

# A Historical Assessment of Women in the medieval period of Sri Lanka with Special reference to the infertile woman, virtue of women, feasibilities of women and their costumes

**Dr. N. A. Wimalasena**

Senior Lecturer, Department of History,  
University of Peradeniya,  
Peradeniya, Sri Lanka  
Email: [nawimalasena@gmail.com](mailto:nawimalasena@gmail.com)

## **Abstract**

*In this study an attempt is made to study the some aspects of life of women from about the thirteenth century A. D. to the end of fifteenth century A. D. This can be considered as part of women's position in Sri Lanka. This period is generally known as the medieval period of Sri Lanka which is after the Magha's invasion. Any serious attempt to study these aspects is beset with certain difficulties, which must be borne in mind from the beginning. On the one hand, the chronicles provide comparatively little information on those activities of women to which the student of social history should attach importance. On the other hand, even the information of chronicle that we find is limited to women belonging to courts circles or to the nobility. The role of ordinary women in society would certainly deserve great attention, because some of our literary sources reveal this aspect. In addition to that, there are a number of epigraphic records which contain much information about position of women. The research is mainly based on primary sources. Wherever necessary material also obtained from limited secondary sources on the social history.*

**Key words:** Primary sources, Infertile, virtue, feasibilities, costumes, medieval period, Musical instruments, YapahuvaVihara

## **1.1 Introduction**

Any serious study of these aspects is beset with certain difficulties, which must be borne in mind from the beginning. On the one hand, the chronicles provide comparatively little information on those activities of women to which the student of social history should attach importance. On the other hand, even the information these we find is limited to women belonging to courts circles or to the nobility. But, the role of ordinary women in society would certainly deserve great attention, for which some literary sources throw light. In addition to that, there are a number of archaeological records which contain much information about subject.

## 1.2 Infertile woman and society

The primary objective of marriage is considered producing of children. It can be seen that a woman who did not bear children was scorned by the society. This narrow view which existed in the society was a very pathetic thing to a woman. Unable to conceive a child, lack of a child was considered a complete wrong of a woman in the ancient society. Males always considered that they were perfect in their part of the contribution. The woman, who did not deliver children, had been considered as very ugly, unfortunate and miserable. Therefore, they were treated as a bad omen in the society. Even though it is not relevant to our period, even Vihāramahadēvi, the mother of Dutthagāmaṇi, had become very sad, due to the lack of children. The story Vihāramadēvi reveals the severe mental stress of a woman without children. She requested three times from a novice who was about to die to become her son as *magē put bāv pātuwa mānava*. (Geiger, 1992: XXII: 33-37). At the time close to death, one expects to live even for another one moment. But Vihāramahadēvi may have desired the bhikkhu to die and so requested from the Bhikkhu that she may conceive, solely due to the sorrow of having no children. *Pūjāvali* describes that Bandula Sēnāpati had asked his wife to leave his home. The reason was the lack of children. It is mentioned as follows in the Pujavali. *Tī vanda pav āti tānāttiya* meaning that you have no children and therefore you are a sinned woman. (Gñāṇawimala, Kiriālle, 1986: 406).

The woman, who did not deliver children, was a serious problem to her husband. His mind was very stressful, because she was treated contempt in the society. In such a situation, although the husband brought an another wife to the same home for the purpose of delivering children, the first wife was in the home. She did not leave home. They lived very happily by doing all the work at home with corporation, even though she did not get children. But, delivering a child by the second wife was a problem to the first wife. Her mind became very stressed at that time. Kāli Yakkhiṇi Vastuva of *Saddharmaratnāvali* can be cited as an example. After the pregnancy of the second wife, the first wife tried to abort the second wife. She becomes very cruel in such a situation. (Oriental, 1985: 76). This story might be a legend and myth. But its notions cannot be ruled out and this concept was prevailing. King Buddhādāsa gave medical advice on producing children. The reason may be the narrow ideas related to the women who had not children. Birth of a child in the marriage is considered as a sine quo non in the ancient Indian society as well as in the ancient Sri Lankan society. According to Buddhist literature, All *Bōdhisatvas* have enlightened as Buddhas after getting a son by the marriage with a lay woman. Such opinions also may have affected the existence of the idea of a bad omen related women who do not give birth to children.

## 1.3 The Virtue and woman

The ancient society, which respected high qualities of women, had not paid attention to women who were treated with contempt. Literature mentions women who protected their pure character. Nandirāja Vastuva of *Saddharmālaṃkāra* describes that one woman rejected a person who came to marry her four times, when the husband was abroad for commercial activities. It is mentioned in the *Saddharmālaṃkāra* as follows; *Yamtāk magē svāmi purushayānō jīvatva inditda, ē tāk kalma maṭa an gehimiyek nam nāta*. (Gñāṇawimala, 1954: 675-677). It means that until my husband lives, there will not be any other husband up. Ancient literature was written with the major aim of fulfilling religious concepts and reforming of the society. Therefore, sometimes only the shortcomings of women may have been depicted in literature. *Pūjāvali*, *Saddharmālaṃkāra* and *Saddharmaratnāvali* have mentioned the exaggerations of weaknesses of women by using some literary characteristics. But, Sri Lankan society did not always pay attention to women, although the Indian Brahmanic society paid attention to women in a negative manner. The major reason for this was the higher status and tolerance of Buddhism. Literature refers the high qualities as well as common weaknesses of women. Although *Pūjāvali* mentions that a woman may be very jealous in some instances, it

also mentions that they have very high qualities. Although the character of Pabāvati has been depicted as a very cruel woman, the author of *Kavsiḷumiṇa* has described very seriously the thought of women. In this manner, the author of *Kavsiḷumiṇa* had analysed the main aim of a woman as love than the husband's appearance. *Kavsiḷumiṇa* emphasizes that Pabāvati of the **Kusa Jātaka** who had heartless qualities got the sincere love of Kusa and joined him as his wife.

