, India and Sri Lanka. Its archives and royal library had documents long lost elsewhere and lost works on Sri Lanka had to be obtained from them. In the fifteenth century, even Toṭagamuvē Rāhula went to Suvarṇapura to study Sanskrit in a pavilion named *Sarasvatīmaṇḍapa*.

iii. Suvarṇapura scholars alone knew the true course of history of these countries and wherever the information in Sri Lankan chronicles differed from such knowledge, the Sri Lankan documents were the ones to be discarded as incorrect. The relative merits of the Mahāvamsa and the Suvarṇapuravamsa were discussed in the reign of Parākramābahu I at Polonnaruwa and the report of this discussion engraved on rock.

iv. The history of Sri Lanka begins not with Vijaya but with Muṇḍa Śīva (=Muṭaśīva), the son of Siṃhala, a contemporary of Alexander the Great. From the kingdom of Muṇḍas on the Malabar coast of South India, Muṇḍa Śīva conquered not only Tāmrparṇi but also the kingdoms of Cola and Āndhra (or Pāṇḍya) and established the empire of Tāmrparṇi in the reign of Bindusāra. Muṇḍa Śīva's son was Puṇḍraka Abhaya (= Paṇḍukābhaya) and his son was Tiśya, who too exercised

imperial power over the Cola and Pāṇḍya kingdoms. Buddhism was introduced in the reign of his brother Uttiya and not at the time of Devānampiyatissa as is the prevailing tradition.

v. On the western coast of Peninsular India, between Malabar and Konkan, there existed a kingdom called Puṇḍra founded by Siṃhala. It maintained its relations with Sri Lanka even as late as the fifth century. Dhātusena began his royal career there.

vi. Dhātusena and not Kāśyapa is the builder of Sigiriya. Christianity - and that too of doctrine of Nicenes - was introduced in the reign of Dhātusena by a missionary bearing the unlikely name of Māga Brāhmaṇa of Paramabhuvana. The "correct" history of Sigiriya was written in a Sinhala book called *Sihigiri - vitara* and was found in the library of the Mahārājā of Suvarṇapura.

All these are totally in disagreement with what could be gleaned and reconstructed of the history of Indian and Sri Lankan civilization. With no corroborative evidence whatsoever other than Paranavitana's assertion that he saw and deciphered these elusive interlinear inscriptions, one cannot expect anyone to accept any of these assumptions even as working hypotheses.

IV EXAMINATION OF PARANAVITANA'S GREEK AND LATIN REFERENCES

Hitherto the most comprehensive analysis of the contents of Paranavitana's last three books has been done by D. P. M. Weerakkody in his article "Classical references in the Interlinear Inscriptions of Sri Lanka" (AC 6, 1986 pp. 259 - 274). The following of his incisive comments are noteworthy:

- It is curious that all the published documents maintain an unorthodox "Suvarṇapura" view of history.

- One reason why we question the authenticity of Paranavitana's document is the incredible amount of learning and familiarity with foreign languages displayed by their supposed authors.

- If, as Paranavitana says, the language, literature and philosophy of the Greeks and the Romans were studied in Sri Lanka in those days, it is strange that their influence should be restricted to interlinear inscriptions Even less is it likely that Greek and Latin were studied in the 12th or the 15th century, either in Sri Lanka or Suvarṇapura.

- It is also extremely questionable whether, before the dawn of modern archaeology, there were any students of, or treatises on, epigraphy in India or Sri Lanka as maintained by Parnavitana.

- What appears most remarkable about these writers and their informants is that, not only are they endowed with prodigious learning, but in some particulars they have even anticipated by many centuries the discoveries of modern research and the opinions expressed by scholars in recent times.

These remarks of Weerakkody, it must be noted, are based on what Parnavitana's analyses in English of the contents of so-called interlinear inscriptions. He had not provided a full translation of the voluminous texts he claims to have "discovered". In these analyses, Parnavitana uses them just as any modern researcher would use documents in libraries or archives and quotes in translation only selected passages that contribute to the reconstruction of a given event in history.

