

## SOME REFLECTIONS ON PROFESSOR PARANAVITANA'S CONTRIBUTION TO HISTORY

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An archaeologist by profession and training, Professor Paranavitana is a historian only by adoption. He began his career as an epigraphist and naturally became aware of the vast amount of historical material available in the inscriptions found scattered in various parts of the Island. The traditional knowledge of the ancient history of the Island was largely derived from the literary sources, especially the Pali Chronicles. The evidence of the inscriptions often enhanced the value of the Chronicles; there was much supplementary information in them and in a few instances they modified the accounts in the literary sources. Prof. Paranavitana soon found himself immersed in the epigraphical and literary material relating to the ancient history of Ceylon and from about 1924 began to make a steady contribution towards a better understanding of the past. The adoption of history by Prof. Paranavitana was perhaps inevitable especially because very little scientific research was being done on the early history of Ceylon.

It is unreservedly acknowledged that Prof. Paranavitana is a devoted and dedicated research worker. This is amply revealed by the large output of work which is almost staggering. Among the research workers of Ceylon, he outclasses them all as the most prolific writer. His primary interest has been archaeology and in a final appraisal, posterity will remember him for his services in that sphere. However, history writing has been an important sideline in Prof. Paranavitana's career and he has displayed an increasingly absorbing interest in it in recent times. The large variety of evidence in the ancient epigraphs of Ceylon has led this scholar to dabble in a wide range of subjects and it is well-nigh impossible for any serious historian to discuss a topic on either the ancient or medieval history of Ceylon without a reference to Prof. Paranavitana's views, whether he accepts them or not.

The acknowledgement of Prof. Paranavitana as a historian was made in 1957 when he was invited to edit the First Volume of

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the *University History of Ceylon*. His contribution to this work marks an important stage in his career as a historian. The need for a comprehensive work on the history of Ceylon, which could bring together the material scattered in a number of publications was a sorely felt need, and Prof. Paranavitana's handling of this task was, to say the least, extremely praiseworthy. The experience so gained, appears to have inspired him to undertake further investigations. Close on the heels of the *University History of Ceylon* was published his startlingly new interpretation of the problem of the Kaliṅga dynasty where he rejects the traditional view accepted in the *University History of Ceylon*. He has since vehemently defended his position that the Kaliṅga dynasty came from Malaysia, and has recently produced, what he believes is epigraphic evidence in support of his theory.<sup>1</sup>

Prof. Paranavitana has been chiefly interested in the period of Ceylon history from the earliest times to the coming of the Portuguese to the Island. Hardly any aspect of the history of this lengthy period has escaped his attention. In the course of his writings, he has commented on the political history of practically the whole of this period. The numerous articles written by him in the *Epigraphia Zeylanica* Volumes 3 to 5 are full of historical comments relevant to the periods to which the inscriptions published in them belong. An early attempt at a connected history of a selected period of Ceylon history is seen in the *Vākāṭaka Gupta Age*<sup>2</sup> where the history of Ceylon from Vasabha to Moggallāna I (c. 65 - 512 A. D.) is discussed. Of greater significance are his chapters on the political history of the island in the *University History of Ceylon*<sup>3</sup> and the *Concise History of Ceylon*<sup>4</sup>. In them he has covered the period extending from the early Aryan settlements to about 433 A. D. and the period from the beginning of the Dambadeṇi Kingdom (c. 1232 A. D.) to 1505 A. D. Prof. Paranavitana has taken on all the chapters on the cultural history of ancient and medieval Ceylon and this is his major contribution to the *University History of Ceylon*. Here he culls together ideas expressed more elaborately elsewhere, for the cultural history of the island finds very detailed analysis among his writings. Some aspects

<sup>1</sup> *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, Vol. V, Part III, p. 440 ff.  
*Ceylon and Malaysia*, Colombo, 1966.

<sup>2</sup> Ed. R. C. Majumdar and A. S. Altekar, Banaras, 1946.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. I, Pt. I, Bk. 2 chs. 2-5; Part II, Bk. 5, Chs. 1-3.

<sup>4</sup> Chs. 2, 5, 15, 16, & 17.

of the political institutions which existed in the Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva Periods have also engaged his attention. Of particular interest are his views on kingship and its origins in Ceylon.<sup>1</sup>

Social and economic history have not been his *forte*. In fact the chapters on this aspect of history written by him in the *University History of Ceylon* are inadequate, and one misses his usual confidence and exuberance. His interest in the problem of Ceylon and South East Asia dates back to 1932 when he wrote an article on "Religious Intercourse between Ceylon and Siam in the the 13th to the 15th Centuries".<sup>2</sup> In the recent past this aspect of Ceylon History has become his major preoccupation. The relations between Ceylon and Malaysia having been at first dealt with in a number of lengthy articles have now been incorporated in one book, *Ceylon and Malaysia*<sup>3</sup>.

