THE LANGUAGE OF THE SIGIRI POEMS*

No serious scholar, who is conversant with modern linguistics or theories of communication, would now consider language as only a medium that conveys messages. As Marshall McLuhan has ably argued, *'medium is the message'* itself.[1] This is especially true with regard to literature, i.e. creative literature, for in a literary creation there is no other reality except the language that is used therein. When we talk of 'language' in literature, it is conventionally taken as something other than the 'content' or 'meaning'. The Indian theory of poetics treats *śabda* (language) and *artha* (meaning) as the most important components of poetry.

While this may be acceptable for commonsense purposes, it becomes a farfetched notion when *śabda*, or language, is treated as *śarira*, the 'body', and meaning, or *artha*, the 'soul' (ātma) of poetry. Even Vāmana, the famous Indian exponent of the *rīti-vāda* (theory of style), who regards *rīti* as the very soul of poetry bases his arguments on the *śabda-artha* dichotomy. Other important features that go to make a poem, such as prosody, rhyme and alliteration are treated as extraneous to language. However, a moment's reflection shows that all such features have to be identified in the language and not outside it. This idea of 'wholeness', according to Piaget[2] is a basic tenet of structuralism, where structure is understood as something different from aggregate.

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* I wish to thank Dr. Senaka Bandaranayake, for encouraging me to expand and revise the original seminar version of this paper. The section II of the paper is freshly added here. I also wish to thank my friend, Charles Hallisey who read through the original paper and made numerous suggestions. The term 'metaphoric statement' was suggested by him.

1. Marshall Mc Luhan, *Understanding Media*, Signet, (1964) p. 24-25.

2. Jean Piaget, *Structuralism*, London, (1971) p. 411.

The constituent parts of a structure have no independent existence outside the structure. Apart from 'wholeness', Piaget also assigns two other dimensions to language, namely, the capacity for transformation and self-regulation. In order that a structure may not remain static or passive, it should have the capacity for transformation. In language new material is constantly transformed and processed through structuring. The language is self-regulating in the sense that it does not appeal beyond itself in order to validate its transformational procedures. According to Roland Barthes, "Language is literature's Being, its very world; the whole of literature is contained in the act of writing, and not in those of 'thinking', 'portraying', 'telling', or 'feeling'.[3] According to Roman Jakobson, "The distinctive feature of poetry lies in the fact that a word is perceived as a word and not merely a proxy for the denoted object, or an outburst of an emotion, that words and their arrangement, their meaning, their outward and inward form acquire weight and value of their form".[4] Poetic language, according to Roman Jacobson is a specially intensified language in which *signifiers* become *signifieds*. "The repetition of sound and rhythmic structures characteristic of poetry and embodied in conventionalized formulae such as rhyme, alliteration and metre have therefore no reference to a 'reality' beyond the poem, but derive from conventions arising within the particular language involved".[5]

The monumental work of the late Professor Senerat Paranavitana the *Sigiri Graffiti*,[6] deals with practically all aspects of the Sigiri poems. Although Paranavitana treats the sections on *Grammar*, *Prosody*, *The Literary Quality of the Documents and Subject Matter of the Documents* as distinct topics in his long introduction, the perspective adopted here makes it possible to discern much that is covered by these topics to be within the "language" of the poems. Subsequent authors who dealt with the Sigiri poems too have written about their

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3. Roland Barthes, *Science Versus Literature* (1967) quoted in Michael Lane, *Structuralism, a Reader*, Jonathan Cape & Co. (1970) p. 411.

4. Roman Jakobson, in Terence Hawks ed. *Structuralism and Semiotics* 2nd ed. (1978) Methuen & Co. Ltd., p. 64.

5. Jakobson, *ibid.*

6. Senerath Paranavitana, *Sigiri Graffiti*, 2 vols. 1st ed.(1956)

language. However, Paranavitana's contribution remains the only serious study. The language corpus we are handling here is that of poetry and not of ordinary language. Although we could make a general study of the language on linguistic lines and give its historical importance, etc., I have subscribed myself to the structuralist persuasion and wish to study the language of the Sigiri poems from the point of view of its aesthetic, synchronic and diachronic aspects in an integrated way.

Apart from this primary view of language in poetry, three more considerations merit our attention in discussing the language of the graffiti. These are, problems of interpretation, structural grammar of the language, and its historical and comparative significance.

II

In this section an attempt is made to focus our attention on the interpretation of the graffiti by Paranavitana. As the introduction of the *Sigiri Graffiti* indicates, Paranavitana was concerned about his own interpretations on the graffiti, and was perturbed at the silence of the Sinhalese scholars, who did not venture to offer their own views. There are many words that are found only in the graffiti and Paranavitana took great pains to explain them. As a result of Paranavitana's arduous labours we now have this great work the *Sigiri Graffiti* which cannot easily be superseded. The section on *Grammar* in its introduction provides for the first time a serious grammar for the language of any historical stage of Sinhalese; the section on the *Literary Quality of the Documents* provides, though in an ad hoc manner, criteria for appreciating the Sigiri poems on the basis of some of the best maxims of both Indian and European theories of poetics. As Paranavitana has been extremely careful about his interpretation of the Graffiti, we rarely come across lapses. However, as our task now is that of re-discovering Sigiriya, I have included comments on some poems which could be interpreted differently.