The Sanskrit texts themselves remain to be examined. Yet, ample doubt has been created not only on the reliability of the contents as sources of history but moreso on the basic claim of Parnavitana that (1) such texts exist, (2) they were "discovered" in the way he claims and (3) so exhaustively studied and interpreted within the time - frame he has indicated.

V HOAX OR HALLUCINATION?

in 1967, Ranaweera (R. A. L. H.) Gunawardhana commented on methodological inadequacies relating to Parnavitana's treatment of interlinear inscriptions in UCR (referred to above) and in 1972 the same article was reproduced in Sinhala translation in the Special Volume of *Samskr̥ti*, dedicated to the memory of Parnavitana. Gunawardhana was thorough in his analysis of what little that was already published or referred to in public discourses. He presented a series of arguments to raise doubts on the authenticity of the data which Parnavitana asserted were in these texts. He was, nevertheless, cautious not to question the elder colleagues's bona fides. On the contrary, he welcomed Parnavitana's approach as contributing to the liberalization of historians from their India - centred outlook in dealing with ancient and medieval periods. One could understand the dilemma of Gunawardhana. Parnavitana's prestige as a scholar was at its highest. Many of the contemporary researchers were indebted to him in many ways. Besides, there was a small but influential coterie of supporters who equated (and quite surprisingly still do equate) the "interlinear inscriptions" to the proverbial "King's new clothes", that is, "If you do not see them, you are either incompetent or prejudiced!"

Writing in 1986 with all of the publications of Paranavitana in hand, Weerakkody did not mince words. Referring to the fact that these documents anticipated much of current knowledge on philology, epigraphy and numismatics and curiously provided textual support to Paranavitana's own theories, he concluded that one is "left with the conviction that these theories were read back into **fabricated documents** for which great antiquity and learned authorship are claimed." (AC 6 p. 269). Again, in listing anachronisms and gaffs in the transliteration and pronunciation of Greek and Latin names and assignment of antiquity to terminology of proven recent origin, he calls them "impossibilities which can only be the result of oversight on the part of a **modern fabricator**" (Ibid.). Further, in discussing the critical notes on grammar and orthography, Weerakkody remarks, "It is more likely that so-called critical notes were invented to excuse in anticipation any bad grammar that might be pointed out in the Sanskrit text which, as we have demonstrated, can only be *a consummate concoction*" (Ibid. p. 273). Finally he says, "*we are forced to dismiss them as works of fiction which do not deserve a place among historical evidence*" (Ibid.).

Weerakkody assumes that Paranavitana perpetrated a hoax. There is an element in his personality which suggests that he was capable of it. His rarely concealed cynicism found expression in sarcasm which he used against his critics and rivals with devastating results. He would walk into an official meeting with a guffaw laughter inquiring whether the "Overseer of National Bridal Chambers" and his "Overseer of Mangoes" were present ridiculing in the process the designations "*Kautukāgāra Adhyakṣaka*" and "*Sahakāra Adyakṣaka*" in Sinhala for the Director of National Museums and Assistant Director. Few could rival Paranavitana in speaking with tongue in cheek with a straight face. His puckish humour specially in public addresses was a weapon he used mercilessly against anyone who disagreed with him.

Knowing this personal trait, one could expect him to resort to a practical joke to have a hearty laugh at the expense of charlatans dabbling in subjects which he pursued. Well known are his guided tours to gullible national V. I. PP. For example, each has been shown a different place in a monument at Anuradhapura as the exact spot (?!) where Fa - Hian was seated when he saw a pilgrim carrying a Chinese fan, which made him homesick! Paranavitana loved to weave fanciful tales on the possible significance of a monument or some element thereof and derived some mischievous pleasure when he was taken seriously. But those closest to him could discern the twinkle in his eye which accompanied such tales. One such was Venerable Welivitiyē Sorata Nāyaka Thera. I shall return to their relationship shortly.