Some Jātaka stories of the *Pansiya Panas Jātaka* reveal that the character of a woman was composed of good and bad qualities. The protected high character of women has been depicted in the jataka stories such as Sambulā, (*The Jātaka*, Vol. V. Fausboll, 1963: 88-98). Sandakinduru (*The Jātaka*, Vol. IV. Fausboll, 1963: 282-288) and Takkāriya. (*The Jātaka*, Vol. IV. Fausboll, 1963: 242-255). Jataka stories such as Swarna Hamsa (*The Jātaka*, Vol. I. Fausboll, 1962: 474-477) and Nīgrodhamiga reveal the characters like Bodhisatva qualities. (*The Jātaka*, Vol. I. Fausboll, 1962: 145-153). Jataka stories such as Kusa Jātaka (*The Jātaka*, Vol. V. Fausboll, 1963: 278-312) and Ummagga Jātaka depict characters of women such as wisdom. (*The Jātaka*, Vol. VI. Fausboll, 1964: 329-478). Vessantara Jātaka reveals the love of a mother to her children. (*The Jātaka*, Vol. VI. Fausboll 1964: 479-596). The character was Mandridēvi. Jātaka stories such as Andhabhūta, (*The Jātaka*, Vol. I. Fausboll, 1962: 289-295) Kaṇavera, (*The Jātaka*, Vol. III. Fausboll, 1963: 58-63) Siri Kālakaṇṇi, (*The Jātaka*, Vol. III. Fausboll, 1963: 257-264) Kōsiya (*The Jātaka*, Vol. I. Fausboll, 1962: 463-465) and Asātamantra emphasize very explicitly the bad qualities of women. (*The Jātaka*, Vol. I. Fausboll, 1962: 285-289). But, those characters reflect the working of the human mind, if those characters influence deeply. It could be said, therefore, that various aspects of women can be understood from the jataka stories.

Sandēśa poems have many exaggerated poems related to women. Sandēśa poets saw the woman who speaks good words as a good omen when someone starts a journey. Sri Rahula had expressed the importance of seeing pots full of water, air mixed with good omen, beautiful mangoes, white flowers, women who speak good words and golden pots than an auspicious time. It is mentioned in the *Sālaḷihini Sandēśa*. (Senanayake, 1972: v. 16).

In the above mentioned examples, there are various attitudes towards women in the society of ancient Sri Lanka. Some scholars paid attention to women according to western thought and they said that Lord Buddha also had expressed the view of women in a negative way. They cited the Satta Bhariyā Sutta of the Sattaka Nipātaya of Avyākata Vagga in the *Anguttara Nikāya* as an example. (Hardy, 1899: 91-94). But, Singālōvāda Sutta of the *Dīgha Nikāya* mentions that the good relation of the husband and wife may be very important in the domestic life. (Hardy, Vol. III. 1911: 180-193). It seems that they have ignored it. Husband should fulfill his responsibilities by doing things such as praising his wife, not blaming, not neglecting her wishes, giving resources and clothes to her. Although the Indian society considered woman as a part of husband, it was not found in practice. According to Buddhism, she had an honourable place. *Theri Gāthā* clearly show some stories in which how severe mental stress was relieved. Motherhood was considered to have a very high status in Buddhism. It is mentioned as *Mātā yathā niyaṃ puttāṃ*. Thus as a mother with her life, will guard her son, her only child, would maintain unboundedly, His thought for every living being. (Bhikkhu Nāṇamōli, 1960: 288). Hence, mother had an honorable place in the society of Sri Lanka. Finally, although there were many attitudes towards women as a mother, a wife, a daughter, a queen and a mahesi in ancient Sri Lankan society, the Sri Lankan society, which is influenced by Buddhism, did not treat her with contempt.

#### 1.4 Feasibilities in arts and women

In ancient Sri Lankan society music, playing musical instruments and dancing out of the various arts which had developed, had a prime place among women. *Mahāvamsa* mentions the words *gandabba* and *gandabbī* to refer to men and women respectively who were engaged in music as their occupation. (Geiger, 1992: 69: 24). The voice of women who sang was melodious, *Manōrathapūraṇi* describes that it was very attractive like the sound of the violin and Sankha. *Iththi payoga nippādito vīnā venu sankha paṇavādi saddopi iththi saddoya tevacha veditabbo* (Hewavitarana, 1923: 14).

Some sources record interesting facts related to the talent of music of women up to the Kotte kingdom. Those examples depict that women were not only experts in singing songs but also there was a trend of singing songs as an occupation. *Kuveṇi Sihabā and Dambadeṇi Asnas* report that there were lady singers who were singing and dancing from place to place. *tanhi tanhi gī kiya kiyā naṭa naṭa yana gāyaka strīn* (Gñāṇawimala, 1960). *Mayūra Sandēśa* mentions that there were women singers in every junction. (Gunawardhana, 1928: v. 126). There were lady singers who were playing with balls according to *Tisara Sandēśa*. (Jayathilake, 1938: v. 176) There were very beautiful women singers according to the *Kōkila Sandēśa*. (Gunawardhana, 1924).

Women in the medieval Sri Lankan society were very clever in music as well as playing musical instruments. Although *Dhātuvamsa* is not relevant to our period, it describes that some women played the pancha turya music. (*Dhātuvamsa*, 1984: 29). There were many women who were experts in the fields of singing, playing music and dancing according to *Saddharmālaṅkāra*. (Gñāṇawimala, 1954: 713).