Basically equipped with a good command of Sanskrit, Pali and Sinhalese he displays a great familiarity with the ancient literature of both India and Ceylon. His intimate knowledge of Sinhalese and Pali literature from which he quotes freely has often given him a fresh insight into historical problems otherwise unsolved. He makes ready reference to Sanskrit sources as well and we find him making ample use of information gleaned from the epics and Purāṇas. With the information gathered from a variety of books, Prof. Paranavitana is in a position to marshall numerous arguments in support of a theory, often creating a majestic vision in front of his readers.

Prof. Paranavitana certainly does not lack intellectual courage when he proposes novel interpretations well outside the beaten track. In 1950 he fascinated scholars with his new interpretation of the Sīgiri rock as an abode designed for a god-king.<sup>4</sup> According

<sup>1</sup> "Two Royal titles of the Early Sinhalese and the Origin of Kingship in ancient Ceylon", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (Gt. Britain & Ireland) July 1936.

"Some Aspects of the Divinity of Kings in Ancient India and Ceylon", *Proceedings and Transactions of the All-India Oriental Conference*, 16th Session, University of Lucknow, 1951, Vol. 2, (Select Papers).

<sup>2</sup> *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon Branch)*, (abbreviated *JCBRAS*) Vol. 32, No. 85.

<sup>3</sup> *Ceylon and Malaysia*, Colombo, 1966.

<sup>4</sup> *JCBRAS* (New Series), Vol. 1, 1950, pp. 129-183.

to the traditions incorporated in the *Cūlavamsa*, Sīgiri was built as a fortress city by King Kāśyapa who was apprehensive of his brother, prince Mugalan. There was no reason to doubt this explanation as the shifting of the capital from Anuradhapura, which was easily accessible, to the rock fortress that was Sīgiri and, the remains of walls, moats etc. at Sīgiri seem to indicate that security was a strong motive for the founding of this city. Struck by the well planned nature of the city and its artistic embellishments, Paranavitana does not concede that this was the hastily built retreat of a ruler. Instead he picks on a statement in the *Cūlavamsa* itself that Kāśyapa lived on Sīgiri like the god Kuvera on Alakāmaṇḍa and finds in it an explanation for Sīgiri. With great effort he tries to fit in the architectural features of Sīgiri to descriptions of Alakāmaṇḍa in literary sources. This of course is an extremely ingenious theory which may or may not be accepted.

The identification of the statue near the Potgul Vehera with Parākramabāhu I<sup>1</sup> and the Man and Horse's head at Isurumuṇiya with Parjanya<sup>2</sup> are two more examples of the fresh interpretation of archaeological data. In his historical writings a certain orthodoxy can be seen for some time more. For the most part this orthodoxy is maintained even in his contribution to the *University History of Ceylon* where the reconstruction of history is based mainly on the evidence available. However, one does get a foretaste of the type of historical interpretation and reasoning that is to come later from his chapter on the Aryan Settlements. Here he attempts a fresh interpretation of the known evidence, tracing the early Aryan settlers of Ceylon ultimately to North Western India. With his subsequent Kalinga theory, Prof. Paranavitana enters an entirely new phase of his career as a historian. This has sparked off a great deal of controversy, his most severe critics being Professor Nilankanta Sastri,<sup>3</sup> Dr K. Indrapala<sup>4</sup> and Dr. R. A. L. H. Gunawardana.<sup>5</sup> Prof. Paranavitana's

<sup>1</sup> *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 1952, pp. 109-217.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 1953, pp. 167-190.

<sup>3</sup> 'Ceylon and Sri Vijaya', *JCBRAS* (New Series) Vol. VIII, Pt. I, 1962 pp. 125-140.

<sup>4</sup> *JCBRAS* (New Series) Vol. XI, 1967, pp. 101 - 106.

<sup>5</sup> *Ceylon and Malaysia: A study of Professor Paranavitana's Research on the Relation between the two regions.* Paper read before the Ceylon Studies Seminar, University of Ceylon, March 28th 1969.

approach to this problem and the methods adopted by him to establish his case have caused a great stir among historians. Whether Prof. Paranavitana will be accepted as a scientific historian among scholars will largely depend on the outcome of the test he is being at present subjected to. He once enjoyed a respected position among historians. That he will keep this is not beyond doubt.