Though a hoax, therefore, cannot be totally ruled out, it may be advisable to consider other explanations. Referring to his discovery of names of Greek philosophers, Aristotle and Plato, in the "interlinear inscription" on the

Mādilla Inscription as "a strange experience on a quiet night in June 1964", he says *"It took some time to convince myself that I was not the victim of some sort of hallucination"* (GM p. i). Parnavitana does not tell us what he actually did to ascertain that he was not subject to hallucination.

There were two courses of action open to him. He could have sought confirmation from one or more competent epigraphists that the "interlinear texts" are real and not a pigment of his imagination. Or else, he could have consulted medical opinion. Here again, we have no information to go on. But a clue may be found in a discussion which Parnavitana and I had in my office in the Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs just before he retired from the Department of Archaeology at the end of 1956.

We talked of a renowned archaeologist for whom I had a special admiration. It was Parnavitana who told me that the last works of this prolific writer of some of the most authoritative and scientific publications on several important finds were pure fiction". He went further and said that he had resorted to Latin to write what he could not possibly present in English. I recall vividly Parnavitana's explanation of his change of behaviour: "He had gone crazy. Somebody should have known it and not published all that muck", he said. Parnavitana was genuinely distressed as this great archeologist was his role model. If, within a few years after this discussion, Parnavitana was seriously concerned that he was a victim of some sort of hallucination, he would have sought professional help, knowing so well the fate of this archaeologist, if it was really true.

What evidence we can glean from his writings is to the contrary. His was a typical case of denial as one could infer from such statements as the following:

He "has had the good fortune to discover the scepticism which greeted the announcement of their existence is quite understandable" (GM p. 5).

Parākramabāhu VI and his advisers "adopted this unusual procedure in order to convey some idea of their contents to some persons who might arise in the future, able to acquire the information thus conveyed and put it to the proper use" (GM p. 11).

"The writing appears, at first sight, to be a confusing mass of curved lines, but after some concentrated observation, the eye gets used to discriminating the strokes of the original writing from those which are of a later date, words become legible here and there, and with the aid of the context, the identity of the damaged and obliterated letters can be easily conjectured." (CM p.30).

"Thus it will be seen that the reading of these documents calls for the utmost patience and concentration, as well as thorough acquaintance with the language in which they are written" (SS p. vi).

"These texts ... like any other source material for study of history, have to be critically examined by competent and unprejudiced scholars. In fact, many criticisms of these documents, which do not mince words, and replies to them (adequate in most cases), have been indited side by side with the documents" (CM p. vi).

What these statements convey is Paranavitana's conviction that (1) he was a fortunate discoverer, (2) scepticism was understandable, (3) one had to be a competent and unprejudiced scholar to criticize what he had found and (4) the documents in themselves contain the answers to their criticisms. Whatever he had done during "some time" to convince himself that "he was not the victim of some sort of hallucination", such effort had not included either seeking medical assistance to have this question answers clinically or verifying critically the accuracy of his findings by consulting competent epigraphists. In neither case had he sought any external aid.

The more one subjects to stringent scrutiny the last three publications along with those papers and speeches on the same themes, the more is one convinced that he was not in touch with reality. Compared to his well argued writings up to about 1962, these show jumbled thinking, unsound reasoning and flawed judgment. They also reflect a verbosity which contrast sharply with his laconic and pointed statements in earlier works.

If the whole thing was meant to be, or began as, a practical joke destined to ridicule numerous charlatans who lionized him, it went too far. If the hoax of "interlinear inscriptions" was contrived to draw attention to his beautiful Sanskrit poem, the *Sundarivṛttānta*, - perfectly in consonance with Paranavitana's acute sense of humour, satire and sarcasm - what followed in somewhat drab and convoluted prose lacks freshness and creative vigour. An obsession that he had been chosen to rewrite the history had taken the better of him.

VI WHY IN SANSKRIT?

