

## **An interpretation into the controversial *Vaharala* inscriptions of the middle Anuradhapura period**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**A** set of inscriptions belonging to the middle Anuradhapura period is collectively known as *Vaharala* inscriptions as they all contain the ambiguous word *Vaharala*. This word is followed almost always by another ambiguous word *Cidavi* and they together form the key phrase for these inscriptions.

It is obvious that these two words refer to a meritorious act performed at a Buddhist monastery by a person or persons mentioned in the particular inscriptions. It has been done with the aim of attaining the 'desired Buddhahood' and / or to share the merit thus acquired 'with all living beings' in the world.

The controversy over these inscriptions is on the identification of this meritorious act. Some believe that it was a 'cutting of certain timber' for the use of the monastic establishment. Some interpret it as a reference to the 'Token meals' of the priests of the monastery. The most popular and seemingly logical interpretation hitherto put forward on this is by Paranavitana, who interpreted it as 'freeing of slaves' from the Buddhist monasteries by the merit seeking personnel.

The present writer also accepts the verbal meaning of *Vaharala cidavi* as more or less the same as 'freeing from slavery or bondage', but interprets it as having a totally different meaning than that of Paranavitana.

**As evidence shows, 'freeing of slaves' in this context is not the freeing of slaves employed at a monastery but freeing from the bondage of worldly life and become a monk at a Buddhist establishment. The monasteries in this case could most probably the Mahayana establishments, where very one can attain the Buddhahood, as the ultimate goal.**

In some inscriptions, *Vatakota* is used along with *Vaharala* instead of *Cidavi*. This word also gives more or less a similar meaning as it could well be a derivation of Sanskrit *vy'akrita* or *vyutkranta* which means 'separated from', or 'gone away' and so forth.

The adjectives often used for *Vaharala* such as *Salamala* and *Alamala* which are not explained by Paranavitana can be interpreted as 'craving for household' and 'craving for love' respectively. Likewise, *Daruyana Cidavi Vaharala* can be interpreted as 'freeing from the bondage of children' and *Siyagana Vaharala Cidivi* can be interpreted as 'freeing from the bondage of one's own wife'.

Interestingly enough, there is a reference for a money payment for performing *Vaharala Cidavi* in some instances. This could be a compensation for dependence or a payment for the monastery for subsistence of the newly admitted personnel to the order.