It is interesting to see how the transformation from a very cautious researcher to an intrepid theorist took place. In his very early articles, his aims are extremely modest. In them he attempted to make known the epigraphic evidence relating to certain events in Ceylon history, comparing it with the literary material for the purpose of corroboration and elucidation. At best he tries to show the inconsistencies if any between the two sets of evidence. For example, in what is perhaps his earliest historical article on the "Colas and Ceylon"<sup>1</sup>, he makes a very factual evaluation of events, keeping very close to his sources. Attention to detail and an exhaustive ferreting out of the smallest bit of evidence is a noteworthy feature even in the earliest writings of Prof. Paranavitana. As early as 1928, writing on the subject "Mahayanism and Ceylon"<sup>2</sup>, he was indefatigable in collecting whatever evidence he could lay hands on from the sources available to him. Here too what strikes one is how much the writer hugs his sources. There is no attempt to study the problem of Mahayanism against the background of Theravada Buddhism and there certainly is no speculation. In some of his early writings one even misses the critical approach so necessary in the evaluation of evidence for the reconstruction of history. In an article on 'Buddhist Festivals'<sup>3</sup> for instance, Prof. Paranavitana merely makes available to his readers whatever information could be had from the *Mahāvamsa* and a few other literary sources without any attempt to discuss the veracity of such information.

A modest scholar to begin with, Prof. Paranavitana acknowledges the contributions of other scholars in the same field of research. In a somewhat brief discussion on Village Committees in Ceylon<sup>4</sup>, he quotes the views of others giving them due recogni-

<sup>1</sup> *Ceylon Antiquary & Literary Register*, Vol. 10, Pt., 1924, pp. 114-121.

<sup>2</sup> *Ceylon Journal of Science* (Section G) Vol. 2, Pt. 1, 1928, pp. 35-71.

<sup>3</sup> *Buddhist Studies*, ed. B. C. Law, Calcutta, 1931.

<sup>4</sup> *Ceylon Literary Register* (3rd Series,) Vol. 1, No. 2, 1931, pp. 49-58.

tion To quote another example, when in 1933 he comments on the Potgul Vehera statue for the first time<sup>1</sup> he sets out the views of prominent scholars and is himself reluctant to come to a conclusion. This is in great contrast to the confidence with which he sets out his own interpretation of the same subject at a subsequent date.

Constant and painstaking research leads Prof. Paranavitana to break new ground quite early in his career. His articles on 'Matrilineal Descent in the Sinhalese Royal Family'<sup>2</sup>, the 'Origin of the Kalinga Dynasty of Ceylon'<sup>3</sup>, 'The Origin of Kingship in Ceylon'<sup>4</sup> etc. display a freshness of thought and the student of history is ever indebted to him for providing him with a new insight into the problems of the past. What is noteworthy is that in these articles Prof. Paranavitana allows himself to be guided by scientific historical methods. He emerges as a cautious historian when he says at the outset of his article on the 'Origin of Kingship in Ancient Ceylon':

I therefore propose in this paper to pursue this line of study so far as the material available at present allows us to do so. The conclusions at which I have arrived by a study of the available data on this may not in the present state of our knowledge be taken as definitely established<sup>5</sup>.

How different from the very dogmatic statements of later years, where one gets the impression that the last word has been said! In placing before his readers the inscriptional evidence relating to the Kalingas of Ceylon, he lets the evidence lead him to the conclusion that the Kalingas came from India. In the subsequent interpretation of the same evidence, he himself leads the evidence to a novel interpretation.

It is readily accepted that the validity of any historical reconstruction depends largely on the proper handling of the available source material. It is extremely important to investigate Prof. Paranavitana's attitude towards his sources and his handling of them. It is rather unfortunate that he is somewhat inconsistent and tends to change his methods depending on the problem at

<sup>1</sup> *Ceylon Journal of Science* (Section G), Vol. 2, Pt. 3, 1933, pp. 229-240.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 235-240.

<sup>3</sup> *Journal of the Greater India Society*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1926, pp. 57-64.

<sup>4</sup> *JRAS* (Gt. Britain and Ireland), July 1936.,

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 1936, p. 433.

hand. The *Mahāvamsa*, the chief Chronicle of the early history of Ceylon, necessarily comes in for a great deal of attention. He is rather sceptical about the historical value of the early chapters of the *Mahāvamsa*. He says: "It is however a moot point how much of really historical matter there is in this Chronicle before the introduction of Buddhism to Ceylon".<sup>1</sup> He concedes that there is a germ of truth in the Vijaya story as given in the *Mahāvamsa*<sup>2</sup> and is prepared to take the Paṇḍukābhaya story even more seriously. "The general absence of superhuman deeds of valour performed by the hero and the probability of the strategy and tactics deducible therefrom inspire one's confidence"<sup>3</sup>. As for the section dealing with the history of Ceylon from the reign of Devanampiya Tissa onwards, he is inclined to accept as historical the information in the *Mahāvamsa* except where there is evidence to the contrary. Putting forward his views on Sīgiri which do not conform to the *Mahāvamsa* view he takes great pains to explain his position. "It is legitimate to reject such points in the literary evidence on the history of a monument that are contrary to the evidence supplied by the monument itself"<sup>4</sup>. No one would quarrel with this principle of Prof. Paranavitana if he stops there. But he does not. He goes on next to strain the evidence of the monument to almost breaking-point in order to support a fresh interpretation even more fanciful than the one he has rejected.