These verses have been published in Sinhalese, with short notes, and rendered into modern Sinhalese by Nandasena Mudiyanse,

(*Sigiri Gī*, 2 volumes)[7] but he rarely tried to give fresh interpretations. Professor P.E.E. Fernando has re-interpreted some verses. He, in his evaluation of Paranavitana's work, was keen on palaeographic problems as well as interpretation of the meanings of the verses.[8]

When we work through the *Sigiri Graffiti* a question that repeatedly comes to our mind is whether the verses are properly read and interpreted. Paranavitana himself has substantially changed his own earlier readings (compare verses found in his article *'Sigiri Graffiti'* in the JRAS[9] (CB) 34, 92, (1939) p. 304 - 406 with those of the *S.G.*), so that we could expect other such instances as well. There are many instances where he tried to fill in the gaps. In doing so he has resorted to some forms and expressions that we usually come across in the graffiti. This may be a proper procedure of restoration when we treat inscriptional records dealing with legal documents or royal decrees where conventionalized expressions are found in abundance. However, if the same principle is adopted in regard to creative writing, the result may not be fair by the writers.

As also noted by P.E.E. Fernando, the reading of the graffiti was sometimes dependent on the meaning that could be assigned to the verses.[10] For example, Paranavitana takes G. 366 to be identical with G. 185; however, in G. 185 the two lengthy expressions. ... *nagulavana japaka geti*... and ... *sabada apa nodi*... are restorations by the author. I do not deny the fact that there were 'thieves' among the writers of the graffiti. As the writing of verses was a communal enterprise in those days, plagiarism was not such a sensitive issue as it is now; in fact it was very much rampant; nevertheless, in our restorations we should be more careful.

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7. Nandasena Mudiyanse, *Sīgiri Gī*, 2 vols. Gunasena, Colombo (1963).

8. P.E.E. Fernando, *Saṃskṛiti: Paranavitana Felicitation Number* (1972) p. 63-67.

9. Senerath Paranavitana, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (Ceylon Branch= vol. 34, no. 92 (1939) p. 304-406.

10. P.E.E. Fernando, *ibid.*

A.V. Suraweera interprets the word *mahavan*, which occurs several times in the graffiti, as 'dark coloured ladies' which Paranavitana takes to mean 'forgive'. Suraweera derives it from Sanskrit *śyamavarna* > *samavanna* > *samavan*, (and by metathesis) *mahavan;* this is a plausible explanation.[11]

Some verses could be differently interpreted. Take, for example, the following:

Kinen asad-bada āyunnahaṭ no baṇata
Topa pärä piya maḷa no e maḷa tad la ättayinaṭ (G.10)

("O faithless one, wherefore did your lover of former times die (even) when you do not speak to those who are come here? Did he not die on account of those possessing hard hearts?")

This verse, which Paranavitana takes as a statement by a visitor, could also be rendered as a question and a retort. If we take ... *tad ḷa ättayinaṭ e maḷa no* ... as the proper word order for the last part of the poem: it means "to those who possess hard hearts he is dead". This appears as a retort by the ladies to those who regard them as faithless ones. Grammatically too ...*tad-la-attayinat* becomes more meaningful with the latter interpretation. Also it provides a fitting answer to the visitors who taunted the ladies as faithless; as suggested in the poem the writer's lover is still alive for her; at least she imagines so.

G. 122, which is tentatively interpreted (see G. 122.2, note 5) may be rendered differently. The second pada of the poem, *udayag'hi me sisi räs yaha (pas) no(lay) kahaṭ* ("To whom do these beams of the moon on the Udaya mountain not bring comfort"), if interpreted as "to whom does the moon-light of hers that appear in the morning not bring comfort?" contrasts with the previous statement which says "to them of this manner, what use is the moon-light?" *Udayag'hi* therefore need not be taken as Udaya mountain, but simply as morning.

G. 238 is interpreted as "The golden coloured one on the mountain side appears as if (she) is playing *paja*, and having coaxed them, touched the men on the rock, who are incessantly maddened in their minds". If we re-construct the word order

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11. A.V. Suraweera, *Vidyodaya Journal of Arts, Science and Letters*, vol v, nos. 1 & 2, p. 42-46.

as ... *girē mat vū sitina ekvana pirimina nalavaya beyadahi ranavana paja kelimina pahasa kala ...*, it may be rendered as "The golden coloured one on the mountain side, who coaxed the men (who are gathered) on the rock and who associate with her mentally, insults them by being engaged in *paja* game".

In this rendering I have taken *girē mat vū* to mean "those on the rock" and *pahasa* to mean 'insult'. Professor Paranavitana says that the *paja* game mentioned in the verse is not clear and is not referred to in our classical literature. This could actually be the same game referred to as *penda, peda, pandu* or *genda* in literature, which is ball-playing. According to literary sources, it is played mainly by women. Actually some of the paintings depict women with open hands, as if they are throwing a ball. Paranavitana takes *ekvana sitina* as "incessantly maddened in their mind", which could simply be, "to associate with by mind", which is suggestive of erotic associations. The lady here insults the men by disregarding their eager desire to *associate with her* by being engaged in ball-playing.