In 1957 - 58, when venerable Weliviṭṭiyē Sorata Nāyaka Thera offered to present to the then Minister of Education, Wijayananda Dahanayake, a detailed concept paper on legislation required to raise Vidyodaya and Vidyālaṅkāra Pirivenas to University status, he put together a small committee of persons with whom he had had long intellectual association. The

seniormost among them was Senarat Paranavitana of whom Sorata Nāyaka Thera had much information to offer. In their youth, they were both students of the Vidyāvardhana Pirivena of Ranwalagoda. Their friendship continued in adult life and was enriched by two mutually complementary interests: Paranavitana was an admirer of classical Sanskrit literature and was eager to master the language to the point of being able to write poetry in it. Sorata Nāyaka Thera was keenly interested in epigraphy, specially in relation to the evolution of the Sinhala language.

Each was a master of what the other was keen to learn. They met often either to read each other's Sanskrit compositions or to exchange ideas on the identification and interpretation of rare words encountered in inscriptions. Endowed with identical personalities as regards scholarly seriousness coupled with an extraordinary sense of humour, they reveled in an age-old game among writers of Sanskrit verse. It was called *samasyāpūraṇa* and consisted of adding the last two lines to quatrains which the other had begun. It was Sorata Nāyaka Thera's assessment that Paranavitana was always the more imaginative and he made his lines more humorous by parodying better known verses. The Nayaka Thera could recall some of these compositions and I had been present at meetings where the two of them refreshed their memories relating to each other's efforts in Sanskrit versification. It is a pity that I had no idea whatsoever that a few years later Paranavitana's excellent command of Sanskrit was going to create a veritable trap for the student of epigraphy and history. If I did, I would have kept a record of this phase of their collaboration.

But in 1966 on the 8th of September at Kurunegala, I referred to his aiding interest in Sanskrit poetry when, I, as the Vice - President of the Sri Lanka Sahitya Mandalaya (Academy of Letters), presented Senarat Paranavitana along with several others for conferment of the Academy's Fellowships; Incidentally this was before the publication of CM with the *Sundarīvṛttānta* in verse in its Appendix I. While I was away in USA and France, the editors of the Senarat Paranavitana Volume of *Samskr̥ti* used my statement as the opening article. In this I had said,

Paranavitana who was specially fascinated by Sanskrit literature had memorized the poems of Kālidasa, Kumāradāsa and others. He was therefore adept in entertaining his friends by repeating Sanskrit verses as were relevant to any given situation. This intense command of the Sanskrit language, which Paranavitana had acquired, becomes amply manifest in his work as an epigraphist in his analytical commentaries on many Sanskrit inscriptions as well as in the critical edition of *Jānakīharāṇa* which he prepared with Charles Godakumbura at a time he had scarcely any leisure from his work in the Department of Archaeology. (*Samskr̥ti* p. 2)

If Paranavitana was emulating his erstwhile role model who was said to have used Latin for his less - than - professional writings, the choice of Sanskrit was only natural. It was a language in which he was intensely interested and his ability to write it was phenomenal.

VII INITIAL EXPERIMENT WITH SANSKRIT POETRY

It is both interesting and curious that the very first "discoveries" made in "interlinear inscriptions" were in Sanskrit verse. The entire process of parodying, completing missing lines (*samasyāpūrāṇa*) and interpolation is evident from Preface to CM written on 7 February 1966. The portion thereof quoted below gives a clear indication of how the pastime in which Sorata Thera and Paranavitana engaged themselves had been continued by the latter wittingly or otherwise to help him to find textual (or rather, epigraphical) support for his historical theories. Emphasized with italics are the statements which reveal Paranavitana's line of argument:

Parākramabāhu VI has also recorded some startling facts about the Jaiya inscription of Candrabhānu. *He gives the Sanskrit stanza as it was on the stone in his time. "The reading tallies closely with that given by Coedes, except for a few minor details."*