In the employment of literary evidence for the purpose of historical interpretation, the main weakness one notices in Prof. Paranavitana's work is the indiscriminate use of such evidence. He is happy to draw from any text, without due consideration paid to its date and without testing the reliability or otherwise of that work, as long as it proves his point. Thus some of his arguments are not valid. The fact that his methods are not always scientific is veiled behind a thick profusion of detail which is sometimes difficult to penetrate. To quote a few examples, the *Vāyu Purāna* is cited as a probable source from which the thirteenth century author of the *Hatthavanagallavīhāravamsa* borrowed the idea that the name of Jambudvīpa pradeśa was applicable to Malaysia. His argument is that though the *Vāyu Purāna* is an earlier text, it would have been well known among the scholars of the thirteenth

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 1936, p. 452.

<sup>2</sup> *Concise History of Ceylon*, 1961, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> *JCBRAS* (New Series), Vol. I, p. 170.

and fourteenth centuries<sup>1</sup>. This type of evidence could be produced to prove anything. In an attempt to establish his theories regarding Sīgiri, the Potgul Vehera statue and the Man and Horse's head at Isurumuniya, literary sources of so many types and ages are quoted that one is spent with the effort of concentration and left somewhat bewildered and confused.

The Indian Epics, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* have provided numerous data in support of his theories. This evidence is often used in a very arbitrary fashion. For instance he says:

The general opinion among scholars is that the Epics as we have them now, belong to the period between the third century B. C. and the first century A. D., though certain sections may go back to a date even earlier. The social and religious conditions which they depict, however, might very well hold good for the period of the first Aryan colonisation of Ceylon, about the fifth century B. C. <sup>2</sup>.

With this he proceeds to build up his arguments. This certainly is not a very responsible way of handling source material. The Epic ideas are made to apply to all periods, the usual argument used being that they were popular in Ceylon at most times. In order to identify the 'Man and Horse' near Tiśāvava, he goes to the *Mahābhārata* looking for a reference to such a combination and finds one<sup>3</sup>. Then again the identification of the statue near Potgul Vehera ascribed to the twelfth century A. D. rests largely on the idea of 'rāja dhura' or 'yoke of state' as found in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*<sup>4</sup>. A first reading of the copious arguments set out by Prof. Paranavitana in support of his many theories leave one totally impressed with the ingenuity of it all. One feels the compulsion of reading it again, this time more cautiously and carefully, and one begins to wonder whether an ingenious explanation is necessarily historical. It seems apparent that something in the evidence has suggested a hypothesis to him. He has then searched for the data and arguments from his great store of knowledge to support his hypothesis. Thus a massive superstructure has been built; but often the foundation is shaky.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid , Vol. 7, 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Memories of the Archaeological Survey of Ceylon*, Vol. VI, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. XVI, p, 167 ff. "The Sculpture of Man and Horse near Tiśavava at Anuradhapura, Ceylon".

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. , Vol. XV, p. 209 ff. "The Statue near Potgul Vehera at Polonnaruva, Ceylon."



Paranavitana is endowed with an extremely vivid imagination and he tends to speculate a great deal. In the process, speculative possibilities are dressed up as certainties. Gaps in history are sometimes filled by his fertile imagination. Unable to find any evidence which would explain why the royal consecration was withheld from Vikramabāhu and his son Gajabāhu, he says:

There must have been a body, a college of jurists whose decision was a prerequisite for a ruler's consecration and that body was independent enough to withhold its sanction for the consecration of a prince enjoying *de facto* sovereignty<sup>1</sup>.

Often he selects his facts and sometimes adjusts them to illustrate his theories. They are no doubt interesting and suggestive. A preconceived theory can always be proved by some chosen facts arranged in a suitable manner. Thus some of his contributions do not constitute a dispassionate, scientific study of the events of history. The method of reasoning adopted by Paranavitana to establish that the Sinhalese came from North Western India would illustrate this point rather well<sup>2</sup>.

