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The Role of Brahmins in Mediaeval Sri Lanka

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Indian influence is evident in shaping up of the Sri Lankan society from ancient times. According to historical sources, Sri Lanka was inhabited by groups of people from India who immigrated from time to time. One of the main aspects of the Indian social organization was the caste discrimination based on four-fold caste system. The four-fold Indian division, Viz, Brahamana, Kastriya, Visya and Sudra is mentioned in the Pali and the Sinhalese chronicles as well as in other literary works.

The important point is that, though these caste groups were known here, they did not become quite a parallel to the Indian hierarchy. Caste in ancient Sri Lanka never assumed the Indian rigidity with its hardened social ramifications, largely due to the impact of Buddhism. There is clear evidence of the presence of Brahmanas among the early Indian settlers in Sri Lanka. They had a high social status and subsequently occupied an important position in the royal court.

The immediate cause for the downfall of the Rajarata civilization was the cruel invasion of the invader named Magha who came from Kalinga Desa. The policy which Magha followed as reflected in the chronicles, was one of ruthless repression and tyranny. According to the Mahavamsa and other chronicles described the disruption of the sacral order.

The result of Magaha's invasion was the shift of the kingdoms to the South West. The aim of this paper is to examine the position of the Brahmanas in the social organization which has been created after the shift of the kingdoms to the South West. The research would be limited to the period from 13th century AC to 15th century AC and to the periods from Dambadeniya to Kotte.

Data was collected through primary and secondary sources and inscription revealed a lot of information pertaining to this research.

In Dambadeniya Kingdom, the first kingdom in the South Western Sri Lanka, villages have been established for Brahmanas. During the mediaeval period, Brahmanas came from India to Sri Lanka due to various reasons. It has been identified that those Brahmins enjoyed various privileges under the patronage of the rulers at the times.

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