

Research Paper

A Socio-historical Study of the Ayyanayake Belief

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 ABSTRACT

Belief in *Ayyanayake* or Lord Villager has been found in Sri Lanka since ancient times. What needs to be clarified here is whether Sri Lanka's Lord *Ayyanayake* is worshipped, and if so, how. In the research study done on this deity, it should first be emphasized whether the deity is called by the name of *Ayyanayake* or by the name of *Gambhara* as it is known in Sri Lanka. The ideas about *Ayyanayake* Deva concept in India and about the famous Village God in Sri Lanka should be emphasized here, and there a special study should be done on his place in the pantheon, the role of the God, the nature of the representation of the God and mostly the things worshiped by the devotees. There, in the study of local and foreign literary sources, murals, sculptures and carvings, an analysis will be presented regarding some new data not found in their research, taking into account the ideologies presented by the scholars regarding the relevant concept. Accordingly, the concept of *Ayyanayaka* in India will be popularized in Sri Lanka under the name of village deity.

Keywords: Ayyanayake, Ayyappa, Ayyanar, Gambara

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1. Introduction

Firstly *Ayyanayaka* should be discussed within the Vedic order of deities and not among local deities. A Vedic deity also appears in the names '*Aiyanayaka*', '*Aryaputra*' and '*shasta*'. Since ancient times he is known as '*Mahashastra*', the people of Kerala believe him as '*Ayyappa*' and the people of Indi, in general call him as '*Revanta*' (Nagaswamy, 2006:232). The *Linga Purana* mentions the worship of '*Ayyanar*' as well as association with hunters and dogs (ibid, 232). '*Ayyanar*' is mainly worshiped in Tamilnadu and he is popularly known as *Mohini* in three forms. He is a guardian deity and is usually depicted on foot or on a white horse or elephant, and in other cases as a warrior holding a scepter or whip (Dalal, 2006:43). '*Ayyanar*' is prayed for safe delivery as well as for protection (Ibid). He is known as the god of the merchant community as well as the god of potters. '*Ayyappa*' is the name of Lord *Ayyanayake*, who is worshiped in Kerala. He is sometimes

referred to as the king of demons or lord. It is customary to build this idol on the right side of the village. He is also known as '*Napriya*'. In various statues, he sometimes carries a horse or elephant vehicle and sometimes sits on a lotus flower. '*Purna*' or '*Purana*' and '*Puskala*' are his two wives.

2. Research Methodology

The methods used to collect and analyze data are both relative and absolute. This research has been done by collecting the data published by previous researchers and comparing it with the unpublished archeological evidence and giving conclusions based on that.

3. Results and Discussion

The oldest stone *Aiyanar* statues in India belong to the Pallava dynasty. The oldest idol of *Aiyanar* in Sri Lanka also belongs to the 8th and 9th centuries AD. It is the world's best horse head and man carving in the Isurumuniya temple in Anuradhapura (Fig. 1). Van Lohuizen, a Dutch art historian,

has interpreted the statue and the horse head as representing the god *Ayyanar* (Lohuizen, 1971:116). Mirendo Obeysekera relates this carving to the story of *Ravana*. He says that this represents the sage 'Agnimithra' who performed the *Ashwamedha Yagya* of the sages (Obeysekera, 2012:81). The architectural style and features of his ashrams do not lack the distinctive features of Shiva and Vishnu temples. He is offered meat and liquor as a forest god of hunters (Nagaswamy, 2006:232-235). A large number of folk tales are woven around this god. The oldest archaeological illustration in this country related to *Ayyanayake* Deva belief. It belongs to as far back as 8-9 centuries AD. On the stone doorway of the *Nillakgama Bodhigara*, there is an image of a deity standing on two legs on a horse and holding a cane or staff (Fig. 3). His right foot rests on the head of a dwarf. Gamalath points out that this is the *Ayyanayaka* deity who existed at that time, and that this deity was depicted above the entrance to the *Bodhigara* to protect the sacred premises (Gamalath and Kekulawala, 2020:218-221).

The belief of this deity is widespread in the North-Central and North-West province. Also, a carving of Lord *Ayyanayake*, depicted in a very high relief, can be seen at the left end of the stone door frame of the *Deundara* temple (Fig. 2). Here, the male figure of God is depicted as riding on a horse, which is mounted on two rear legs, just like *Nillakgama*. With his right foot trampled a dwarf. Here, *Vamana* has been beautifully carved as if he is struggling to press the Lord's feet. The time here belongs to the 13th century AD. That time was the time when *Deva Prathiraja*, the minister of King *Parakramabahu II* (1236-1270 AD) of *Dambadeniya*, carried out the development of the temple at *Deundara*. *Ayyanayake*, who is born from *Shiva* and *Vishnu* (*mohini*), and he belongs to the *Vamana* community, who is later blessed with *Kuvera* status, have the same birth relationship, though distant. But the dwarf community has been working under *Ayyanayake* as a group of servants (Ibid:218-220).