At the outset he explains the geographical confusion in the *Mahāvamsa* story relating to the original home of Vijaya who led the first batch of Aryan settlers and points out that this evidence is inconclusive to decide what their original home was. The pitfalls as well as the contradictory nature of the philological and linguistic evidence suggested by certain scholars are discussed next. So far Paranavitana's reasoning seems quite valid. Having concluded that the evidence set out by scholars so far does not yield conclusive results, he himself sets out on a new quest.

Paranavitana attempts to settle the question by analysing proper names in the early Brāhmi inscriptions in order to see whether any known Indian tribes could be recognised among the Sinhalese of the 3rd and 2nd centuries B. C. We are introduced to two references to a mercantile corporation of 'Kabojhias'. They are equated with the Kambojas who according to the Pali Canon as well as the inscriptions of Asoka, lived in the North-Western extremity of India.

<sup>1</sup> *University History of Ceylon*, Vol. I, Part II, p. 531.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 88 ff.

As both Pāṇini and the Buddhist texts refer to the Yonas in association with the Kambojas it is thought possible that they too could have come to Ceylon with the Kambojas and evidence for this is found in the Paṇḍukābhaya story in the *Mahāvamsa* where is there a reference to a Yona settlement. This evidence is quite insufficient to establish the assumption that the Yonas came to Ceylon with the Kambojas. Although Paṇḍukābhaya has been assigned to roughly the fourth century B. C., the legendary nature of this particular section of the Chronicle does not inspire sufficient confidence in the historian to assume that the details in it reflect actual conditions prevailing in the 4th century B. C. The *Mahāvamsa* was composed around the sixth century A. D. Although it is known that the information in the *Mahāvamsa* is based on earlier works, it is not possible to fix the antiquity of any one section of it with certainty. Even if one takes the reference to the Yonas to be an indication of their presence in the island, we cannot be certain that this knowledge is even early as the 2nd or 3rd. century B. C. when the Kambojas could be dated. Thus the association of the Kambojas and Yonas in Ceylon is only an assumption which is not based on any reliable evidence. Furthermore, it in no way strengthens the next assumption that the Kambojas arrived in the island along with the original Sinhalese.

In order to establish the above thesis Paranavitana seeks the assistance of the *Mahābhārata*, a text which has become almost indispensable for Paranavitana's theories, and he finds in it a reference to the Kambojas.<sup>1</sup> He points out that the Kambojas are mentioned among a group of countries and peoples which comes after a reference to Siṃhapura. This is presented as further evidence for the contention that the Kambojas came to Ceylon with early Sinhalese, for Siṃhapura he says was their original home. Here again, we find a conclusion based on an assumption and not on clear factual evidence. The assumption here is that the Siṃhapura of the *Mahābhārata* is the Siṃhapura of the Vijaya story; for this there is not a shred of evidence. Siṃhapura was a popular place name in India and Paranavitana himself has suggested that there was another Siṃhapura in Kathiawar<sup>2</sup>, an intermediate area where he says the Sinhalese settled before they came to Ceylon. There is no independent evidence that the Sinhalese were associated with the Siṃhapura of North Western India, this assumption resting entirely on the

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., Vol. I, Pt. 1, p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Vol. I, Pt. 1, p. 91.

earlier assumption that the Kambojas came to Ceylon with the original Sinhalese.

A reference to people known as the Vañkas in the *Mahābhārata* in close proximity to Siṃhapura is also cited as supporting evidence, for Vañga figures prominently in the Vijaya story. The explanation offered is that the later Sinhalese who were familiar with Vañga confused it with Vañka due to their obvious similarity. That there was such a confusion is again an assumption which is quite unacceptable because the Vijaya story is also associated with Magadha and Kaliṅga, regions very close to Vañga in Bengal. Paranavitana who is unable to find a Magadha and a Kaliṅga in North Western India dismisses them with the statement that they were introduced in the elaboration of details. He adds further that the shifting of names from one region to another is not rare in Indian history and cites the example of the Malavas who were living in the Panjab when Alexander invaded India and were later found in the Vindhyan plateau. How this provides an analogy for the shifting of Magadha and Kaliṅga to North Western India where the stories relating to the early Sinhalese take place is difficult to see. The Malava tribe could have shifted from one place to another but no such explanation could be offered for Magadha and Kaliṅga.

Paranavitana also refers to two personal names Sihila and Sihilaka which occur in two inscriptions of the 1st and 2nd century A. D. period from North Western India. Sihila is thought to be a later form of Siṃhala. Even if this was so, this evidence is far too meagre, too far removed in time to establish that there was a tribe by the name of Siṃhala in North Western India roughly about the 5th or 6th century B. C. While conceding that Paranavitana has made an interesting suggestion we cannot accept as historical a conclusion based on a series of assumptions.