The custom of engaging women in playing musical instruments existed in the Rohana region. It is clearly showed from a wall painting in Mulkirigala where figures of women play *horanāva* and *pantēru* as well as figures of women who play a drum kept on the lap. (Kulatilaka, 1974: 141). There are some beautiful women figures which depict playing musical instruments in a door-frame which is made of stone at Galapata Vihara, in the proximity of Bentota in Galle District. A woman plays mrudamga drum and another woman plays the flute. (Godakumbure, 1982: 9).

Women showed their cleverness in singing, playing musical instruments as well as in dancing. The women who had artistic abilities can be seen from the women who worked in the king's palace. Even some Brahmi inscriptions which are not relevant to our period, reveal women who were experts in dancing such as the sasseruva inscription which can be attributed to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC in the Kurunegala District of North-Western Province. It has the statement *naṭa culaba jhita naṭa dama (jhiya) samudaya*. (Paranavitana, 1970: 78). The meaning of this brahmi sentence is the actress, Samudda, the daughter of *cula* who is an actor. Similarly, we can glean facts about the actresses relevant to our period. Dancing was very well developed by the periods of Gampola and Kotte. It is revealed from the Sandesa poems. *Parevi Sandēśa* emphasizes that women danced very beautifully. Posture of the body, long eyes, neck, hands, red fingers, narrow laps, two feet and shoulders were the main part of the body used by women, when they danced. (Kumaratunga, 1958: v. 170).

The facts related to dancing and playing musical instruments can be gathered from the features of door-frames in many viharas. The figures of women which were dancing and playing musical instruments can be seen in a door frame at Galapata Vihara of Bentara. (Godakumbure, 1982: 9). Such figures can be seen also in a door-frame of Yapahuva. (Kulatilaka, 1974: 141). The actor which was depicted in the door frame of Galapata Vihara shows as *mandiyāṭa siṭṭina stri nāṭum vilāsaya* or the method of the dancing as staying in circle. Drama figures of Yapahuva, Gadaladeniya, and Ambakke which are considered as historical places were limited only to women. (*Ibid*, 1974: 121). Ediriweera Sarathchandra has concluded that figures of women in Yapahuva Vihara as a reflection of certain methods of dancing such as *chatura*, *karigasta*, *gandasūchi* and *nikunḷita*. (Sarathchandra, 1992: 30).

The Panca nāri ghaṭa or the pot of five women which is created in the door frame, made of ivory, in the Ridi Vihara of Kurunegala District can be considered as dancing of women. These figures were made as a pot including five women. Various methods of dancing such as *chaturāri pallākkiya*, *sapta nāri pallākkiya*, *aṣṭa nāri rathaya* and *navanāri kunjaraya* are depicted in ancient paintings. Two women dancing figures have been included as *doraṭupālas* or door controllers in the Ridi Vihara. Women were such experts in dancing, there were dancing groups of women in every Dēvālas in ancient Sri Lanka. (Kulatilaka, 1974: 120). Several coins and women statues which depict the expertise of dancing women have been found in archaeological excavations. These statues and figures of coins can be regarded as those of women who engaged in dancing in the king's palace. It clearly shows that ancient Sri Lankan women were very talented in playing musical instruments and dancing.

### 1.5 Costume and woman

This is a subject which have been greatly dealt with Martin Wickramasinghe, M. B. Ariyapala and Hettiaratchi (Wickramasinghe, 1960: 1-118). (Ariyapala, 1968: 1-415). (Hettiaratchi, 2008: 1-375). Our attempt is to review their findings and to discuss the material included in the ancient sources with a view to studying the costume of women during the period under survey. According to Rōhiṇi Vastuva of *Dhammapadaṭṭha Kathā*, it appears that Rōhiṇi did not cover the upper part of her body. When Anuruddha Thera came to the Kapilavastupura, a woman, by the name of Rōhiṇi, did not come to meet him, due to a skin disease. The therā summoned her and she came with a jacket covering her upper part of the body. *Dhammapadaṭṭha Kathā* gives the reason as *kaṭakañcukaṃ paṭimuñcivā āgataṃ*. (Dhammānanda and Gñānissara, 1931: 479). Based on this statement, Wickramasinghe and Ariyapala say that women did not cover the upper part of the body. (Wickramasinghe, 1960: 32-35). (Ariyapala, 1968: 320). Interpreting this statement in the *Dhampiyā Aṭuvā Gāṭapadaya* gives the meaning that because she had been requested by the Thera, she came to meet him removing the jacket and covered by a cloth. *sivi rovu piḷi seyanuvaṭa perevi paṭa kassa tuman kerehi gāvuren mudā tabā*. (Jayathilake, 1933: 226). But this statement is mentioned in the *Saddharmaratnāvali* as she came wearing a silk jacket. She said that she did not come, due to the disease of skin. It is mentioned as

*paṭa kaḍa sātṭayak ānga vasālāgena āvavunṭa hāi... svāmini heli basinṭa lajjā vana taram kushṭa rōgayak siyal sirura vasā āti viya. ē nisā lajjāven no ā bava mut niharasarava novei.*" (Oriental, 1985: 736).