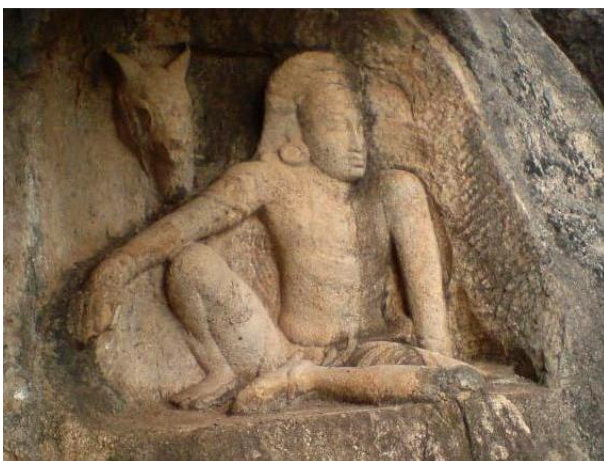


Fig.1. *Ayyanayake*, *Isurumuniya*, Man and horse head (5th Century AD)



Fig. 2. *Ayyanayake* – Depicted in the stone Door Frame at *Deundara Devalaya* (13th century).

Mohini represents one of the guises of *Vishnu* (Parker, 190 3: 147). A connection between *Vishnu* and *Shiva* can also be discerned according to the *Bhagavad Purana*. Here it is stated that after *Vishnu* came to *Shiva* in the guise of *Mohini*, she got a child from *Shiva* (ibid: 147). This baby appears before the world as '*Aiyandar*' born from the right hand of Lord *Vishnu*. He is '*Aiyandar*' in *Sinhala*. Parker says that the interpretation of the *Tanjore* temple is more correct. Interpretation of the so-called *Tanjore* temple indicates that this deity is known as *Keiyanar* in *South India* (ibid: 148). He also appears as "*Nayanar*" - son of *Hara* or son of *Vishnu* and *Hara* or son of *Shiva* (ibid: 148).

It is mentioned in the '*Vanni Upata*' that he came to *Cybil* with the *Aryans* during the reign of King *Buwanekabahu IV* (1341-1351 AD). *Kotagama Vachissara Thero* thinks that the people who have a *Tamil* origin wrote the '*Vanni Upata*' in this way to show that they are *Aryans* (*Darmadasa, Tundeniya*, 1994: 117). It is important to mention here the treasure story from several popular legends about the birth of *Ayyanayake*. Seven princes were created by *Vishnu*, who came in the form of a woman, to save him from *Bhasmasura*, who sought to destroy him by learning a mantra from *Ishwara* that could turn anyone's head to ashes as soon as *Mathura* laid his head in his hands. When *Devi Uma* came there and hugged them together, only six people were caught in her arms. Those six are called *Skanda*. One

person fell there and he is known as *Ayyanayake* (ibid: 118). Obesekara's opinion on this was mentioned above.

And as mentioned in the poem *Aiyanayaka devi*, he was born from his mother's right breast by the power of god Upulvan. After that he was accepted by the Deva Council. It is said that when the Buddha visited the Malla Garden, he also received permission from him to save the world (ibid: 118). His color is dark blue or black. In Ceylon his vehicle is the white horse or elephant and in India he drives both elephant and horse. *Mohini's* son *Ayyanar* is also considered a forest deity. He protects those who walk in the forest. But it is Parker's opinion that he is not called 'Tree god' (Parker, 1903:137).

An elephant and a horse are depicted next to the human sculpture carved on the left pillar of the frontier space (*Ayaka*) of the northern sector of Jetavana Dagoba, dated 276-303 AD (Fig. 4). Parker interprets the carving as depicting the god *Ayyanar*. But Senarath Paranavithana interprets this as depicting Chakravarti holding a thunderbolt (Ibid:148, fig.37). Bopearachchi has also presented this opinion (Bopearachchi, 2015:240). Shroder states that this symbolizes the god Indra (Shroder, 1990:82). However, this artwork is also well represented among the carvings belonging to the Jaggayyapeta Stupa in the Amaravati region (Rowland, 1953:16; Gamalath, 2016:354) (Fig. 5). Parker points out that the female figure depicted in the panel (*kaveni*) below this carving is *Ayyanar's* wife (Parker, 1903: 148). An eleventh century carving in the Thanjavur temple depicts Lord *Aiyanar* in the guise of a child with twelve hands. It shows one face and is seated on an elephant (ibid:148). Bargees offers a different interpretation of *Ayyanar's* origin and purpose based on the carvings at the Badami rock temple in Decan, which are about four or five centuries older than the Tanjore carvings (Ibid: 148). One half of the *Aiyanar* carving in Badami depicts Shiva and the other half Vishnu. One face and four arms. In one hand he carries a hand axe (*keteriya*). In its hilt is a naked cobra and depicted wearing a tall crown.

