Jhaya **and** *Bariya*: **A Case in the Early Brāhmī Inscriptions of Sri Lanka**

Raj Somadeva[1]
Laleendra Amarasinghe[1]
Anusha Wanninayake[1]
Dinesh Devage[1]

Abstract

Jhaya and *bariya* are two terms in early *Brāhmī* inscriptions in Sri Lanka that had been used to denote the next of kin of privileged persons. Its prestigious usage suggests that the duality was not a hasty expression. Present variation does not correspond to any geographical or linguistic anomaly notably the differences held in the syntactic morphology of the contemporary language. In the perspective of social semiotics, it could be argued that the regular occurrence of this inconsistency may signify a sensible disparity corresponding to the contemporary social fabric. Theory of social semiotics considered as the 'codes' of language and communication are formed by social processes shaped by relations of power. Therefore giving a meaning is a social practice. This essay attempts to investigate the probable social circumstances which resulted in this duality of lexicon in the early *Brāhmī* inscriptions in Sri Lanka.

Key words: social semiotics, historical linguistics, social archaeology

Introduction

Out of more than three thousand lithic inscriptions dated to the late first millennium BCE found in Sri Lanka, several examples consist of two specific lexical terms used to express the idea of 'next of kin' of the privileged individuals of the contemporary society. Those two terms are *jhaya* and *bariya* which elucidate the meaning of wifehood. Paranavitana (1970), who initially translated those two terms seems less concerned about their visible lexical disparity and the etymology was assigned to the Sanskrit language, which has an

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1. Postgraduate Institute of Archaeology, University of Kelaniya.

Indo-European linguistic origin, without any academic uncertainty. He further contemplated that the term *jhaya* was derived from Skt: *jāyā* which gives the meaning of 'wife' or 'consort'. The term *bariya* was assigned to a derivation from Skt: *bhāryā* which provides several equal meanings including 'one to be supported'; 'one to be nourished'; 'one to be maintained'; 'one who is dependent for a livelihood on another' and ' a servant' which more or less share almost parallel connotations. But the incompatibility of the meanings of those two terms as Paranavitana has contended upon, could easily be noticed. If we seek for an insight from the structuralist notion of language; *signifier* and the *signified*, this incompatibility comes to its surface much explicitly. In the former, the word *jāyā* as signifier directly correspond to what it signified; 'wife' or 'consort', or otherwise a female who married someone, elaborating the desired meaning of the 'next of kinship' or the 'close subordination'. But in the latter case the Paranavitana's linguistic inclination does not offer such a dearest inclination. For instance, the ideas of 'one to be supported'; 'one to be nourished'; 'one to be maintained' and so forth indicate a sense of enslavement and subjugation when it is applied to denote a certain female. Friendliness and enslavement are opposite notions that could hardly be united into a single meaning.

The disparity shown by the interpretation of those two terms would have occurred due to Paranavitana's academic interest that has overwhelmingly depended on the belief of the Indo-European affiliation with the language which appears in the early Brāhmī inscriptions in Sri Lanka. It seems that this scholarly bias pushed his intellectual horizon into a fog thus ignoring the microscopic lexical inconsistency traceable in those two terms. We will examine this problem later in this essay.

The structure of the argument presented here consists of three interconnected conceptual planes. In the first plane, it attempts to describe the theoretical perspective of the presentation. It follows a review of the archaeological findings that relate to simulate the social aspects of the proto and early historic period in Sri Lanka which is one of the less investigated time periods in the country's history. Subsequently it attempts to reexamine the existing definitions of those two terms against the archaeological findings through a social semiotic perspective which is discussed and presented at the outset of this section .

2. Language beyond codes

Traditionally language is considered as a coded system of signs which emulate certain meanings. Recent discussions held in structural linguistics identifies language with its receptiveness towards reproducing the broader social matrix it situates that furthering the boundaries of the scope of the conventional linguistic definitions (eg. Thibault 1991; Kress and van Leeuwen 2001). Words are not static and immovable entities of their own right. Such should disentangle from the 'trivial identification with the idea of coded equivalence and identity' (Eco 1986: 1). Hjelmslev (1943) argues the signification of words as signs of a language is merely an explanation of its external outlook but hardly corresponds to their communication intent. He states:

> ... The definition of a language as a sign system has thus shown itself, on closer analysis, to be unsatisfactory. It concerns only the external functions of a language, its relation to the nonlinguistic factors that surround it, but not its proper, internal functions (*ibid*: 47).