In instances where we get the double negative as in ... *kenda novana niya nove* ... (G. 254), one has to carefully decide whether to take it as a statement, an affirmative question, or a simple question.

In G. 603 ... *me kata tamalavan* is explained by Paranavitana as "copper-lipped damsel" and in a note says that this may be explained also as "of the colour of *tamala* leaves". However, if we take this expression as ... *me kata tama lavan nobini* ... where the compound *tamalavan* is broken up as *tama lavan*, its meaning becomes clear. What is actually meant is that "this lady did not speak her lips", a metaphorical expression that she did not make even the slightest attempt to talk. Other such expressions are ... *tol no bini* ..., which is same as the above, and ... *sit nobini*... "did not speak the mind".

G. 595, which is considered as one of high poetic merit, may be re-examined here to demonstrate the importance of the re-interpretation of the graffiti. This quatrain runs,

Hamul maru jahas suyuhassandallā
Turu gal ko hal hū mala-galhi hällā

Gaṇanin mut kalab kaḷa tamba-ḷa-paḷḷā
Pä räya digäs ta dun hasun kum vāḷḷa

("The wind blew. Thousands and hundreds of thousands of trees, which had put forth buds, fell down. The curlew uttered shrieks. Torrents came forth in the Malaya mountain. The night was made to be of the glow of tender copper-(coloured) leaves by fire-flies beyond count. O long-eyed one, the message given by you - what sustenance does it afford?")

The scene depicted here is that of a night in the early rainy season. Paranavitana takes ... *jahas-suyuhassan-dal-a* in combination with *turu gaḷ*, which, according to him means "thousands and hundreds of thousands of trees which had put forth buds fell down", It is difficult to comprehend why only those trees that put forth buds fell down. Actually it is not necessary to connect the two expressions. *Turu gaḷ kohaḷ hū*, if word order is built up in this manner and not as *ko haḷ hu*, as Paranavitana has done, may mean, "In the forest the jackal cried;" (*turu vadula* : Sanskrit *ghaṭa* as found in *vana ghaṭa* etc., can give rise to *gaḷ* here). Paranavitana takes *ko hū haḷ* "the curlew shrieked". It is unlikely that the curlew shrieked at night, and if at all we press for the curlew's presence, we may render the expression as "the curlew gave up (*haḷ*) its cry". However, we do not associate the *hū* cry with the curlew, but with the jackal. (*Kohaḷ* can be derived from Sanskrit *kroṣṭu*. Prakrit *kolhuya/kuḷha;* compare also Hindi *kohḷa*, Gujarati *kohḷu* and Marathi *koḷha;* metathesis of *h/ḷ* in Prakrit and Marathi; Sinhalese, Gujarati and Hindi retains the *hl* combination, but Sinhalese has the svarabhakti vowel 'a' to break the conjoint). Again, *pä räya* of the last pada Paranavitana connects with the third pada. If we take only *pä* to combine with *tamba-ḷa-paḷḷā pä* the expression would be, *gaṇanin mut kalab tamba ḷa palḷā pä kaḷa*, "countless fire-flies made tender copper-coloured buds shine". Finally, *digäs räya ta dun hasun kum vāḷḷa* means "O long eyed one, the message given by you in the night - what sustenance does it afford?". The reinterpreted meaning would be:

"The wind blew. Thousands and hundreds of thousands of buds burst forth. In the forest the jackal cried. Torrents came forth from the

mountain. Countless fireflies gave a glow to the tender copper-hued leaves. O long eyed one, the message given by you this night - what sustenance does it afford"?

In a wider sense interpretation includes all explanational and critical procedures, as well as grammatical analysis at a lower level. After 'heuristic reading' an interpreter is engaged in 'retroactive' or 'hermeneutic reading' of a literary discourse. In the semiotics of poetry, language expresses concepts by indirection.[12] True poetry, according to the semiotic approach, does not make sense at the mimetic level; it is at the level of semiosis that poetry makes sense.

Now, if we turn back to the above poem, which we were dealing with, even after the new interpretation it appears as elusive as before. The final sentence of the poem functions here as the climax and clicks, as it were, the sequence of phrases and helps them to assume the capacity for metaphorization and symbolization. The message of the woman is not defined here and has to be discovered by retroactive consideration. The natural phenomena depicted are disturbing as well as creating hope for the writer. In the haunting night of wind, rain, glowing fire-flies and cry of the jackal, the message of the lady is one of hope and despair.

A careful examination would undoubtedly reveal more such instances that need reinterpretation, in fact there are many instances where slight changes are possible, which I do not wish to include here. However, another type of interpretation is possible on the basis of poems dealing with identical

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12. For Semiotics of Poetry see:
Culler, Jonathan: *The Semiotics of Poetry*, in *Semiotic Themes* ed. R.T. Lawrence de George, University of Kansas (1981) p. 75-93.