According to Sinhalese tradition, *Aiyanar* came to Sri Lanka from Madura (ibid: 149). It is said that from there, five powerful gods and ten Tamil devils came frozen to Sinhala in a stone ship. *Aiyanayaka devi's* poem class also indicates that after landing in Jaffna, he again traveled along the coastal belt to Kalutara (Dharmadasa & Tundeniya, 1994:119). But the prevailing opinion in India is different. P.R. Rama mentions that *Sasta* was born in 1006 A.D. But according to another version *Sasta* or *Ayyappa* was born as the son of a married ascetic in Ponnampalamedu. One of *Ayyappa's* epithets is the Malayali *Chevakan*, which shows the close association of the *Ezhavas* in Kerala at the time (Sadasivan, 2000:122). *Chevaka* is "a knight who fought to settle political or social issues for two warring or dissident groups or rival rulers'. *Ayyappa* was taught by the Muppil (chief or leader) of Chippanchira in Thannimurmukkam, who controlled all the martial arts schools in the Chempakassery

district. Muppil was powerful militarily and economically (ibid:122). Although *Ayyappa* stayed at Muppil's house and did teaching work, he did not get the chance to test *Ayyappa's* talent. Meanwhile, Muppil's beautiful daughter fell in love with *Ayyappa*. Meanwhile we come across the name *Vavar*. He was once the leader of a gang of robbers in the hilly areas and had connections with Arab traders in Kerala. He was challenged by *Ayyappa*. The *Maravas* who took control of the Sabarimala temple were completely defeated and *Ayyappa* disarmed in the true Buddhist spirit and deposited all his weapons at the foot of a pipal tree at a place called *Saramkuty*. The place is called *Saramkuthi*. *Ayyappa* then decided to go to Ceylon under the authority of the King of Pattalam, where he had to decide in what guise he would go there. Finally, he decided to come to Sri Lanka as a Buddhist teacher (Sadasivan, 2000:122).

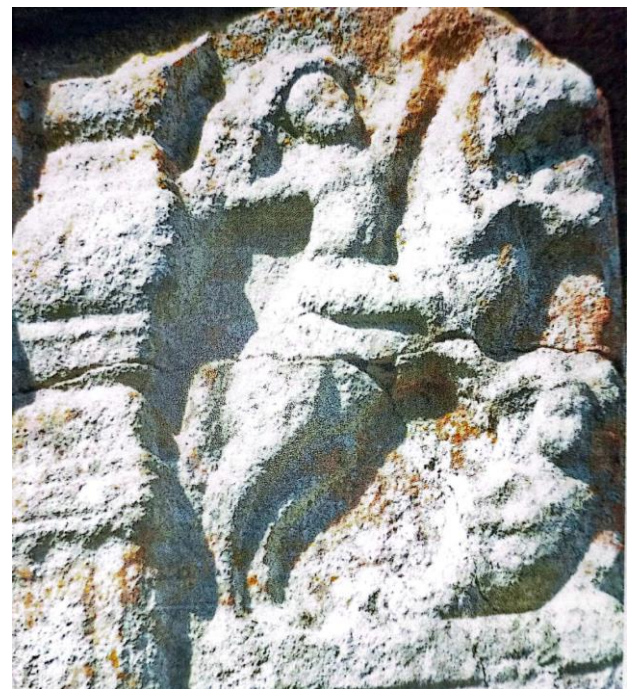


Fig. 3. Ayyanayake – Depicted in the door frame at Nillakgara Bodhigara (8th to 9th century AD)

It is clear that the name was coined from the place of his origin in the Dravidian land. The literally uses the name '*Nayanar*' and appears by that name because he was first a '*Nayar*' god. If so, he is an early South Indian deity and his high status would have come from his being regarded as a special forest deity in Ceylon. This is revealed by the introduction given to him by the early Naga tribes. Parker further points out that *Ayyanar* would not have been recognized as a very important deity in the forests of Ceylon if it were not for the care given to *Ayyanar* by the first inhabitants of this island (Parker, 1903: 149).