The author of *Saddharmaratnāvali*, without any consideration of *Dhampiyā Aṭuvā Gāṭapadaya*, *Saddharmaratnāvali* has accepted the basic source. *Dhammapadaṭṭha Kathā* and *Saddharmaratnāvali* reveal the covering of the upper part of the body was an extraordinary action. Especially, these two sources emphasise that Rōhiṇi came wearing a jacket. These two statements further describe that she did not come, because she was very shy to show her upper part of the body. *kaṭakañcukaṃ*, according to the Pali- English Dictionary, means being tightened in by a bodice. (Rhys Davids, 1921-1925: 177). The word *kañcukaṃ* gives the meaning as a closely fitting jacket or a bodice. The word *paṭimuñcivā* denotes the real meaning as dressed in a closed bodice. (*Ibid.*, 176). Another place of the Pali- English Dictionary gives the meaning to the word *paṭimuñcati* as to fasten, to bind, to tie and put on. (*Ibid.*, 308). The word in *Dhampiyā Aṭuvā Gāṭapadaya*, *paṭa* means fine cloth, woven silk and cotton cloth. (*Ibid.*, 402; Sorata, 1963: 503). *Kassa* means, according to the Sri Sumangala Dictionary jacket or cloth. (Sorata, 1963 : 233). The word *gāvuren* gives the meaning as honorably. (*Ibid.*, 308). According to the above mentioned facts, the views of Martin Wickramasinghe and M. B. Ariyapala who were renowned scholars, that the women did not cover the upper part of the body cannot be accepted. This argument was rejected by M. Somathilake in the view of Sigiri

Painting. He says that the costumes of the upper part of the body of these women paintings are so soft ones, that the colour of the skin of them can be seen very easily. (Somathilake, 2002, Chapter seven). This can be considered as proof that generally women were covered in their upper part of the body. Rōhini wore the jacket in this time to cover her skin disease. *Dhampiyā Aṭuvā Gāṭapaday* mentions about the respect for the Maha Sangha. As have been pointed out by Martin Wickramasinghe (Wickramasinghe, 1960: 35) and M. B. Ariyapala (Ariyapala, 1968: 320) removing the dress of the upper part of the body was a custom from ancient time. It also cannot be accepted. As has been described earlier, women were influenced by Buddhism which arrived in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. Women behaved well and they were extremely shy and timid ones. Hindu practice was to keep open the upper part of the body. Clergy of Hindu religion open the upper part of the body and when devotees enter the Hindu Kovil, they remove their costume of upper part of the body. But, Buddhist monks never open the saffron robe of the upper part of the body, when they normally stay or do religious activities. Therefore, Buddhist practice was the covering of the full body. It is a more civilized tradition.

It should be noted that the removing of a cap and towel from the head were other customs. Wickramasinghe interpreted the word *paṭimuñcitavā* as having removed and kept a side (Wickramasinghe, 1960: 33-34). Even now a days, when a man or woman sees a monk, parents or other elders or she removes the cap. A cloth was used for covering shoulders, when women came out of home. Ciñci mānavikā vastuva mentions that as *devurayat baḍat vasā piliyak poravagena*, which means a cloth covering the shoulders and stomach. This is also show in the *ēkasāṭaka Brāhmana Vastuva*. It is mentioned as *taman handanaṭa ek kaḍak hā bāmiṇiyan handanaṭa ek kaḍek āta. Piṭata yana kaḷa dasaruva vasāgena yanṭa dennāṭa keṭiva eka uturu saḷuvek āta. Piṭata yana kala bamuñānan gei randavā bemiṇiṇiyo hō yeti. Bāmiṇiṇiyan gei randavā bamuñānō hō yeti.* (Oriental, 1985: 551).

This means that both, the Brahmin and his wife had only one upper cloth between them, and that when one goes out the other had to remain. Women of the lower strata of the society wore only to cover the lower part of the body. *Saddharmaratnāvali* mentions it as “*siṭu duvaṇiyan da devana davas kiluṭu adahas sēma kiluṭu kaḍa reddak koindō soyā hānda gena... Miḍives gat lesaṭa... (Oriental, 1985: 539).* It means that the daughter of the setṭhi is wearing a dirty piece of rag, ...like a servant. *Saddharmaratnāvali* further mentions as *kiliṭi kaḍak hānda gena hisakē vidālā sharīrayehi kuḍu galvāgena kalayak hāragena miḍiyaka hā ekva...* Wickramasinghe concludes under these examples that when women go out from homes they did not wear anything for the upper part of the body. But it cannot be accepted. Ancient Sinhalese poets called the cloth for upper part of the body the uturu saluva or upper cloth. (Wickramasinghe, 1960: 40-41). Uturu saluva is a dress worn in special occasions. *Kavsiḷumiṇa* also mentions the uturu saluva. (Ariyapala, Kantos 9, 1994 vv. 437, 565.). *Saddharmālamkāra* mentions that a woman was very shy to go to out without an uturu saluva. (SI, 1954: 264) *Saddharmaratnāvali* mentions about two clothes as *hāndagena giya salu sangala. (Oriental, 1985: 23).* *Pūjāvali* also describes two clothes as *iṇa tubū sāṭaka yugmaya. (Gñāṇawimala, 1986: 160).* A man wore one cloth to cover the upper and lower part of the body. *Pūjāvali* mentions that as *dahasak aganā kasī saḷu hānda dedahasak aganā kasī saḷu karaṭa damā* which means wearing a *kasi* cloth worth a thousand, and putting on the shoulders a cloth worth two thousand. (Ibid, 450). Same source describes that as

*śakra purayehi devanganak ē puren avut mihi mandalaṭa bāsapi kalak sē dahasak aganā kasī saḷu hānda dedahasak aganā uturu saḷu kara lā*

which means wearing clothes worth a thousand, and cloth worth two thousand... like Goddess who had descended to the earth. (Ibid: 524). *Saddharmaratnāvali* records as *saḷuvak hānda esēma saḷuvak*