Quite conscious of the fact that the above theory does not explain away all the problems arising out of the Vijaya story, a further proposition is made. The Sinhalese who were originally from the Upper Indus Valley are thought to have settled down in an intermediate area before they came to Ceylon. Thus Western India is brought into the picture. Vijaya's father according to the *Mahāvamsa* settled down in Lālaratṭha where he built the city of Siṃhapura. Lāratṭha is taken to be the same as modern Lāṭa in Western India and Siṃhapura according to him could be identified

with either Sihor in Kathiawar or Hingur in the Indus delta. Perhaps what Paranavitana intends to convey is that the original Sinhalese introduced the name Siṃhapura to the new region in which they settled, for he has attempted to locate the city first in North Western India and next in Western India.

Apart from the identification of Lālarat̥ṭha and Siṃhapura, Paranavitana uses further arguments in support of the view that the original Sinhalese settled down in Western India before they set out to Ceylon. For the most part they form a series of assumptions which cannot be treated as evidence. However, the view that the early Aryans came to Ceylon from Western India is plausible for other reasons.

Prof. Paranavitana's thesis regarding the Malaysian origin of the Kaliṅga dynasty of Ceylon is perhaps one of the most glaring instances which illustrates the unscientific and highly speculative nature of his more recent writings. The weaknesses in his method of historical reconstruction have been laid bare by Dr. Leslie Gunawardene<sup>1</sup> who has subjected Prof. Paranavitana's views on this subject to a very detail analysis. The controversial nature of the linguistic evidence on which Prof. Paranavitana leans heavily and the arbitrary use of place-names have been pointed out, thereby rendering the conclusions arrived at by him equally controversial and often unacceptable. In this connection, in addition to the inscriptional and literary sources to which historians normally have access to, he introduces us to a new type of source material, minute writing inscribed on stone which is for the most part written in between the lines of original inscriptions, and sometimes over them. On certain slabs there are apparently many layers of writing. They are best described in his own words:

The portion of the slab below the end of the Sinhalese inscription  $4\frac{1}{4}$  in. in depth, is seen at close examination to be covered with writing in very small Sinhalese characters crowded together. The writing is badly weathered, and records of a later date have also been engraved over it. Nevertheless, it has been possible to decipher this writing by concentrated observation... The Sanskrit document is not brought to a close at the bottom of the slab, but is continued, reading upwards, from the last line of the Sinhalese record in the

<sup>1</sup> *Ceylon and Malaysia: A study of Prof. Paranavitana's research on the relations between the two regions* A paper (63/69, Series No. 6, March 28, 1969) read before the Ceylon Studies Seminar, Peradeniya.

same small characters to cover one half of the height of the slab. Starting from the top of the slab is another series of inscriptions, also written over the earlier Sinhalese writing of which the lines are continued downwards until they come to the point where the writing from the bottom upwards ends. The whole of the slab has again been utilized for another series of records in characters of a considerably later period. Moreover in certain parts, the writing of the earlier Sanskrit document has been copied in a later script of about the fourteenth century in minute characters faintly but sharply incised. On the stone, therefore, there are three or four layers of writing, one over the other, of which only the original writing, in bold letters deeply engraved, has been recognised so far.<sup>1</sup>

It is extremely doubtful whether such records could have been read by the average literate person even at the time they were inscribed and appear to have been meant only for the 'trained epigraphist'. The problem which faces the average historian is the verification of these records which at first, even to Prof. Paranavitana, "appeared as a hopeless task".

Juggling around with words, reading hidden meanings into them and speculating on their historical evolution are pet devices used by Prof. Paranavitana to prove his theories. For instance the term 'pṛ̥thu kula' in the Buddha Gaya inscription is taken as a hidden reference to the Chronicle, the *Mahāvamsa*<sup>2</sup>, this being one of the arguments put forward to establish that Mahānāma mentioned here is the author of the Chronicle. In an attempt to identify Uppalavaṇṇā of the *Mahāvamsa* with the Vedic god Varuṇa, he argues that 'uppala' is ultimately derived from 'udakapāla' a possible epithet of Varuṇa. Unable to find a direct reference to Varuṇa by the epithet 'udakapāla, he points out that he was known as 'udakapati'. Vaṇṇa, the second component of the word Uppalavaṇṇa is derived from Varuṇa on the basis of analogous derivations mentioned by him.<sup>3</sup> The same method of reasoning is adopted to prove that the expression "podonavulu-puluṇḍāvuluyen" in a tenth century A. D. inscription is actually an invocation to Parjanya and Agni<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *Ceylon & Malaysia*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>2</sup> *University of Ceylon Review*, Vol. XX, No. 2, pp. 279 ff. 'Mahanama'.