As the scholar who has dealt with this inscription in the fifteenth century has pointed out, the Sanskrit of the second and third padas of this stanza is very inaccurate, in contrast to that of lines one and four, which is on the whole satisfactory. The stanza, as now found on the stone, does not give a coherent meaning. The Sanskrit of the prose passage is even more barbarous than that of the second and third padas of the verse. Neither the verse nor the prose passage states the purpose for which the record was set up. This unsatisfactory state of the inscription, we are told, is due to the reason that we do not now have, on the stone, the record as it was originally set up. A wilful attempt was made to erase the inscription, it is said, by none other than Candrabhānu himself. After the failure of his second expedition to Ceylon, he returned to Sri Vijaya through Tāmbraṅga. He was bitter against the Sinhalese for having invited Sundara Pāṇḍya to take the field against him. He therefore ordered to destroy all documents which referred to his connection with the Ceylon royal house, and this record was one of them. After the record had been almost totally erased, the abbot of the monastery intervened and begged him to stop the vandalism. But the damage had already been done. Subsequently, the inscription has been engraved on the stone

again, but the text was prepared by a person who had a very meagre knowledge of Sanskrit, and no idea of the contents of the original record.

A copy of the original inscription had fortunately been preserved among the archives of Śrī Vijaya, and a copy of this came to the hands of Parākramabāhu. He had this copy indited on a number of stones, together with the inscription as it was found in his time and the information briefly summarized above. The original text of the stanza, as recorded on a slab at Anurādhapura) (Ep. Zey. Vol. I, Plate IO), is as follows:

According to this text, Candrabhānu, the son of King Māgha was established as the Lord of Tāmbraḷiṅga with independent authority over Pāṭaliputra and Vartmasetu as well. It has been pointed out in Chapter VIII that Ligor was known in the eighteenth century as Pāṭaliputra (p. 137). 'Vartma-setu' means the 'Causeway on the Route,' and was probably applied to a region at the narrow neck of the Malay Peninsula, where an overland route connecting the sea-routes between India and China existed (see pp. 106 f.). This same region appears to be indicated by the name of 'Varttma-dvayantara', occurring in one of the two benedictory verses (*yugmaka*), coming at the end of the treaty between Gajabāhu II and Parākramabāhu I. In the copy of this treaty contained in the Saṅgamu-vihāra inscription (Ep. Zey., Vol. IV, pp. 106f), only the first two lines and two or three words of the fourth line of the first stanza are preserved. But the full text of this inscription, found in the library of Maṅḍalagiri-vihāra, has been indited on a pillar at Mādilla near Rambha - vihāra in the Hambantōṭa District, and a number of other stones, by order of Parākramabāhu VI. The text of the two verses

Here, Gajabāhu II is stated to have been a scion of the Kāliṅgakula of Varttma-dvayantara. He was taken to be of the Kāliṅga family, as his mother Sundaramahādevī was a Kalinga princess (Cūlavamsa, Chap. 59, vv. 46 ff). And this Kāliṅga family is qualified here as that of Varttma-dvayantara, i.e. the region between the two trade routes. The name Devotunumaṇḍa, as pointed out in Chapter VI (Pl. 105f). is the equivalent of Varttma-dvayantara.

Parākramabāhu VI had collected epigraphical material referring to Ceylon from places further afield than Jaiya. After the writer has finished reading the final proofs of this book, it came to him as a surprise, while studying an estampage of the Rambāva Slab (Ep. Zey., Vol. II, Plate 12) to find mention of the text of a stanza in an inscription from a place named Ratubaka in Yavadvīpa. On extricating this stanza from the other writings in which it is embedded, it was found that it is the same as the one which he has discussed in Chapter X (pp. 183ff.). Unlike the text given by Dr.

Casparis, the stanza he has recovered in this manner is complete, It shows that the restoration by Dr. Casparis of the last word in the third pada as *yatīnām* is quite justified. Moreover, the second line is given in full, it reads *prathitaguṇa- samākhyādyakaracaryyāpadaiḥ*. The first two lines of the stanza thus given us, in parenthesis, or rather by means of an easily solved riddle, the name of the teacher who trained the Sinhalese monks, for whom the Abhayagiri-vihāra in Java was built. The name is given as 'ākara' preceded by the word which has the same connotation as the quality for which Padmapāṇi is well known, That quality, it is hardly necessary to say, is Karuṇā. The name of the teacher, therefore, was Karuṇākara.