*poravā* which means a cloth that is worn and also an upper cloth. (Oriental, 1985: 556). According to the description above mentioned, both men and women had used the *uturu saluva*. They got the *uturu saluva*, when they went outside the home. There are some statements about what the *uturu saluva* was. According to the *ēka Sāṭaka vastuva* as mentioned above, the upper cloth or *uturu saluva* was used for covering shoulders as in the statement *dasaruva vasā gena yanṭa*. Various descriptions can be read of the breasts and the line of hair from the navel of women. *Pūjāvali* tells that as *nāba piyumaṭa muvarada lolin basnā bhrungāvaliyak sē duṭu duṭuvan sit umatu karavana nil vasā roden hā...* (Gñāṇawimala, 1986: 301). *Kavsiḷumiṇa* mentions as

Dasa vamiyan visituru- rudu piyayuru mandalē

Dulupala koku mangarā- gī vī tede naravarā

(Ariyapala, 1994, v. 40).

According to these examples, it shows that women put an upper cloth covering the shoulders. The lower cloth was put with the navel visible.

*Kāvyaśēkhara* also refers about the *uturu saluva*.

Nokiyā siyā himi

ṭa

Nātivada uturu salupo

ṭa

Gaman ikman ko

ṭa

Noyan numba vasana gen piṭata

ṭa (Sumangala, 1946, 10, 17)

According to the preceding poem, “ you should not go out from home not informing the husband and without the *uturu saluva* as well as not in haste. *Uтуру saluva* is not a costume which covers whole body. It is a long piece of cloth. *Uтуру saluva* is put on after wearing the main custom of the body.

Pekaniya no

dakvā

saḷu ānda bolaṭa

dakvā

No pava tana

sakvā

Sinā noma sen dasan

dakvā (Sumangala, 1946, Kantos 10, 19)

This poem gives the meaning that should not be seen breasts with wearing the cloth up to the calf and the navel should not be seen as well. Thus, it cannot be said that women did not cover upper part of their bodies.

Women of high strata and lower strata of the society covered the whole part of the body. Women of *caṇḍāla* also covered the whole body. Swarnatilakā story of *Saddharmālaṃkāra* can be shown as an example for this. It mentions as *visituru vū karmānta āti dahasak vaṭana palasakin duvage sharīraya vasā poravā, tamā perava hun palasa mandak paha koṭa*; (Gñāṇawimala, 1954: 368). On the other hand, Tēbhātika *vastuva* of *Saddharmālaṃkāra* mentions that *chandālas* and Brahmanas wore yellow clothes. “*Brāhmana caṇḍālayōt kāśāya vastra perava gena avidināhumaya*.” (Gñāṇawimala, 1954: 322). Another statement of *Saddharmālaṃkāra* says that people of various castes *vaiśya śudrādīhu da brāhmanayō da yana häma denāma taman tamanṭa anurūpa vū vastrāḷankārayen sārāhī*. (Gñāṇawimala, 1954: 168). It should be noted here that Swarnatilakawore her upper cloth, when she went out of her residence. Aiyanger has clearly shown that even women of low caste in South India, wore dresses covering the whole body. Another statement of wearing a jacket can be seen in the *Saddharmaratnāvali. kirimavun uḍukaya sampūrṇayenma väsena sē sātṭa lā gena* This shows that women covered the upper part of the body. It is shown from the *anittigandha kumarugē* story. (Oriental, 1985: 242).

Gopalu women in the fourteenth century wore their dresses covering their whole body. *Tisara Sandēśa* describes the women who were engaged in animal husbandry in Moratuva. They wore a piece of cloth in the between hip and knees.

Lelavā tana bara gana ran kumbu vāni dana net veḷi	yē
Duhulānda uḍu daṇa mandala da sirisara pāmin eḷi	yē
Geri navatā yanena gopalu anganan dāka tunu heḷi	yē
Netu situ sanasamin sabanda noḷangava moratuva eḷi	yē

(Suraweera, 1991, v. 89).

*Tisara Sandēśa* also mentions that the women who were in Wilgama wore a piece of cloth covering the knees.

Kesā puḷul dulānda ānda daṇinuḍa	ma
Sisā ramin āda āda tanamin naru	ma
Tosā yanena gamvāsi anganan dāku	ma
Nisā nohinda yā ganu mānavi wil ga	ma

(Suraweera, 1991: v. 126).

Silk clothes were the major material for costumes. *Visuddhimārga Sanna* describes Chinese silk (china patta) and sōmāra silk (Sōmāra paṭṭa). (Vajiragnāna, *Visuddhimārga Sanna*, 1927: 388.). According to the Sri Sumangala Dictionary, sōmāra denotes the sōmāra dēsa. (Sorata, 1963: 1093). *Saddharmaratnāvali* tells about various clothes. Some of them were made of tihiri, a kind of tree. *Dhampiyā Aṭuvā Gāṭapadaya* gives the interpretation of the word *kōseyya* as *tihiripili*. (Jayathilake, 1933: 119). *komupili*, were made of the tread of komu trees (*Visuddhimārga Sanna*, 1888: 282) and kasi salu. (Oriental, 1985: 976).

Personal ornamental and decorative arts of women should be mentioned here. According to the *Kavsiḷumiṇa*, women tied hair into a knot and flowers were worn in the knot.

*Pāhāsara saranga maldam- banda muhulasa* (Ariyapala, 1994, v. 40).

*Ḷahopalu kasuma bada – dī muhulu kārā muhulu* (Ariyapala, 1994, v. 40).

