

Status of Women in Sri Lanka's History as manifested in *Saddarmalankaraya*

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Saddarmalankaraya is a Sinhala scripture written by Rev. Jayabahu Dharmakeerthi who lived during the era of the Gampola Kingdom. *Saddarmalankaraya* is a significant work because more than half of the 103 chapters of *Saddarmalankaraya* represent the Ceylonese society. It includes descriptions of elites, priests and ordinary people who lived during the Gampola Era. Although certain chapters of *Pansiya Panas Jathakaya* prove that the literati of the Jathaka stories have not depicted females as illiterate, capricious and conservative, *Saddarmalankaraya* depicts females in a different manner. In the ancient times there were wise women who also protected civility. Yet, while the author has made an effort to praise females whenever possible, in certain places satirical and scornful allusions have been made towards women. Especially through 'Kakawarnatissa Vasthu' the capriciousness of women is highlighted. As such, it appears the author has made an effort to present a balanced attitude regarding women. Nevertheless, a citation in *Saddarmalankaraya* exposes all the compositions that alluded to women in that era in a sexist manner. The narration related to Dutugemunu's Royal Tusker (Kadol Etha) and the mare Dheegahuni highlight the relegated view on women. According to *Saddarmalankaraya*, there are facts about superfluous readings on feminine chiromony, called Samudrika Shastraya, and how only male children of patriarchal families have been encouraged to obtain an education. Texts namely *Kinchisangha Vasthu*, *Vessamiththa Vasthu*, *Naga Vasthu* present various information about education for females, cookery and other practices confined to women. These texts divulge facts about females who gained liberation through *savoir faire* and meditation. Also, marriage had not been an assured bond for women. Moreover, women had been engaged in professions such as nurses and midwives.

Key words: Ceylonese Society, Status of Women, Sexism, Chiromony, Sinhala Scripture