A verse given on the same slab as coming from another inscription at Ratubaka reads:

Samarottuṅga - bhūpena śailendra-kula-ketunā
Kāritarit Siṃhalārāmam yavadvīpasya maṇḍanam

Translation: By King Samarottuṅga, the forehead ornament of the Śailendra family, has been caused to be constructed the Siṃhalārāma, the adornment of Yavadvīpa (Java).

This is preceded by four other verses in the Anuṣṭubh metre, which trace the descent of Samarottuṅga from the Sinhalese king Mānavarmman, through Sanaphulla, the founder of the Śilāhāra dynasty of India.

Many more instances can be given of the confirmation, by direct statements in these documents, of the inferences that have been drawn from circumstantial evidence contained in the sources that have been hitherto available. There is much that can be otherwise stated about these documents also. (CM pp. vii-ix Chapter and page references to CM)

The two legible lines and a fragment of the fourth line of Sanskrit verse in Saṅgamu-vihāra inscription was evidently a welcome opportunity for Paranavitana to try his hand at a piece of historical *samasyāpūraṇa*. He composed six lines in the same Vasantatilakā metre to fit his theory that Gajabāhu II was from Kāliṅga of Malaysia. Now he needed "epigraphical evidence" to show that Candrabhānu whom he brought into his new addition was from the same place. Conveniently available was George Coedes' reading of the Jaiya Inscription. But it was not usable as it was and some changes were called for. This had been already anticipated for Paranavitana

by Parākramabāhu VI in an "interlinear inscription" with the correct reading of the Jaiya inscription !!! Once this ingenious ploy was tried out on an all too gullible audience with success beyond all expectations, the sky was the limit for Parānavitana. He was never more to be without supportive "textual evidence" for any of his theories. And there was no aspect of philological or religious studies relating to his professional discipline of epigraphist/archaeologist in which he had no novel theory.

VII SUNDARĪVṚTTĀNTA - THE ONLY POEM IN 'INTERLINEAR INSCRIPTIONS'

The *Sundarīvṛttānta*, likewise, was a more elaborate and particularly ambitious exercise in *samasyāpūraṇa*. The Slab Inscription No. I of Mahinda IV at Abhayagiriya (erroneously called Jetavanārāma in Ep. Zey. Vol. I, pp. 213 ff) ends with a passage in Sanskrit as testified to by the twenty-four scattered syllables, deciphered by D. M. de Z Wickremasinghe, in the last five lines. They are inadequate to determine whether the passage was in verse or prose. It, however, began with the words "Mano-vāk". Apparently this inspired Parānavitana to compose a poem of twenty-four verses which he claims was "recovered from oblivion" (CM p. 30) It begins in *śloka* metre: *Manovākkāyaraukṣyeṇa khaṇḍitaratidambarāḥ* (By roughness of mind, word and action, smashed the pride of enemy kings). Parānavitana, of course sees no discrepancy in that a poem which begins as a part of the inscription proper in identical script size as the rest of text should continue to be inscribed interlinearly.

Parānavitana further describes *Sundarīvṛttānta* as "a unique one, not only for its language, which possesses considerable literary beauty, but on account of its contents also. (Ibid.) He refers to the second verse in the Upajāti metre as "a beautiful verse" and it certainly is.

Specially noteworthy is the *Rūpakālāṅkāra* (metaphor) couched in the last two lines in the polished diction of the Sanskrit Kāvya or ornate poetry: "who, by the royal splendour which rejoiced the whole earth, was a very orb of the moon surrounded by a circle of light". Parānavitana elaborates how the third verse was a *Śleṣālāṅkāra* or "double entendre" with a lyrical reference to wind and the sun and an implicit but "eloquent" recounting of a princely "romance":

(1) The beloved of the Malaya Wind (Vasanta Śrī, the splendour of Spring) being touched by the early rays of the Sun, remained brilliant in Suvarṇapura, and becomes resplendent having arrived in Lanka.