Tying the hair was a salient feature in both high caste and low caste women. *Saddharmaratnāvali* describes that *dāsis* were tied to the hair very loosely as mentioned *miḍiyange lesaṭa līl koṭa hisa kē bānda gena*. (Oriental, 1985: 539). Women of high caste tied the hair very large and raised and not loosely hanging. *Kavsiḷumiṇa* expresses the statement as *dī muhulu kārā muhulu*. *Saddharmālaṃkāra* says about a decoration of plaits and tying hair. The statement *isakē gotā bānda* of *Saddharmālaṃkāra* confirms that. (Gnanawimala himi, 1954: 522). It also mentions the statement *karal koṭa isakē gotā piṭa helā*. It means that the hair was woven into plaits like pods or ears, and allowed to hang on the back. (Gnanawimala himi, 1954: 295). *Saddharmaratnāvali* further describes the procedure of cleaning and tidying of hair in various ways. It is mentioned as

mē hisakē vaḍā pirimasannavunṭa āṭṭāl solosek āta. ē solasa nam kavārēda yat.? Hisakē siṭuvannāhu mura novaradavā sēduva mānava. Pān nosiṭuvā hiṇigānnuva mānava. Bandinaṭa perātu hisakē tānuva mānava. Tel gā panti kaḷa mānava. Hisa sōdhapī kaḷaṭa mal sevva mānava. Mila dī uvat suvanda sevva mānava. Suvanda gālluva mānava. Panā gāsuva mānava. Avul kaḍā pīruva mānava. Ukunan hārauva mānava. Nara penena kaḷaṭa karuppu luva mānava. (Oriental, 1985: 68).

Meaning of this statement can be thought as those who have long hair must wash it regularly, must be dried it, and must dress it before tying up. Oil has to be applied, flowers should be worn, it must be scented even at some cost, scented creams must be applied, a comb must be used; it must be welcomed, lice must be removed; when it grows grey it must be dyed. Other than those applied to the hair, there may have been various cosmetics which were applied to the body. The author of *Saddharmaratnāvali* emphasizes this as



pālandagena ketek ābharaṇa luvat sil namāti ābharaṇayaṭa vaḍanā ābharaṇayak nāta. Suvanda vilavun gannavunṭa sil namāti suvandaṭa vaḍā suvandakut nāta.(Oriental, 1985: 29).

Those who wear ornaments, say that there is no ornament better than that of sila, there is no scent better than that of sila. It is known about applying of *kumkumagara* on the breasts by the statement *kokumangara piyavure*, (Ariyapala, 1994, v. 322). *angarāgayana tavarā*. (Gnanawimala, 1986: 707). It is shown in some sources applying scents to the body of women. *Is sōdhā nahā mal suvanda pālanda*, (Oriental, 1985: 190) The eyebrows were painted with collyrium. It can be seen in the statements *nuvanathi andunadamin*, (Ariyapala, 1994, v. 363). *andun gā sārāhū ās* (Oriental, 1985: 125). Sandal wood paste was applied on the whole body of women. *Sakala sarīrayehi sandun kalka tavarāgena sav barana la sārāhī mal pālanda*.(Oriental, 1985: 51). *Visuddhi Mārga Sannaya* describes the applying the sandal wood paste in hands and the use of kinds of scent which were called *mallikā* and *tagara*. (Vajiragnāna, 1927: 96). Sometimes *Saddharmaratnāvali* says that an ointment (*nānu*) or a composition was used for cleaning the hair. (Oriental, 1985: 365). *Saddharmaratnāvali* further refers to four kinds of scents as *sivudā ganda* or *suvanda*. Those are *kokum*, *yonpup*, *tuvaralā* and *turuk* oil which mean saffron, sandal-wood, frankincense and fragrant oil. (Oriental, 1985: 640). Women much desired to mark a *tilaka* on the forehead and wear a flower garland on the head. (Oriental, 1985: 678). *Saddharmaratnāvali* has the statement *hisa mal damak sisāra lā*". (Oriental, 1985: 409). *Saddharmālaṃkāra* describes of wearing of a flower garland on the head made of *idda* (*Wrightia zeylanica*) flowers. (Gnanawimala, 1954: 541). There are some descriptions about hair stylists according to some sources. *Saddharmaratnāvali* records the hair stylist as *andam tabana karaṇavāmiyaṭa andam tabannē kavaraḍāda*. (Oriental, 1985: 235). The term *andam* is very important here. It means the style. Therefore, it can be thought that hair was cut in a variety of styles in the medieval period.