John, K. Sheriff, *Charles S. Pierce and the Semiotics of Literature* in *Semiotic Themes* ed. R.T. Lawrence de George, University of Kansas Publications (1981) p. 51-74.

Terrence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics*, 2nd ed. Methuen & Company Ltd. (1978) p. 59-106.

objects of reference. An object of curiosity and of mystery is the mirror wall of Sigiriya. There are several verses that refer to it. Poetical allusions to it may be helpful to discover its location at this particular point. Some of these verses suggest that the mirror wall was meant to reflect the paintings, although Paranavitana's renderings do not bring this out. My curiosity over this was aroused when reading through the G. 593, which has the expression, *tubu se no tama yenu bala ju no dãka kaṭa bitä tibu seya*, which Paranavitana renders as "even without having seen the manner in which the mirror wall was there, is it after having seen (Sihigiri) as it is that you are going". However, *'kaṭa bitä tibu seya'* could also mean "the reflection that is in the mirror wall" (*seya*. Sanskrit chaya).

A similar expression is repeated in G. 511, which reads as *'bälumo sisikisni kaṭa bit tubu sey ara'*, which is rendered as "we saw the manner in which the wall made of moon-stone was existing there". This also could mean "we saw the reflections that are on the moon-stone wall" (moon-stone wall obviously refers to the mirror wall).

In G. 398 *'balumo käṭ bita pähädul'* is explained as "we looked at the mirror wall", but Paranavitana says in note 3 to the verse that in the original there is an *ä* matra which he treats as extraneous. If the reading is *käṭbitä* we get the meaning "in the mirror-wall". As Paranavitana has made some crucial restorations in the text nothing further could be said of this verse. However, it refers to something that was reflected in the mirror wall.

In G. 556 which has *'balananaṭa ramaṇi ahasa pokaṇa käṭabiti'*, these words are rendered as "the sky, the pond and the mirrorwall are delightful to look at". Paranavitana says, that in the original there is *'ä'* in *pokunä;* if so it should mean, "in the pond". Again, *käṭabiti* has 'i' suffix, which is not explained. This clause in its original version could be rendered as "the sky reflected in the pond of mirror wall is delightful to look at". Here the mirror wall is compared to a pond, for the reflections that reach from above appear in it as though in a pond.

In G. 680 the poet imagines that a lady in the paintings appears as though coming towards a resplendent mirror, which is the wall. In G. 145, there is the expression *sadakat pavra mese dilenu gena tupa siribara*, which is rendered as "it is by having borrowed the abundance of your splendour that the shining of the wall of moonstone is like this". Paranavitana says that the wall of moonstone may refer to the gallery wall. However, it could be the mirror wall, for, there is no reason why they should describe the gallery wall.

It is not my intention here to prove that the mirror wall was there to reflect the paintings or other aspects of Sigiriya; however, our examination of the language of some verses points to such a fact, which is incidental. Similar study would be useful as regards the other important aspects of Sigiriya.

III

In this section I mean to study the aesthetic aspect or the poeticality of the language of the graffiti. In the previous section we have already probed into some problems pertaining to it. In a poetic creation what really matters is "not the poet's or the reader's attitude to reality, but the poet's attitude towards language, which when communicated wakes up the reader, and makes him see the structure of the language, and so that of his world anew".[13] This remark of Jakobson is based on the fact that we think and perceive through language. This is more explicitly stated by Robert Hall Jr. when he says, "Every artist's work is conditioned by the limitation of the medium within which he works, by the cultural background in which he has grown up, and by the demands which his culture makes on his art. Hence the literature written in any language is of course channelled in so far as its possibilities of expression are concerned, by the structure of the language. This latter determines what can and cannot be said in the language, and limits the means at

13. Jakobson, *op.cit.* p. 70.

the literary artist's disposal, just as his cultural background determines the semantic content of his work. This influence is exerted at every level of linguistic structure, from the phonological through the syntactic, and of course in lexicon as well".[14]

The above remarks reveal the intimate relationship of language to a literary creation. Those who have studied the graffiti claim that the Sigiri poets were masters of their craft.[15] Perhaps on the basis of extreme dissimilarity of the script used by our writers, Paranavitana refers to the poems as scribblings, which unfortunately tends to make an unfavourable impression of them in the minds of his readers. However, a careful examination reveals that these poems were not meant to be of ephemeral significance, for most of the poets were keenly aware of what poetry is and displayed discipline in writing them. Some writers claimed themselves to be *kavi* (poets) and many considered themselves as writing *gī* or *'kavi'* (poetry). As pointed out by Paranavitana, the poems were some forms of *'gettama'* or knitting (G. 492). *Gettama* involves systematic deviation from the normal use of the language to suit the rhyme, sound effects, emphasis etc., which the poet tries to create. For example, G. 239 consists of 16 verbal units, which in the poem take the following order (with the stroke used by us(/) indicating phrase division:

5 3 4 2 1 / 8 9 10 / 16 14 15 / 13 11 12 /

As the poems were expected to be read by the visitors to Sigiri, we have to assume that the average reader was able to reconstruct such intricate knittings in order to comprehend the

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14. Robert Hall Jr. *Introductory Linguistics*, Chilton & Company, New York (1964) p. 406.