<sup>3</sup> *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of Ceylon*, Vol. VI, 1953, pp. 22-24.

<sup>4</sup> *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. XVI, p. 167 ff.

To base one's conclusion on the possibility that crucial words in one's sources went through a particular type of evolution, without actual evidence of such a process except analogy is, to say the least, extremely hazardous. Conclusions arrived at through this type of argumentation are therefore not historically valid. Obvious meanings of words are sometimes set aside in favour of fanciful interpretations. Thus, for instance, commenting on the term '*devoṭunu-māṇḍa-upan*' he does not for a moment consider its obvious similarity to the term '*dehisava-jā*' but resorts to a more complicated derivation where '*voṭunu*' is derived from '*vartma*' meaning route and the entire expression is interpreted as 'the land between the two routes'.<sup>1</sup>

Copyist's errors and emendations by copyists due to some reason or other are conventional explanations offered by Prof. Paranavitana when he wishes a manuscript to read the way he wants it to so that it would fit in with his scheme of thinking. By this method he manufactures data to prove his point. *Met-giri* in the Sinhalese Glossary of the *Mahābodhivaṃsa* (*Mahābodhivaṃsa-granthipadavivarāṇaya*), would be a copyist's error for *Mey-giri*.<sup>2</sup> *Jambudvīpa* should have been *Jambidīpa* and *Varmasetu* should have been *Vartmasetu*.<sup>3</sup> Such instances could be multiplied. Not much distinction is made between this type of conjectural evidence and factual evidence; and this makes his conclusions rather doubtful.

Employing so many different devices, Prof. Paranavitana clutters up his arguments with evidence drawn from such a variety of sources that sometimes he himself gets quite mixed up. His sole aim is to establish his point of view by every means at his disposal. Sometimes the type of argument used to prove one particular theory would be completely reversed to prove another hunch. Consistency therefore is not one of Prof. Paranavitana's strong points. Analysing the account of the *Daṭṭhavaṃsa*, he says that the author followed the traditional story faithfully, but when describing *Kaliṅga* from where the Tooth Relic was brought he described the *Kaliṅga* of Malaysia for literary embellishment. No better reason is offered for transferring the scene of action from India to Malaysia. The confusion which would result in the minds of *Dhammakitti*'s readers is not posed but the opposite argument is trotted out that

<sup>1</sup> *JCBRAS* (New Series), Vol. 7. pp. 39—30.

<sup>2</sup> *Artibus Asiae*, XVI, p. 182.

<sup>3</sup> *JCBRAS* (New Series), Vol. 7, p. 30.

because the Sinhalese of the twelfth century A. D. were familiar with the Kaliṅga of Malaya the story would have been more convincing.<sup>1</sup> In fact one would expect the geographical confusion to make the story less convincing. However, when he wishes to identify Jambudvīpa of the *Hatthavanagalla-vihāravamsa* with Further India, contemporary usage is not considered at all but the author is supposed to have borrowed it from some work such as the *Vāyu Purāna*, a text which according to him would have been known to the educated elite of Ceylon.<sup>2</sup> This type of contrary argument does not in anyway behave a scientific historian who wishes himself to be considered seriously.

Much could be said on the credit side with regard to Prof. Paranavitana's work. Witticisms and pungent humour often characterize his writings, and this make them immensely readable. Commenting on the introduction of Buddhism to Ceylon, he says:

Mahinda Thera and his companions are believed by the faithful to have transported themselves through the air... Those who are not prepared to believe that there was air transport in those days may give some thought to the manner of Mahinda's progress from Avanti to Ceylon.<sup>3</sup>

Replying to a critic he says with sarcastic humour:

What a horse! But we must not be too hard on the poor beast. We must rather blame those who place animals in positions not quite suited to the abilities with which they are endowed by nature.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout his career, Prof. Paranavitana has never feared to modify or even repudiate as unsound views he once held. The theory regarding the Malaysian origin of the Kaliṅgas is a complete repudiation of the view he once held that the Kaliṅgas came from India.<sup>5</sup> Regarding the Potgul-Vehera statue one finds him making a rather guarded statement in 1933 that it might belong to about the eighth century A. D.<sup>6</sup> Later, however, he expresses the opinion

<sup>1</sup> *JCBRAS* (New Series), Vol. VII, pp. 24—21.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *University History of Ceylon*, Vol. I, Part I, p. 138.

<sup>4</sup> *JCBRAS* (New Series), 1950, p. 168 ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Journal of the Greater India Society*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1936, pp. 57—64.