- (2) The desired of the Malayānīla having been held by the youthful hand of Sūrya(nārāyaṇa), remained in distress in Suvarṇapūra, but reigns after having come to Ceylon. (CM pp. 30, 34)

Paranavitana explains that this "fact" had to be so couched in mystery as it would have otherwise been considered *lese majeste* !!!

The way the literary merits of the poem is repeatedly underscored, one cannot but feel that Paranavitana was "savouring" on the success of his own composition. Why did he not continue in the same strain? There are just two more verses at the beginning and end of the second "document" on the successors of Mahinda IV and this second verse draws attention through alliteration and a play on the word "rāja".

After that, Paranavitana appears to have settled down to Sanskrit prose. The voluminous "*yavanarājyavṛttānta*" (GM) and "*Siṃhagiri - vistara*" (SS) are entirely in somewhat insipid and matter-of-fact Sanskrit prose. He must have found that it was not so easy to invent poems to provide "textual support" to his many theories on the Mauryas and the Greeks, Sīgiriya and beginnings of Christianity in Sri Lanka and such other aspects of Sri Lankan history. Could it be that he was racing against time?

IX PROSE COMPOSITIONS: STYLE AND CONTENTS

The four pages of prose in the Appendices of CM are written in a lucid narrative style. Being devoted to two straight forward themes pertaining to Mahinda IV and Kulottuṅga, each of them presents in rapid sequence a series of events and as such do not distract the reader with literary embellishments or convoluted arguments. With the clever use of the present and past participles, the gerund or indeclinable participle, the locative absolute and appropriate compounds (*samāsa*), he would write long sentences which are reminiscent of the prose of Bāṇa in Harṣacarita rather than in Kādambārī.

If one is familiar with the names of places and people, the language by itself presents no difficulty in comprehension.

This simple prose style persists for the most part in his longer works, the *Yavanarājyavṛttānta* and the *Siṃhagirivistara* but with a difference. In content and form of presentation, these works resemble Paranavitana's many articles in learned Journals as well as his Chapters in the University of Ceylon History of Ceylon. They are not quick-flowing narrations but heavy scholarly essays with arguments and counter-arguments and references to literary and other authority. For example, the discussion on Greek Philosophy in comparison with classical schools of Hindu Philosophy is deliberately

made to sound profound with an in-depth comparative knowledge which is never known to have existed prior to recent times. In addition, the very style is the hallmark of Parānavitana the scholar and that alone would establish that these works are nothing but his own compositions.

A discerning reader familiar with Parānavitana's articles in say the Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (JCBRAS) will no doubt see recognize in more than one place his typical method of marshaling data and arguments: e.g. GM p.131 and SS p. 4.

But a significant departure from the rigour of his English articles is to be found in repetitions. The phrase "*Rājavarṣapustakam tu viśvasanīyam*", asserting that the *Rājavarṣapustaka* should be believed, is repeated four times in the course of seven lines; in fact the paragraph ends with this phrase repeated thrice. Either Parānavitana wanted the repetitions to be passed off as a clerical error on the part of the engraver of the "interlinear inscription" or it was done in a "tongue-in-cheek" fashion for fun.

It is evident that he did have fun inventing all the stories he put into these Sanskrit works. Nothing makes it clearer than the nonsensical genealogies he constructed for various kings: e. g. **Candragupta** (GM p.144); **Candragupta**, again (GM p. 145); **Dhātusena** (SS p.1).

Although GM and SS are said to contain documents written at different times in different places and by different persons of varying scholarship, the style and linguistic characteristics of all the prose texts are so uniform as to establish common authorship. It is very clear that Parānavitana made no effort to feign diversity of style as a means of enhancing the authenticity which he claimed for these texts. This uniformity becomes more evident when he proceeds from analysis to narration.

There is however, less of narration in GM. SS, on the contrary, is less analytical and critical as the theme presents more opportunity for description and narration. An example of a passage portraying dramatic action deals with the conversion of King Mugalan to Christianity by the evangelist Maga-Brāhmaṇa (SS p. 79).