15. Paranavitana S, *Sigiri Graffiti*, Indroduction; A.S. Kulasuriya. *Sinhala Sāhitiya*, vol. I, Saman Press, Maharagama (1962) p. 227-243.,
G.D. Wijayawardhane, *Saṃskṛti: Paranavitana Felicitation Number* (1972) p. 343-360.

poems. Some tend to think that, since all who visited Sigiriya were permitted to write on the mirror-wall, irrespective of their social standing (*Sigiri Graffiti*, Introduction), the language used by them must contain dialect variations as well as spoken forms in abundance. However, apart from some stereotyped poetical usages, language appears to be of a standard form. The problem of regional variation has to be carefully studied in a context like this. It might be presumed that, despite the regional and other variations that would undoubtedly have existed, the literary medium had by that time evolved a standard form of islandwide currency.

The remarks of Robert Hall quoted above show that the efficacy of the language structure, the cultural background of the writer and the demands of society determine the nature of literary creations. It is well known that the majority of the writers on the mirror wall were inspired by the paintings of the ladies. The poets reflected on them in intimate terms and different human relationships were maintained. The language positively helped to indicate these relationships, as shown by the variety of terms employed. They are at times referred to in a neutral manner: *tiri*, *geheṇi/gähäṇi*, *li̯*, *agan/agana/kalata* - all of which mean 'woman'. Sometimes they are endearingly referred to as *kal* 'agreeable one', *kalan* 'auspicious one', *kat/kata* 'charming one', *piyabad/piyabaṅd* 'one with enchanting body/loved one', *yaha-bäsi* 'one with sweet words', *yaha-dasna* 'charming one', *yovan* 'youthful one', *varagna* 'noble lady', *sikisaṅd/siki*, *yeheḷi* 'friend'; a still more intimate relationship is shown by *abi/aṁbi* 'wife', *sepiya* 'beloved wife', or *kella* 'girl'. Accepted cultural norms of physical beauty are depicted by terms such as *digäsi/dignet* 'long eyed one', *leṇäsi/miyuläsi* 'deer eyed one', *heḷilaṁbi* 'fair coloured one, *ranvan* 'golden coloured one', *samavan/samvan* 'dark coloured one', *mahanelvan*, 'blue-lily hued one', *nilupuläsi* 'blue-lily eyed one', *uḍvaṭu tana* 'one with upturned breasts/firm breasts. *Ranamalī* 'one with a golden chain', and *tanaranmalī/tanaranmalī* 'one who wears a golden chain on her breast', which occurs several times, appear to be coinages by the Sigiri poets to refer to particular paintings where such details occur.

The ladies are derogatorily referred to as *asad-bad/ asadbaňd* 'faithless ones', *masiriyo* 'disdainful ones', *miňdibi/midibi/midimi* 'conceited one', *mukan* 'dumb one', *vana* 'lonely one, i.e. separated from lover', *vandabu* 'widow' *avisara* 'prostitute', *rijiya* 'washer-woman', *isi-tad* jealous one', *ukaṭali* 'despondent one', *bat-tana* 'one with fallen breasts', etc. Some of the compounds in these appellatives are linguistically significant, for they show that the language was well adapted to form such compounds as *tanarammalī*. So also the terms reveal that there were sufficient alternative forms out of which the authors could select. The exact connotations pertaining to some appellatives and especially the alternative forms, (for example *kal/kali/kalu*) are not clear to us.

One of the constraints which appears to be more or less self-imposed by the writers was the preference to write a single *gī* verse. The compressing of a poetical expression into a single couplet is known as *muktaka*. A few writers wrote either two verses, or quatrains. However, single couplets are far more preponderent than these. The *gī* metres employed in the graffiti have between 37-42 syllables.

Now let us consider how the phonological and morphological structure of the language facilitated these poets to express themselves clearly within the confines of a *gī* verse.

The language of poetry at this stage was pure Sinhalese, or *Eḷu*. *Eḷu* consisted mainly of derivative cognates from Old and Middle Indo-Aryan languages. Phonological developments such as consonantal clusters being reduced to single consonants and loss of vowel length had made the canonical structure of the Sinhalese language extremely simple by about the 1st century A.D. There were only a few words which had over four syllables. Actually, even a casual glance through the vocables of the graffiti shows that monosyllabics and disyllabics predominate. It need not be emphasized that when the lexical units themselves are short, it would be easy to compose verses within a limited syllabic structure. By about the latter part of the seventh century the cononical structure

of (C) VCV type (C = consonant; V = vowel), where all the words ended in a vowel, was gradually changing due to the loss of medial consonants and medial and final vowels. This gave rise to conjoint consonants and long vowels that were absent in thelanguage for nearly eight centuries. The Sigiri poets had the advantage of using the earlier monotonous CVCV . . . type or the new phonological structures of various combinations. Compare for example:

I. *De atahi hodala tana ranahasu nabaka vana*
Sänähi mulā ḷa mayi beyadahi ranavanuna atare
(G.201)

CV CVCVCV CVCVCV CVCV CVCVCVCV CVCVCV CVCV
CVCVCV CVCV̄ CV CVCV CVCVCVCV CVCVCVCVCV VCVCV

II. *Sisā sisā dudul beyad sel aḍḍarahi*
Nositiyu tipi ahay vahay avujni may vet vay
(.426)

CVCV̄ CVCV̄ CVCVC CVCVC CVC VCCVCVCV
CVCVCVCV CVCV VCVC CVCVC VCVCCV CVC CVC CVC

It is obvious that the phonemic flexibility shown in the second poem adds much colour to it. Compare also,

Kumund piṇi bind ṣand merejin jat varaj näta
(G.177)

which in the original structure would have appeared as

Kumuda piṇi bida sada merejina jata varaja näta.

The new developments spread almost unhindered so that some of the restrictions that developed subsequently in the language, such as the non-occurrence of cerebrals and 'r' in the absolute final position were not restrictive for the Sigiri poets:

I. *Naratur atur no di satur mitur vana* (G.386)
II. *Komul amaḍ leḍ lina sī* (G.103)
III. *Tanapaṭ velasarangmal sihilas koṭ lū* (G.327)

Another phonological development which surfaced at this time was what is known as spontaneous nasalization; this feature is a pan-Indian phenomenon that appeared in association with the voiced consonants. In Sinhalese it was realized in the form of a full nasal or a half nasal. Thus forms like, *samuda* 'sea', *agana* 'woman', became *samunda/samuṁda*, *angana/aṁgana*. There is no doubt that the Sigiri poets made use of this development to enhance the sound effects in their poems:

I. *Ninabu sunil kiyambu helilambu lambu sit may* (G.380)

II. *Sihil pinibindin ad savand pavan gena mand hamule* (G.249)

It should be mentioned that the phonological losses as well as gains that we have discussed so far did not affect the number of syllables in a verse; but, as is evident, this flexibility was an advantage for the poets.

Morphologic structure also had certain distinctions in the formation of the poetic diction of the graffiti. We have already mentioned that the variety used was Eḷu. Some, including Paranavitana, believe that during the time of the graffiti the differentiation between Eḷu and Mixed-Sinhalese was not there. (*Miśra-Sinhala:* This variety which has *tatsamas* or semi-*tatsamas* from parent languages was predominently used in later prose). This may be true for the earlier period of the graffiti; but during the latter part the tendency was present but the poets were careful not to use *tatsamas*. For instance, poets used Sanskrit forms such as *svasti*, *srī*, *adhikari* and *dharmanvito* in the introductory statements to some poems. Within poems too we have a few instances like *kātara*, *madhura* being used. It is strange how the Eḷu movement went unchallenged when Pali and Sanskrit learning was thriving at this stage. The respect for the long standing tradition as well as the preference for Eḷu by the learned must have restrained the writers from deviating from the norm.

The linguistic experiment of restricting poetic diction to pure Eḷu would have had both advantages and disadvantages. As noted by the author of the *Siyabaslankara*, a 10th century

work on poetics, one of the disadvantages was the absence of the three *praṇas* (poetical effects brought about by sound combinations), *śliṣṭa*, *samā* and *sukumaratā* in Sinhalese in comparison with Sanskrit.[16] *Śliṣṭa* is an effect brought about by the preponderance of non-aspirates as against the aspirates in a poem; *samata* is an effect caused by the preponderance of soft sounds in preference to hard sounds (consonants such as voiced stops and cerebrals are regarded as hard or *gaḍha* as against unvoiced stops, which are *mṛdu*); although *sukumara praṇa* is not explained in the text, it is the absence of complex sound combinations. In fact, *praṇas* mentioned above are indistinguishable in Sinhalese in the absence of the opposing conditions, and hence one could argue that these *praṇas* are ingrained in Sinhalese. However, it appears that the author of *Siyabaslakara* took a standpoint similar to that of the structuralists, according to which the existence of a thing has to be distinguished on the basis of its polar opposite.

Some morphological features pertaining to suffixation indicate that this was a crucial stage of the language; the synthetic morphological structure of the Old Indo-Aryan language was undergoing gradual change and was transforming itself into an analytical structure. However, we do not get pseudo-suffixes and periphrastic uses in abundance as we find in the subsequent period. It could be seen that the addition of pseudo-suffixes and periphrastic forms made the later language more prosaic. The most important feature as regards the grammatical suffixation was that, while it became simplified to the maximum possible extent,[17] within each distinctive feature, there were many alternative forms that the poets were free to use. Stylistically this was important, for while grammarians are usually interested in searching for prescriptive norms and trying to channel the language through them, creative writers need fewer grammatical constraints and more latitude for using as many alternative forms as they wish.

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16. *Siyabas Lakara*, ed. Ven Henpitagedara Gnānasīha Thero, Svabhasa Prakasakayo (1964) vs. 62.