As Thibault (1991:37) argues, linguistic forms manifest conscious attempt**s** to establish a system of contrasting "points of view" rather than being just simply coded representations. This would be more explicit if one could view it through the idea of semiosis. Semiosis is the process which makes signs that generate meanings. It is also a process of a triadic and has a cyclic flow. It is triadic because a production of a meaningful word requires three counterparts i.e. (i) sign; (ii) object and (iii) interpretant (Eco 1986).

Our basic argument developed in this essay is connected with the theoretical notion of any meaningful word situated in a given language is a social product. It replicates the way that society perceive the objects about which its members intend to communicate. The replication involves with social ideology that reproduces the means of the production of that society (*vide* Althusser 1984). Viewing through such generalizations, there is a possibility to develop a hypothesis that describes the semantic connotations registered in the early inscriptions as ideological expressions *per se*. If So, two linguistic terms used to denote a single phenomenon within a single facet of time and space, as shown in the present case, should invariably have two different 'points of view' cultivated upon a certain social theme which corresponds to the 'internal functions' of its wider social matrix through the process of semiosis.

We assume that this linguistic generalization facilitates us to look at the existing semantic polarity present between the two terms *jhaya* and *bariya* through a high resolution social semiotic perspective with special reference to its historical context. This semantic polarity even shows a greater degree of hermeneutic contradiction. One could elaborate on this semantic polarity; for instance, as once mentioned, the meaning and the etymology proposed to the term *jhaya* in the language of the early Brāhmī inscriptions (< Skt. *jāyā*) stand for the meaning of 'the wifehood' (Williams 1964: 419). If we agree with Paranavitana's interpretation of the second word *bariya* since it is derived from Skt. *bhāryā*, then it gives several parallel meanings as mentioned above which provide an opposite implication to the former. In such a circumstance, one could argue that this semantic polarity might have manifested two streams of thought which were completely dissimilar to each other.

The meaning assigned to the Sanskrit word *bhāryā* in the classical Indian literature is an ideological reminiscence of the brahmanical perspective developed on womanhood. Some teachings of this tradition does not allow any independence for women either inside the house or outside the house. A stanza in *Manusmṛti* (the law of Manu) says:

"…Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence."[1] (Buhler 1886: ix:3).

This notion has immensely degraded the true spirit of womanhood as a mother, wife and sister and in turn, portrays the absolute dominance of males.

There is no point in arguing since the rulers and the elite in ancient Sri Lanka had consciously used the term *bhāryā* to designate their wives in the public declarations such as inscriptions, in such a demeaning sense. One such inscription recovered from Kossavakanda in the Anuradhapura district mentions about the consort of the great King Gāmini Abhaya as *'ramaṇi bariya'* which means 'the charming/delighted consort' of his own (Paranavitana 1945: 59; 1970: 193). It is very much clear that the communicative objective of the usage of the epithet of *'ramaṇi'* (< Skt. *ramya* = 'delight') was to express the author's dearest affiliation and the affectionate attitude towards his consort. What is explicit in the lexical composition in Kossavakanda inscription is the contradiction between the inherent meaning of the word *bariya* and the context of its occurrence.

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[1] *balye pitṛrvashe tishṭeth-pānigrāhasya yauvane putrānāṃ bhartari pretenabhajeth strī svatantratām* (*Mn* v:148); *pitā rakshati kaumare bhartā rakshati yauvane rakshanti sthāvire putrāḥ na strī svatantraymarhati* (*Mn* ix:3)

Pietroski and Crain (2005) argue, that a language communicates knowledge rooted in the cognitive resources used when people conceptualize their experiences. In that sense, the context and the usage of the word *bariya* in the above inscription and other similar instances is theoretically legible because it radiates the personal attitude of the respective husbands upon their better halves. In spite of that, the hermeneutic appendage of the word is completely distorted. We argued here that this was neither *false-et-dubia* in the usage of the word, nor a misconception associated with the interpretation of the term but that it may have entirely relied on the etymological fallacy advocated in the interpretation of the word *bariya*.