<sup>6</sup> *Ceylon Journal of Science* (Section G), Vol. 2, Pt. 3, 1933, pp. 229—234.

that it belongs to the twelfth century A. D.<sup>1</sup> Prof. Paranavitana's views regarding Nissankamalla's claim that he was descended from Vijaya have undergone a radical change as a result of what he believes is new evidence. Writing in 1959 he offers a rather laborious explanation making out that Nissankamalla's claim was with reference to another Vijaya who colonised another Laṅkā situated in Malaysia.<sup>2</sup> However, in 1965 in the light of his new discoveries he states that there is evidence that the Kaliṅgas were descended ultimately from a Sinhalese king Kassapa V and therefore had as good a claim to be considered the descendant of Vijaya as any other prince who occupied the Sinhala throne."<sup>3</sup>

There is no gainsaying that Prof. Paranavitana excels as a story-teller and always fascinates his readers. When he is analysing accepted historical data and is heading in the direction to which his evidence leads, he is at his best as a historian. There is much that Prof. Paranavitana has written in this vein, which is valid history. By way of illustration a few examples may be quoted. It is with great skill that he handles the the problem of the capital of Ceylon during the ninth and tenth centuries A. D.<sup>4</sup> He marshalls together the evidence of the *Mahāvamsa* and of archaeological sources to establish his point which he does with sufficient evidence and clear reasoning. The way in which he tackles the career of Kāvantissa and Duṭṭhagāmaṇī in the *University History of Ceylon* is masterly<sup>5</sup>. The reconstruction of the early history of Rohaṇa with the help of evidence gathered from the *Mahāvamsa*, *Dhātuvaṃsa* and the early Brāhmi inscriptions is both ingenious and plausible. The interpretation of the evidence of the *Dhātuvaṃsa* and the *Mahāvamsa* regarding the career of Kāvantissa, where he emerges as a shrewd diplomat and the chief architect of the political unification of Rohana, quite in contrast to the cowardly ruler painted by the author of *Mahāvamsa*, is extremely convincing. The evidence of contemporary inscriptions is cited to establish the historicity of the warriors of Duṭṭhagāmaṇī and the legendary nature of the stories about them are explained away with great finesse. The description of the war between Eḷāra and Duṭṭhagāmaṇī follows the *Mahāvamsa* account very closely. He does indulge in minor

<sup>1</sup> *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. XV, p. 209 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *JCBRAS* (New Series), Vol. VII, pp. 35-6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ceylon and Malaysia*, p. 73.

<sup>4</sup> *Ceylon Journal of Science* (Section G) Vol. 2, Pt. 2, 1950, pp. 141-147.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, Pt. 2, p. 145 ff.



speculations such as the possibility of Elāra's agents having a hand in the estrangement between the two brothers Duṭṭhagāmaṇī and Saddhātissa but what is noteworthy about it is that he does not dogmatise.

Except for certain flights of fancy noticed in his approach to the problem of the original home of the Aryans who came to Ceylon, his contribution to the *University History of Ceylon* deserves great praise. The chapter<sup>1</sup> on the introduction of Buddhism is written in a very dispassionate manner. The historicity of the Third Buddhist Council and the mission of Mahinda are accepted, and for these supporting epigraphical evidence has been given. The relations between Asoka and Devānampiyatissa are also discussed in a very rational manner without unduly straining the evidence available. The possibility that there was some knowledge of Buddhism in Ceylon before the arrival of Mahinda is discussed but he does not present this as a fact due to lack of evidence. The *Mahāvamsa* story of the arrival of Mahinda and later of Sangamitta in Ceylon, the patronage of Buddhism by Devānampiyatissa and the propagation of Buddhism by the Thera Mahinda and his followers is accepted although no credence is given to the miraculous element in it. The political history of the island from Duṭṭhagāmaṇī to Mahasen is also dealt with in a very matter-of-fact way. Here he seldom indulges in unwarranted speculation and in the main keeps close to his evidence in the reconstruction of history. His familiarity with the original sources of Ceylon history is used to great advantage and his conclusions will invite the serious consideration of historians.

Prof. Paranavitana has given fresh incentive to those interested in Ceylon's past and has set many to think afresh regarding problems which they once thought were settled. In conclusion we may quote Prof. Paranavitana himself, "... but whether one agrees with him on a particular point or not, no one will deny that his views are always stimulating."<sup>2</sup> Prof. Paranavitana's views will certainly continue to stimulate and engross.

<sup>1</sup> *University History of Ceylon*, Vol. I, Pt. 1, Chapter 2.

<sup>2</sup> A review of Paul. E. Pieris, "Tri-Sinhala—The Last Phase", *JCBRAS*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 91, p. 280.