17. *Sigiri Graffiti* vol. I, sec. 321.

For example, the instrumental case form of *ata* has *atani/atini/atni/atin/atina*, 'by hand', of which pedants would insist on the use of one or two, but the writers of poetry would prefer to use any one of them at their will.

The preponderance of alternative forms in the graffiti, and relative absence of some of them in the classical times may not necessarily be due to their actual absence in the language but due to pedantry that hindered their use by the later writers. This is clearly seen by the presence of forms like genitive *taya* 'your', *maya* 'my' in the graffiti and in the modern Sinhalese, but never in the classical literature. *Kiyavi* 'you will say' which occurs as *kiyāvi* in modern Sinhalese is another example of this type; instead of this, the periphrastic form *kiyanu ăta* is used in the classical Sinhalese.

As the morphological structure in the graffiti was still fairly strong, there was no necessity to maintain the syntactic structure intact. Even the phrase and clause structures were quite loose. There are some verses which more or less follow the regular word order:

Beyand āmo ma si ăti kiyanu balay gatmo
Giyak äja līmo risisa beyand da balay āmo (G.362)

("We came to the mountain side. We saw for ourselves the coquetishness which is there in the smile of this damsel. We wrote down a song. We also looked at the mountain side according to our desire and came back".)

Apart from the metre there is nothing poetic in this verse. In the verses, which are of high poetic quality, phrase structure too is much complicated:

No jäni ma äshi meyi sit ękvan ā nu yęti
Mahame(ya) gäṇă (seyini) a sihil panittak pavan
(G.244)

("They say that this came to my sight now without being perceived and together with (the arising of) thought, just as the wind came in the height of

the rainy season bringing light showers of cooling rain".)

The above rendering by Paranavitana does not clearly bring out the extreme suggestiveness of the poem. Restoration of a *'ya'* in *mahameya* in the second line is unnecessary. The poem depicts a man who was brought adrift to Sigiriya. *Meyi nojäni nu ma ashi ā yeti* is a succinct but forceful expression which reveals that the poet was not aware of coming across his own object of travel until the others told him so. *Ma ăshi ā* 'came to my eyes (the object struck my eyes)' is an unusual expression used to convey subtly how the poet was unaware of his own bearings. *Mahame* here should be rendered as 'rain cloud' and not 'rainy season', because the former allows for a deeper meaning. Here is a travel worn man who comes in search of his object (Sigiriya), like a rain cloud being drifted aloft by the breeze. When his object is reached (when the object strikes his eye) his thoughts begin to pour out as when a rain cloud issues forth cool drops of water after striking a mountain. The poet brings the three words *sihil* 'cool' *pănittak* 'water' and *pavan* 'breeze' together to heighten the effect of rain cloud meeting a mountain or a travel worn person coming to Sigiriya. Incidentally, the thoughts here are comparable to drops of rain. The preciousness of the thoughts or drops of rain is indicated by the diminutive - hypocoristic suffix *-tta* added to *pănittak*. In poems like the above, words or phrases are mere symbols that lead us from the mimetic level to the semiotic level.

We have so far tried to see how the language of the time facilitated the writers to express themselves freely. However, the *muktaka* model adopted by them was a severe constraint. The *muktaka* is ideally suited to write lyrics; its brief space provides better for suggestion rather than for long-drawn description. The *Mahākavya* model that came into vogue after the 10th century, on the contrary allowed or rather forced the poets to write descriptions; poetic expression itself came to be designated as *vänuma* 'description'. The language of the graffiti never gave way to description; symbolization and metaphorization were the chief characteristics of them. Consider the following poem:

Mahanela bara varala gela huṇa pihirala rasan
Ädini tamā me bäluma sevataka vi apa nuyunaga tā

("The look of yours from a corner of your eye has verily been recognized by us as that of a rival of you whose hair laden with blue water lilies, being combed in style, droops down on your neck".)

In this, *mahanela bara varala gela huṇa pihirala rasan* is a discontinuous compound. The normal language demands, in such cases, for grammatical markers; however, the proximity of the vocables impinges upon the reader to create a perfect image of the lady in question. The words devoid of grammatical markers float before the reader; nevertheless the writer expects the reader to reconstruct the meaning, thus allowing the reader to take part in the creative act himself.

If we take suggestion, as against description, as the mark of genuine poetry, it appears that there are a considerable number of the latter type of verses among the graffiti. Some critics among the poets have critized such poetry as *his gī* 'empty poems'.[18] There are others that display a remarkable lyrical quality. The poets were keen on arousing erotic sentiment (*śṛngara rasa*) in its different aspects. True lyrics have suggestion (*dhvani*) as their base. The linguistic process whereby dhvani is effected, according to Indian aestheticians in *vyañjana* by which ordinary meanings of words are restricted. Not only meanings, but the very basis of language is sometimes violated to bring about suggestion. Roman Jakobson refers to this process as 'organized violence committed on ordinary speech'[19] On the basis of the best of the graffiti we could refer to them as *raga-dhvani* poems.