The alternative explanation proposed in this essay to further discuss this lexical uncertainty is twofold. The first is to reject Paranavitana's etymological interpretation dominated by the Indo-European origin. The second is to suggest another root of derivation that bridges the existing gap between the *SIGNIFIER* (*bariya*) and *SIGNIFIED (wife)*.

3. Language before 600 BCE ?

The idea of Indo-European linguistic origins of the old Sinhala language was propagated by several authorities (*vide* De Alwis 1867; Childers 1875; Hettiarachchi 1962; .Jayatilleke 1941; Geiger 1937; Siddhartha 1935; *cf.* Paranavitana 1956; for a recent reference *vide*. Coperaheva 2009). Their primary unit of analysis was the language used in the early Brāhmī inscriptions of the country. Direct affiliation shown by the vocabulary with two middle Indian dialects: Sanskrit and Pāli languages, have been elucidated and explained as mother languages (*mātṛ-bhāṣā*) of old Sinhala. This linguistic hypothesis was contextualized within the space defined by the historical chronicles in relation to the colonization of the island by a team of north Indian migrants said to have occurred in the 600 BCE (MV xii:3-6.).

The above assumption postulated by the early pioneers including Paranavitana is true and show a greater degree of observational precision. From a lexico-statistical point of view, the majority of words appearing in the early and late *Brāhmī* inscriptions are derived either from Sanskrit or Pāli languages. It is noted that irrespective of the dominance of the words that have Indo-European affiliations, some words remained devoid of any semantic association with the said tradition (Table I). The origin of such words has not yet been explained and thus, probing that question may open a new window to look at what was the linguistic background in which the

Sinhala Prākrit language had formed during the mid first millennium BCE.

The presence of etymologically undefined words which had

Word	Provenance	District	Reference
kudali	Ritigala-Marakkalaulpota	Anuradhapura	*ASCAR* 1893:13
Kapali	Nisolena	Kurunagala	Paranavitana 1970:950
Kurajhini	Hennanegala	Polonnaruva	Paranavitana 1970:406
Kujha	Virandagoda	Puttalam	*ASCAR* 1911/12:69-71; *UCR* VIII:118
Gala	Eriyava, Malvatta	Kurunagala, Ampara	Paranavitana 1970:1225
Kutahate	Dimbulagala	Polonnaruva	*CALR* III: 78
Kera	Pilimalena	Kegalle	*ASCAR* 1952:41
Kotaya	———do———	——do—-	——do——
Gilika	Ganekanda vihara	Matale	Paranavitana 1970:979
Gura	Situlpavuva, Mandagala	Hambantota	*JRASCB* NS II:129, ASCAR 1934: 21
Cani	Handagala vihara	Anuradhapura	*CHJ* II: 221-4
Calala	Brahmanayagama	Anuradhapura	*UCR* VIII:124
Cali	Maha Aagamuva	Anuradhapura	*JRASCB*, NS,V:74
Calu	Rottakulama	Batticaloa	*JRASCB* NS V:74
Chahanila	Kusalankanda	Batticaloa	*JRASCB* NS V:145
Cirece	Dambulla	Matale	Paranavitana 1970:847
Culu	Mandagala	Hambantota	*ASCAR* 1934:21
Coriki	Iccilampattai	Trincomalee	*ASCAR* 1954:36
Tarapaya	Ganekanda vihara	Kurunegala	*JRASCB* NS V:71
Jhavaya	Kudumbigala	Ampara	*JRASCB* NS, V:147
Nokapi	Hennanegala	Batticaloa	Paranavitana 1970:406
Nela	Delvita	Kurunegala	*CJSG* II:216
Yavavavika	Sasseruva	Anuradhapura	*JRASCB* NS, V: 150-53
Patakana	Handagala vihara	Anuradhapura	Paranavitana 1970: 127

Table I. A table showing some words in the Sinhala Prākrit language as depicted in the early Brāhmī inscriptions. It is difficult to trace their affiliation with Indo-European linguistic ancestry (*cf.* Paranavitana 1970).