The whole chapter XIII of SS is an elegantly written "Tourist Guide" for Sīgiriya. In structure and style, it resembles a direct translation of a typical practical guide in a modern language. One even gets the impression that the English version in Chapter XIV of the English text was the original. Not a single figure of speech - not even a simile or a metaphor - has been added though many a place described would have tempted a classical Sanskrit writer to make a few digressions into poetic expression.

In content all these Sanskrit works of Paranavitana contain fanciful theories, historically uncorroborated versions of otherwise well-documented events and palpably anachronistic references and comparisons. The knowledge base with which the analytical and critical presentations are developed was never known to have existed at the time to which the "interlinear inscriptions" or these texts are attributed. As already pointed out by Weerakkody, practically all the theories proffered by Paranavitana in the course of his own illustrious career are anticipated and supported. Bhadra, Buddhapriya, Buddhamitra alias Ānanda, Mahābuddharakṣita, Sumaṅgalācārya and even Rumavāṇija appear to be only different *noms-de-plume* for Paranavitana.

If there is one overriding observation, it is that Paranavitana has either not attempted purposely or has miserably failed to hide his hand in what he elaborately presented as the singularly unique discovery of a life time of archaeological and epigraphical research.

X CONCLUSION

Without getting embroiled in an abstruse discussion pertaining to his mental and physical health and any medication he was on, one may not be able to examine in full the state of the mind of Paranavitana, when he embarked on, and laboriously completed, this massive task of producing a substantial amount of Sanskrit writing during the closing year of his life. All the literary evidence of language and style and the modernity of the contents and the underlying knowledge base compels one to come to the conclusion that every word presented as found on "interlinear inscriptions" is written by none other than Paranavitana himself. As Venerable Sorata would have said if he lived to read these works, Paranavitana did achieve through them his lifelong ambition of being a master of Sanskrit writing.

If what spurred him was the gripping temptation to prove into still unexplored chasms in the history of humanity or, even more narrowly those in the history of Sri Lanka, one can understand the compulsiveness of his effort. Ancient history, in general, and that of Sri Lanka, in particular, are powerful stimuli to trigger creative imagination. The Sri Lankan historical tradition says so much of the landmark events of the country's history but leaves at the same time so much unsaid. The more one delves into this tradition, the more one is tempted to fill in the gaps, interpret actions and attitudes and trace cross-currents of influences and impacts. I, myself, have found enormous pleasure and intellectual satisfaction in doing so - way back in the late 1950s when, with several collaborators, the Mahāvamsa was

dramatized for a series of Radio Ceylon broadcasts and later when imaginary speeches of kings and historical personages were first written for *Samskṛti* and later published in book form as "*Voices from Ancient Ceylon*" (1990).

The problem is that, at some point in the pursuit of this goal of filling gaps in history, so characteristically seen in the initial phase of doing *samasyāpūraṇa* on the fragmentary verses in the inscriptions or parodying the Ratubaka inscription, Parnavitana stepped beyond the thin line which separates reality from the imaginary. But that should not detract from the significance of the product of the last seven or eight years of incessant effort. He has left behind two major works of historical fiction and that too in classical Sanskrit. This is an impressive accomplishment. As in the case of all historical fiction, there is a kernel of fact and this kernel gets embellished and sharply focussed as the fertile imagination of the novelist gives life to it. If full translations, rather than his analytical essays, were available, those not reading Sanskrit could have appreciated the creativity of the author.

Parnavitana should have presented these works as fiction in Sanskrit. If he had done so, he could have been acclaimed as having adumbrated by over a decade Umberto Eco. This Italian novelist presented his "*The name of the Rose*" (1980), with detailed academic literary and bibliographical analyses so reminiscent of Parnavitana, as the French translation of a mysterious Latin book, which was handed over to him by a certain Abee Vallet in 1968. What a fascinating frame for a work going into the complexities of the Christian church and its many monastic orders with mushrooming heresies and rival sects in the closing century of the Dark Ages. The difference, unfortunately, is that Umberto Eco crafted his most absorbing novel consciously and deliberately as a work of art, whereas Parnavitana laboured as though he was sharing with the world his "unique startling discovery".

Washington D.C.,

20 January 1994.