Devendra identifies *Ayyanayaka* as a deity associated with the jungles of the Vanni region (Devendra, 1965: 31). The Sinhalese people of Rajarata province worship him as *Wanniya Bandara*. Then his body is said to be black in color and his vehicle is said to be a white elephant (Darmadasa &

Thundeniya, 1994:120). It is customary for devotees to remember this deity by hanging leaves before entering dangerous places in forests (Devendra, 1965:31). Kurunegala shows with examples how the Muslims of Puttalam province also worshiped Lord Ayyanayake (Ibid: 32).

Among his special duties in South India is the night vigilance of villages. There Ayyanar rides on a horse. According to his genesis story, he has become a Hindu deity through the rebirth that takes place at a later time. When the facts of the genesis story are considered logically, his father is Lord Shiva. Then Shiva calls the son Ayyanar, an avatar or spirit of Vishnu who successfully works against the demons (Parker, 1903:149).



Fig. 4. The male figure depicted on the stala at Northern Ayake of the Jethavana Stupa (3rd to 4th Century AD)

In Sri Lanka, this deity is popularly known as 'Suniyam Devatava' or 'Gambara Deviyo' (Devendra, 1965:39). He is also called a village deity. In some parts of the country, there are many Gambara deities who are believed to be local (Dharmadasa, Tundeniya 1994:227-228). However, Gananatha Obesekera points out that the Gambara deity or the sorcerer deity is the god of magic (Obeysekera 1984, 39). Similarly, Dharmadasa and Thundeniya have mentioned that the sorcerer deity visits the villages at night and

therefore he is called the Gambhara deity (Dharmadasa & Thundeniya,1994: 450).

This image of God is not said to be innocent. Every devotee lights a lamp in gardens or gardens for this deity. According to certain features of the body, Kasturi will represent the guise of a sub-demon that looks like a deer. It is believed that if the rituals performed for him are abandoned, there may be dangerous results. These rituals are performed daily among all religious couples. It is Parker's opinion that when popularity is declining in one place or group, it can be seen to re-emerge elsewhere (Parker, 1903:150).

In the Yathikas of Kandy Province, he appears not as Ayyanar but as Bilinda. It is called Baby Devil. This belief also prevails among the villagers and the milk mother has an Ayyanar connection. Deity Ilandari is the youth of Ayyanar. Both of them are the same God called by different names (Ibid:150). Ayyappa's origin as a child is reflected in several myths. According to one story, the child was found by King Pandalam on the banks of the river Pampa. The Pandalam dynasty was a Pandya dynasty, and the childless king took Bilinda to his palace and raised her with love. This little boy showed his power by killing the demon Mahisha (Dalal, 2006:43).



Fig. 5. carving belonging to the Jaggayyapeta Stupa at Amaravati

The 'Kalu Kambili' and the 'Kadavara' devil also join this. All these are servants of Lord Ayyanayake. Some consider him as the brother of Lord Gana. Some believe that the demons

Bandara and Kalu Kambili, the black deities (Kalu Devatha Bandara), reside under Lord Ayyanayake. It is a legend in the Minneriya area that when King Mahasen was working with the demons, Prince Ayyanayake was in charge of the demons and he was in charge of many villages and dairies in the country where he was located (Dharmadasa and Thudeniya, 1994:120). nces of Sri Lanka.

4. Conclusions

Lord Ayyanayake is believed in several names depending on the cultural background and regional purpose of India and is represented in several images in India and Sri Lanka. Among them, the name *Gambhara* is used in Sri Lanka for the god Ayyanake and it can be pointed out here that the god *Gambhara* is worshiped in Buddhist guise by the Sinhala Buddhist people. However, the horse-head and human carvings of Isurumuni and Jetavana in the northern Vahalkada carvings are an impediment to fully accepting the above-mentioned conclusions that some scholars bring about Ayyanayaka because the relationship between the male figures and the horse in those carvings is only at the symbolic level. The carvings of Isurumuni show only the horse's head and the human figure sitting on the ground. Ayyanayake's biography has not been carved like that anywhere. Also, in the northern Vahalkada carvings of Jetavana Dagaba, the depiction of the deity is shown with two heads of elephants and horses, while the human figure is holding an object in one hand, not a stick. Ayyanayake is not a national deity or a deity who has received definitive commentary from Buddha and is included in the Buddhist Deva Council. Lord Ayyanayake is a rural deity worshiped in the provinces of Sri Lanka. *Gambara Devata* is extremely popular among the villagers as a protector of the villages.

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