ASCAR- Archaeological Survey of Ceyon Annual Report; *CALR- Ceylon Antiquary and Literary Register*; *JRASCB* NS- *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society Ceylon Branch*, New Series; *CHJ- Ceylon Historical Journal*; *UCR-University of Ceylon Review*; *CJSG-Ceylon Journal of Science* Section 'G'.

escaped from the Indo-European linguistic framework could be considered as relict representations of the local dialect which existed in the early phase when the Sinhala Prākrit language was formed. The knowledge of such proto-Sinhala Prākrit local dialect is still a *terra incognita* for historical linguistics as well as to archaeology in Sri Lanka. The inconsistency of such a field of study has prevented the idea of the significance of a possible linguistic interaction between local language and the elements of *lingua franca* in order to become the Sinhala language in to its final form. We are ill-informed about one of the major conceptual inadequacies shown by the scholarly attempts in dealing with the history of the Sinhala language which is the disregard of the influence/inspiration of the local language and the idea of possible linguistic hybridation between those two semantic arrays.

Continuity of the prehistoric occupation in Sri Lanka stemming from the middle Pleistocene epoch has been archaeologically secured. The decline of that is seen after 1800 BCE and it is said that it was superseded by a wave of cultural traits diffused from mainland India around 900 BCE (Deraniyagala 1992).

A behavioral leap of the prehistoric hunter-gatherers towards increasing utilization of floral resources is confirmed by some of the recent archaeological findings dated to the 4th millennium BCE (Somadeva 2015). Selection of edible floral resources, periodic patterns of exploitation and processing of plant materials require team work and is also essential to disseminate that knowledge through generations. To accomplish such goals, it needs to introduce a firm communicative device at least consisting of a particular vocabulary. One could strongly suggest that there was a prevalence of a set of definitive words associated with different edible plant species, among the prehistoric communities, commonly operated at least on a regional basis. Subsequently such words could have been amalgamated with the dialect that later became dominant among the literate class. Assimilation of some selected words from the local vocabulary with the dominant language is a frequent experience of historical linguists. Such an assimilation could be visible especially in the loan words and the names of persons, of clan/tribes, localities, rivers and mountains (*eg.* Witzel 2003).

We have very scanty evidence to trace prehistoric languages not only in Sri Lanka but also in the wider South Asian region as well as the other parts of the world. However, to a certain extent, historical

linguists were optimistic and were able to make some propositions to show the possibility of maintaining such a discussion. For instance, the spread of Austro-Asiatic language phylum westward from its Chinese homeland is a sensible case (*vide*, Higham 2002; Benjamin 1976; Blust 1996; Bhattacharya 1975). The Proto-Munda language, which is an archaic dialect that had widely scattered in the northeastern India is considered as a remnant of the Austro-Asiatic linguistic family. Some scholars show that it had entered the Indian mainland before the Vedic Sanskrit language took its final form. It is believed that the Proto-Munda was used by the indigenous tribal groups in India who inhabited the hilly jungles in the region covered by modern Orissa and evidence is available even to show their spread down to some patchy regions in Andhra Pradesh (Kuiper 1948). The Väddā language in Sri Lanka, before its creolization took place (Dharmadasa 1974), which is also considered as a language unit in some way contributed to the linguistic arena in South Asia before the Indo-European linguistic influence became dominant. Recent studies carried on mtd DNA suggest that the biological inheritance of the Väddā people is closer to the genetic markers of the groups occupied in the eastern part than the rest of the world (Hawkey 2002). The original Väddā language is a 'Rosetta Stone' of representing the morphology of the local dialects unless it was amalgamated with Sinhala and Tamil languages since Vadda people had interacted with the civilized society. To elaborate this statement, a little, but significant example could be cited here. The word denoting the meaning of 'stone' in contemporary Sinhala language is *'gala'*.(plural. *'gal'*). This word has no derivative root from Sanskrit or Pāli languages. The oldest occurrence of this word appeared in the Kirinda rock inscription dated to the first century CE (Nicholas 1952). The inscription includes a phrase '' *…megala vihare Naga uvara[je na]ma budha sarana gate*'' (the Viceroy named Naga, went to the Buddha for refuge in the monastery situated on the rock). Lewis has interviewed five of Väddā individuals (*Kaḷuvā, Demaṭā, Davuṭā, Kandā* and *Millalānā* by name) of *Nambudana varige* of Daṁbāna he met in Alutnuvara in 1922. During that meeting, Lewis was able to hear several words uttered by them (Lewis 1935). They also used the word *'gala'* (*gal rakkiya* = axe, *gala* = stone) to denote the same meaning expressed both in the Kirinda rock inscription and the modern Sinhala language. It is interesting to note that in the Munda language, the word *'gala'* appears to indicate the same