According to the references of ornaments, all ornaments were worn according to the expression of *sav barāṇa lā sārāhī*. According to *Saddharmaratnāvali*, some ornaments were *pāmudu* (toe rings), *pāḍagam* (anklets), *mudu* (rings), *vaḷalu* (bangles), *mut-hara* (chain of pearls), *Tōdu* (ear rings), *tisara* (neck ornament), *samkhalā*, *kai bandhi* (body band). (Oriental, 1985: 4, 21, 262, 844, 945). *Pūjāvali* records the *gela mutudam* (strings of pearls for the neck), *kondola* (earrings) and *ridī savaḍi* (silver waist chain). (Gnanawimala, 1986: 218, 405). Some verses of *Kavsiḷumiṇa* describe the *mevul dam* (girdle band), *ran dam* (gold chain), *rasan dam* (tinkling chain) and *piyayuru muthara vāla* (a chain of pearls for the breasts). (Ariyapala, 1994, vv. 9, 147, 266, 702). *Saddharmālaṃkāra* gives a very long list of names of women's ornaments such as *tisara paṭa*, *pāmudu*, *pāḍagam*, *ruvan tanapaṭa*, *pavutilingam*, *paṭṭakāra*, *kuṇḍalābharaṇa*, *nūpura*, *tāḍaṃga*, *rantōḍu*, *ekvāṭi*, *pāmudu*, *pāsalamba*, *pāḍagam*, *sadaṃgā*, *oravasun*, *vijaya vastra*, *kakusanda*, *pādaṃguli*. (Gnanawimala, 1954: 96). *Saddharmaratnāvali* mentions some ornaments of women such as *pāmudu* and *pāḍagam* by the statement *gānunṭa uvamanā pāmudu pāḍagam ādi vū ābharaṇa*. (Oriental, 1985: 461). Women much desired *koṇḍa mal* or wreaths for the hair. (Gnanawimala, 1954: 182). *Pūjāvali* also mentions some women ornaments such as *pāda pādaṃguli*, *pāda kaṭaka*, *pas rū*, *pas perahāra*, *ekvāṭi*, *pāmudu*, *ranmirivādi*, *pāḍagam*, *hiṇa kesvāla*, *siri paḷalu*, *depaṭa vidyā*, *angul dasaru*, *bāhu daṇḍa*, *mutuvāla*, *galamutu mālā*, *māṇik mālā*, *dākan*, *pasevi kandasa*, *aṃgā tilaka*, *miṇidam*, *nīla mātrā*, *mudu* and *oṭunu*. (Gnanawimala, 1986: 129). We always hear about the *mevul dam* or girdle band. Wilson's Sanskrit Dictionary gives several meanings with regard to the word *Mekhalā*. Some of them are a woman's girdle or zone, a sword knot, the edge or swell of a mountain, a sword belt etc. The Slab Inscription of Sāhassamalla mentions a golden waist band as *mevāni daruvan lada ovunṭa vādi satkāra kaḷamaṇa vedāi movun māṇiyaṇṭa lankātilaka mahā dēvi yāi nam dī badāran paṭa bandavā...* (Wickramasinghe., Vol. II, 1929: 223). (*Kavsiḷumiṇa* also mentions the girdle band by a verse.

Piyayuru barusulā- no sähäevu mevulni duvan

Debarin yuga danga - nuru rävní guguranavan

(Ariyapala, 1994, v. 205).

The meaning of this prose is due to the sound produced by the garland band, the waist seems to roar being unable to bear the weights of the breasts. Another verse of *Kavsiḷumiṇas* says the sound of the anklets as well as the girdle band to the music of cupid. (Ariyapala, 1994, v. 293). Some scholars describe the girdle band as an ornament for the genital organ. According to the description of poets, it might mean that *mevul dama* was worn not on the upper side but on the lower side. This was originally worn to decorate the hips and the waist. And this view appears to be borne out, in the main, by the references to the *mevuldama* found in Sinhalese literature from the 15<sup>th</sup> century AC. (Senanayake, 1972, v. 9).

This city's wall with strong broad gates and bars, the jewelled breast-band represents, assumed by the fair proud dame lanka in her youth, her crest Samanta , and see her zone. Many references can be gleaned Sandesa poems and Kavyasekara. (Senanayake, 1972, v. 43, 56; Sumangala, 1946, Kantos 06, 23; MS, v.84; Kumaratunge, v.173; HS, v. 88; Senanayake, 1972, v. 74; Kumaratunge, 1958, v. 56).

Another very remarkable ornament is the necklace or *tälla*. This has been pointed out by the Hettiaratchi. (Hettiaratchi, 2008: 88). Sigiri graffiti mentions as

No heḷillā mekī bithi dig netak mai

tepalan piyovur mājā kaḷa la muka ärä nil tällak'.

This means 'did not the long eyed one on the wall – the fair one – say this to me : Open your mouth and speak after having placed between the breasts, blue necklet (speacially) prepared. (Paranavitana, 1956: v. 219). This expression hints that if her life partner wants to develop more intimate connections with her, he should wear a *tälla* in her neck. Bridegroom wears the *tälla* on the bride and with that she becomes legally bound and owned to the bridegroom. Wearing *tälipili* is a custom among Sinhalese and Hindus. Bride is decorated by the bridegroom with as witnesses relatives of both parties who are participating at a wedding during the rituals of *pōruva* ceremony. Queroze in 16<sup>th</sup> century described the wearing *tälipili* and weddings. Thus he said;

Among almost all the castes and families of this heathen Industan the essence of the contract of matrimony consists in the handing of the jewel of called Tale, which the bridegroom ties round the neck of the Bride with a cotton thred tinged with saffron. In which matter they have a barbarous custom the marriege, for after the parents have settlled the contract among themselves and have fixed a day for the marriage... (De Queroze, 1930: 88).

Sri Rahula therā in 15<sup>th</sup> century also refers to this jewellery. (Sumangala, 1946: 06, 22). It is mentioned here *ruvanhara mananada* as the *tälla* or golden necklace. Apparently, Thurstan says that the marriage badge occurred in Southern India. (Thurstan, 1909: VII, p. 3). There were many interrelations between Sri Lanka and South India. However, Hettiaratchi emphasizes that *tälla* custom is not a Tamil one as a whole. (Hettiaratchi, 2008: 87). It is a common custom of Hindus which remained among Aryan and Non- Aryans. Therefore, this custom was common both to Sri Lankans and Indians. There is no sufficient data to confirm that this custom came from Indian migrants or aborigines of Sri Lanka. However, there is some evidence that some women had worn necklaces even in pre- Historic period.