meaning (Witzel 1999). In Tamil the derivation presents as *'kal'*. The word *gala* is an archaic form of the Munda word and preserved through ages up to the present. Paranavitana's attempt to relate the word 'gala' with Sanskrit origin (Skt. *śilā* > P. *silā* > SP. *sala* > *gala*) seems overwhelmingly hypothetical and once again demonstrates his firm belief on the Indo-European linguistic association with the origin of the language in the early inscriptions in Sri Lanka.

The point which could be highlighted here is, the Sinhala Prākrit language, in its early days would have also been inspired by the other substrate languages existed in the wider South Asian region than Sanskrit and Pāli of Indo-European genre. It is important to note that the Peninsular India has a marked diversity of minor languages of Munda substrate; few of them like Sora, Nahali, Mundari and Santali have a deep antiquity than Sanskrit and Pāli. Interactions among those languages on a regional basis at large, could happen through the dispersal of crops and animals and the vocabularies could also diffused along those migratory routes since the Neolithic period (for southern Neolithic, *see* Padayya 1973). Especially the geographic proximity between Sri Lanka and the peninsular India would have been a crucial factor that enhanced such exchanges for a prolonged period uninterruptedly[2].

Etymologically undefined words appearing in the early Brāhmī inscriptions indicated in Table I would have been the derivatives from such native languages which existed in the South Asian region including the local dialect that prevailed in Sri Lanka during the period before the penetration of Indo-Aryan dialects into those areas. An attempt has been made in this essay to propose some possible roots for a few such words but the linguistic affiliation of the majority is *speculumobscurum* until the questions are resolved from an archaeological perspective.

4. Womanhood in history

If we turn back to the theme of this essay; *viz.* the use of two different terms to express a single idea in the early inscriptions in a legitimate manner, it is worth observing the nature of representation of its object signified in our historical tradition i.e., the woman. The

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2. The unequivocal relationship between the initiation of farming and the worldwide language dispersal discusses by Language/farming dispersal theory received a strong academic credibility among both archaeologists and linguistic anthropologists during the recent decades (Renfrew 1992, 2000; Bellwood 1997, 2000, 2001).

only such evidence which surfaces through archaeology could be chronologically ascribed to the protohistoric period in Sri Lanka. The excavation conducted in a limestone cave in Valmītalāva of Wäliya in Haldummulla has revealed some interesting artifacts, perhap̄s the earliest evidence of female representation in the prehistory of the country (*vide* Somadeva 2014). The assemblage of objects excavated include three stone sculptures depicting the parts of a body of woman. The notable characteristic is that in each sculpture the areas of reproductive organs and the features associated with child care have been enhanced graphically. As we are familiar with early farming cultures in the old world, female reproductive organs became the object of symbolic representation for diverse reasons, notably the wish fulfillments associated with child birth. Some of the artifacts recovered from Valmītalāva, including grind stones, pestles and threshing-balls suggest a behavioral regime directly connected with cereal processing. Lack of datable materials in the Valmītalāva cave has constrained the confirmation of chronology of the artifacts yielded. However, the cereal bearing layers of the Luṇugal gē cave in Ilukkum̐bura excavated in 2015 which can be securely dated to 4350 BCE may have a parallel chronological bearing with the Valmītalāvas artifacts. We have no evidence to prove the prevalance of large-scale farming but the beginning of cereal processing is clearly evident. As a response to the gradual transformation from hunting and gathering to increased floral exploitation, the other structural relations of the forages seem to have acquired a new pace of modification. Archaeological evidence suggests that one of the ideological facets of such was the symbolism adopted to femaleness.

The social consensus of making figurative representation in early societies, especially the female figurines and their body-parts have been widely discussed (eg. Ucko 1996; Marcus 1996; Hamilton 1996; Haaland & Haaland 1996; Lesure 2002; Bailey 1996; Tringham & Conkey 1998). Agreement on the relationship between the roles that a woman plays in communities and the presence and use of female imagery with reference to deep, complicated systems of meaning and negotiation within communities where men dominate in public have been emphasized.

Another artifact assemblage excavated from an ancient house-floor unearthed in a village called Uḍa Rañcāmaḍama of the Ratnapura district contained a khol stick (used for a cosmetic purpose), highly abraded ochre stones (red & yellow colored, used for skin coloring or

tattooing) and a single clay bead (a part of a necklace?), probably the remnants of belongings of a woman. It could be hypothesized that, for some reason, whether a ritualistic act or an intention which refers to an idiosyncratic expression on the self, a woman who resided in that dwelling had made an effort to express herself in a symbolic manner. This artifact assemblage radiometrically dated to 1125 BCE suggests that the agency of woman in the contemporary society was firmly distinguished at that time (Somadeva 2014).

A magnificent bead necklace (Somadeva 2011) recovered from the excavation at Ibbankaṭuva cemetery (768-383 BCE) is another complementary evidence that highlights the expression of womanhood during the proto historic period in Sri Lanka. The color composition of the bead arrangement in that necklace together with its tempo in the stylistic lineup of each bead duplicate an intricacy radiating a visual beauty on the one hand and symbolic complexity structurally coupled with the desired meaning on the other hand. The composite essay of beads consisting of locally manufactured varieties and imports of semi-precious stones, especially Carnelian and Onyx etched beads, propose that the user of the necklace was a member of a wealthy group. There is a lack of supportive evidence in the Ibbankaṭuva excavation to reconstruct the social status of the women dressed in such an esthetically high esteemed object. However, the Chieftains (*parumakalu*) mentioned in the early Brāhmī cave inscriptions of the last two centuries of the first millennium BCE found in different parts of the island make a comparable case.

As the epigraphical evidence suggests the female members in the early historic society in Sri Lanka had exercised a marked independency at their disposal. It is a completely different status in comparison with the scenario associated with the subject found in the Vedic literature. In such circumstance**s**, it is in-vein to make an attempt to probe the appropriate meaning of the word *bariya* appearing in our inscriptions, with the Sanskrit word *bhāryā* as Paranavitana has pointed out. No one can make a reasonable argument to justify the use of a term which indicates a second order meaning by the kings and elite to signify their consorts.

Gaining insights from the discussion held above on the potential of having linguistic affiliations between the hunter-gatherers/ foragers in Sri Lanka and the contemporary communities who spoke non Indo-Aryan languages in the geographically accessible areas

of the peninsular India, a viable solution could be proposed to this problem. If we look for an alternative root of derivation to the word *bariya*, a close resemblance can be elucidated from a word in Santali language in the Munda subfamily of Austroasiatic languages.[3] It is the word *bari* which gives the meaning of 'household' and *bariya* for the meaning of 'great' and 'powerful'. In the Munda language, the word *bariya* occurs for an alternative form of the word *behera* which gives a meaning as 'bearer'. All those words mentioned signified a constructive feeling that could be used to denote a woman who take**s** care of the family.

The word *gähäni*[4] appeared in Sigiri graffiti (Paranavitana 1956) is etymologically derived from the Sanskrit word *gṛhaṇi* which signifies the meaning of 'wife, the mistress of a house'. It is rooted to the Skt. word *gṛhin* which means the 'house holder' (Williams 1964: 362). What we want to stress here is that, the words selected to denote wifehood in the ancient languages in South Asia were directly associated with the role she played in the family. The word *bari* in Santali language and the other parallel usages have reiterated this reality. In such circumstances, it is reasonable to propose that the word *bari* had drifted southwards from the eastern part of mainland India in a remote period of history and sustained parallel with the words borrowed from Sanskrit and Pāli by the Sinhala Prākrit dialect around the mid first millennium BCE. It is only a single example of words found in the early Brāhmī inscriptions which shows the morphology of the formative period of the Sinhala language.