## 1.6 Conclusion

We have now completed the task of the describing the history and vicissitudes of the status and condition of women in the course of medieval history of Sri Lanka. We saw how the status of women under the characters of infertile woman, virtue of woman and widow as well as their abilities of arts and costumes of

women as went on changing in the course of time. As indicated at the very beginning, this study is necessarily limited, because of the nature of the available evidence. It may, however, be seen that the comparative study of the available data in chronicles, inscriptions and other sources throw, at least, some light on the social life of women. In the light of these examples, one may conclude that as far as the history of the women in the Island up to the present time is concerned, our period marks a very important phase. Finally, it should be said that Buddhist attitudes greatly influenced the Sri Lankan society to maintain the women's position high of medieval Sri Lanka.

## References

- Ariyapala, M. B. (1968). *Society in Mediaeval Ceylon*, Colombo: Departmental of Cultural Affairs.
- Ariyapala, M. B. (ed.), (1994). *Kavsilumiṇa*, Colombo: S. Godage and Brothers.
- Bhikkhu Ñāṇamōli, (Tr.) (1960), *Khuddaka Nikāya, Metta Sutta: The Lovingkindness Discourse*, London: Pali Text Society, pp. 265-296.
- De Queraoz, Fernāo (1930). *The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, Book I, (Tr.), S. G. Perera, Colombo: Acting Government Printer.
- Dhammānanda and Gñānissara, (ed.), (1931). *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā*, Colombo: Book Publishing Center.
- Fausboll, V. (ed.), (1962). *Jātaka*, Vol. I. London: P.T.S.
- Fausboll, V. (ed.), (1963). *Jātaka*, Vol. III. London: P.T.S.
- Fausboll, V. (ed.), (1963). *Jātaka*, Vol. IV. London: P.T.S.
- Fausboll, V. (ed.), (1963). *Jātaka*, Vol. V. London: P.T.S.
- Fausboll, V. (ed.), (1964). *Jātaka*, Vol. VI. London: P.T.S.
- Geiger, Wilhelm (Tr.). (1992). *Mahāvamsa*, Part II, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services.
- Gñāṇawimala, Kiriālle (ed.), (1954). *Saddharmālaṃkāra*, Colombo: M. D. Gunasena and Company,
- Gñāṇawimala, Kiriālle (ed.), (1960). *Kuveni Sihabā and Dambadeṇi Asna*, Colombo: M. D. Gunasena and Company.
- Gñāṇawimala, Kiriālle (ed.), (1986). *Pūjāvali*, Colombo: M. D. Gunasena and Company.
- Godakumbure, C. E. (1982). *Sinhalese Doorways*, Colombo: Archaeological Department.
- Gunawardhana, W. F. (ed.), (1924). *Kōkila Sandēśa*, Colombo: Vidyasagara Press.

- Gunawardhana, W. F. (ed.), (1928). *Mayūra Sandēśa*, Colombo:Vidyasagara Press.
- Hardy, E (Tr.), (1889). *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, London: Pali Text Society.
- Hardy, E (Tr.), (1911). *Digha Nikāya*, London: Pali Text Society.
- Hettiaratchi, S. B. (2008). *Lankāve samāja ha sanskrutika ithihāsaya*, In Sinhala, (Social and Cultural History of Sri Lanka), a Publication of author.
- Hevavitarana, Simon (ed.), (1923). *Manōrathapūraṇī, Aṅguttaranikāyaṭṭhakathā*, Colombo.
- Jayathilake, D. B. (ed.). (1933). *Dhampiyā Aṭuvā Gātapada*, Colombo: Lankābhinava Vishruta Press.
- Jayathilake, D. B. (ed.), (1938). *Tisara Sandēśa*, Colombo: Lankabhinava Vishruta Press.
- Kulatilaka, C. de S. (1974). *Laṅkāvē Saṃgīta Sambhavaya* (The Birth of Music in Sri Lanka), In Sinhala, Colombo: Lake House Investments Company.
- Munidasa, Kumaratunga (ed.), (1958). *Parevi Sandēśa Vivaraṇaya*, Colombo: Anula Press.
- Oriental Languages Company, (ed.), (1985). *Saddharmaratnāvali*, Colombo: S. Godage and Company.
- Paranavitana, S. (ed.), (1956). *Sigiri Graffiti*, Vol. II, , Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Paranavitana, S. (ed.), (1970), *Inscriptions of Ceylon*, Vol. I, Colombo: The Department of Archaeology.
- Rhys- Davids, T. W and Stede, W. (1921-1925). *Pali- English Dictionary*, London: P. T. S.
- Saratchandra, Edirivira (1992). *Sinhala Gāmi Nāṭakaya*, Maharagama: Institute of National Education.
- Senanayaka, G. S. B. (ed.), (ed.) (1972). *Sāḷalihiṇi Sandēśa*, Colombo : Pradeepa Publishers.
- Somathilake, Mahinda (2002). *Ancient Buddhist Mural Painting of India and Sri Lanka*, Wellampitiya: Godage International Publishers (Pvt) Ltd.
- Sorata, W. (1963). *Sri Sumangala Dictionary*, Colombo: Anula Press.
- Sumangala, Hikkaduve (ed.), (1946). *Kāvyaśēkhara*, Colombo: Ratnakara Press.
- Suraweera, A. V. (ed.), (1991), *Tisara Sandēśa*, Colombo: S. Godage International Publishers (PVT) Ltd.
- Vajiragnāna, Parawahera (ed.), (1927). *Visuddhi Mārga Sannaya*, Colombo: Mahabodhi Press.
- Wickramasinghe, D. M. de Z (ed.), (1929). *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, Vol. II. London: Oxford University Press.
- Wickramasinghe, Martin (1960). *Dress and Ornament in Ancient Ceylon*, Maharagama: Saman Press.