It is a requirement to rationalize why the kings and the elite had used the word *bariya* in parallel with the word *jhaya* which bear a similar meaning, especially to resolve the problem in which context had the authors decided to follow this dichotomy? and What are the social factors which persuaded them to differentiate between their usage?.

There is a possibility to argue that the word *bariya* might have been used by the privileged class to denote the wives who had an

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3. *Santali* language is still spoken by around 6.2 million people in India, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal, although most of its speakers live in India, in the States of Jharkhand, Assam, Bihar, Odisha, Tripura and West Bengal.

4. For example, ''... *Sapu-kusum-atini gat may mana dakut samvan - Gähäni-liya tana li beyandihi ran-vanan ature.*'' (The dark-complexioned creeper of a woman, in the midst of the golden-colored ones on the mountain side, who has taken a *sapu* flower in her hand, caused my mind to quiver, when (I) see her. (Paranavitana 1956:142, *v*. 232).

indigenous ancestry. There is evidence to show that, at least partly, there was an ambiguous treatment on the social recognition of females in the ancient society in Sri Lanka. This presumption is based on several complementary observations. Most explicit among them is the female representation in ancient sculptures. Except some of the quasi-mythical divine figurines appearing in paintings and sculptures in a religious context, the iconic depiction of women is comparatively rare in ancient Sri Lankan art. However, a few examples at hand support to distinguish this ambiguity.

For example, the painters of the most popular fifth century female figurines in the Sigiriya frescoes had consciously followed this dichotomy. Golden colored and dark colored figures in these paintings symbolically manifest the intention of the painters demarcating the desired conceptual stand of that dichotomy. The identity of these two types of female depictions has been thoroughly discussed by several scholars (*viz*. Paranavitana 1947, 1950, 1961). Paranavitana's identification of such images with Cloud Damsels (*Mēghalatā*) and lightning Princesses (*Vijjulatā*); the concepts described in classical Sanskrit literature have received a wider acceptance among both academic and popular audience.[5] Paranavitana's interpretation is only valid within his socio-political hypothesis developed on the contemporary royal ideology of divine kinship, but there is no room to lobby the same where similar depiction of that polarity is registered in Sri Lankan art at least once more. For instance the stone relief popularly known as the 'Royal family of King *Duṭṭhagāmiṇi Abhaya*' recovered from the *Ran-masu Uyana* (golden-fish park) area in Anuradhapura could be cited as rare but a bold example. There are two female figures depicted in that relief and one of them is shown as a dwarf figure. Paranavitana has identified that figure as *Asōkamālā*, the consort of prince *Sāliya* -son of the king- said to have been a

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5. Paranvitana argued as: .... *Ālakamandā* being thus conceived as a place with clouds hovering around it. Sigiri, if it is a replica of that paradise, must have had the same characteristics..... The drawing of naturalistic clouds on the rock face would not have impressed the beholder; and , if the clouds had been fully personified, their nature would not have been evident to him at first sight. The master mind that was responsible for the designing of Sigiri therefore made a compromise between these two methods, and showed the clouds half personified and half naturalistically. The dark damsels rising from the clouds thus would represent the Cloud maidens their fair companions are the representations of Lightning which issues forth from the Cloud, and is golden in color (1962:397)

daughter of a craftsman (*kammāradhītā*). He further states that due to this low social rank of her birth, the figure appears in a dwarf form. If Paranavitana's postulation is acceptable, an avenue will open to consider that the ancient sculptors had tended to express some thematic messages by formatting the iconographic elements of the respective personal figures of their artworks.

Summary

The discussion presented in the above text has many more conceptual extensions which we have not attempted to debate here. Especially the duality of treatment of the female in Sri Lankan art and sculpture will be a fresh and interesting topic for a deep academic discourse. However, as we have argued in the present essay, the use of the two terms, i.e. *jhaya* and *bariya* to denote a single phenomenon in our inscriptions was not a *de facto* occurrence but it could be considered as a *praxis* of social semiotics of the contemporary society.

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