In the following verse, the beauty of a lady is suggested by the effulgence of her eyes:

Topa nuyun miṇi viṭni vāmhena pähä diseyi
No keḷe taman temam eyin datim topa sura bava (G.50)

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18. *Sigiri Graffiti* vol. I, Sec. 626.

19. Jakobson, *op.cit.*, p. 71.

("Hail! In your eye (there appears the effulgence which shines forth from jewel lamps. (And) stillness (of the eye) has not been feigned by you. Therefore, I know that you are celestial beings".)

The sharpness of the imagery of *'nuyun miṇi viṭni'* and *'vämhena'* could never be brought out in a translation. The comparison of beauties to nymphs is frequently found in our literature. However, nowhere in our literature is the contrast between immovability and liveliness of eyes so forcefully brought out, although there are many references to the eyes of nymphs.

With the rhyme and proper emphasis the Sigiri poets were able to express forcefully even a common-place idea:

Sī raju yasasa sirī
Tubu mulu lov pätirī
Nilupul äsun asirī
Balumo sihigirī (G.205)

("We saw at Sihigiri the king of lions, whose fame and splendour remain spread in the whole world, and the wonderful damsels with eyes like blue lillies".)

The crucial words *sī raju* and *nilupul äsun* are found at the beginning of the first and third lines, the points at which emphasis is to be found in the recitation of the poem. And rhyming at the end adds much colour to the verse.

Jakobson observes that a linguistic discourse may proceed along two semantic lines: one topic may lead to another, either through their similarity or their continuity. In the first, the process at work is metaphoric and in the latter it is metonymic.[20] While metaphoric mode is well known, metonymy reminds us of the *lakṣaṇa* process of language enunciated by

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20. Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language*, Mouton & Co. (1956) ch. V, p. 76-82.

Indian aestheticians, according to which *rūḍhi* (tradition) helps to assign some meanings to words through their association. (Example *kuntaḥ praviśanti* 'the spears enter', means that the spear bearers enter).

While both these functions are found in literary discourses, the metaphoric mode is said to be fore-grounded in poetry, while the metanymic mode is foregrounded in prose.[21] In lyrical poetry the metaphoric mode generally predominates. It may be clear from the examples cited from the graffiti that this is in fact the case with our poems. In the Indian poetry *alaṃkaras* (figures of speech), constitute the essential feature of poetic expression. Although the manner in which the poets utilize the figures of speech may be inexhaustible, the metaphoric mode is the basis of all of them. The *Siyabaslakara* discusses thirty-five *alaṃkaras*, and possibly influenced by this text, the later Sinhalese poets tried to use them to the maximum possible extent to heighten the poetical effect of their poems. In doing so, they appear to have over-burdened their literary creations with *alaṃkaras*. However, the Sigiri poets were not carried away by their skill to conceive *alaṃkaras:* they used them sparingly. Paranavitana has found some of the well known poetic figures, such as *upama*, *utprekṣa*, *arthāntaranyasa*, *ākṣepa*, *atiśayokti*, *vakrokti* among the graffiti.

To demonstrate how the simplest poetic figure, the simile (upamā) is used by the Sigiri poets, let us take the following often quoted verse:

Nil kaṭrola maleka āvuṟu vāṭkola mala sey
Sāndägä sihi vanneyi mahaneḷ-vana hayi ranyana hun
(G.334)

("Like a vāṭkola flower entangled in a blue kaṭrola flower, the golden coloured one who stood together with the lily coloured one will be remembered at the advent of the evening".)

Here, the golden coloured lady and the Lily coloured lady, who are sitting side by side are compared to a *vāṭkola* flower

21. Terrence Hawkes, *op.cit.* p. 80.

(yellow) and the blue *katrola* flower. However, critics discerning the simile between words - between a flower and a woman - have not considered the imagery that exists at a deeper level which one can see when the whole poem is read as a *metaphorical* statement. The associations of the deeper metaphor become clear when we consider the significance of *sändägä* in the poem. *Sändägä* - 'evening' - is the hour at which day and night, or the bright and dark forces meet. It is also the hour when the väṭkola and kaṭrola flowers blossom. Moreover, evening is associated with ease and rest, but most important, with companionship and erotic feelings.

At the level of the word - the dual simile between flower and woman - the associations evoked by the simile derive from these flowers common in Sri Lanka villages. Through the simile, the casual and commonplace beauty of the flowers is transferred to the women of the Sigiri paintings. But this simple simile contrasting light and dark gives access to a deeper level, where the associations are completely different; associations of encounter and love, associations which have more literary overtones than the overt word-simile.

G.244, which we have already analysed in the earlier section, is another example of this type. Like *sändägä* in this verse, the mountain, indirectly referred to as *ma* 'this' in it, functions as the crucial word; the travel worn visitor as well as the rain cloud carried aloft by the breeze meet there to unburden themselves of their weariness. The visitor breaks into thoughts and the cloud into rain: both get rid of their burdens and the result is pleasing for both parties.

Sometimes only a part of such a metaphor is expressed in the poem; the other part of the linguistic expression is left unsaid. It is as though silence also is an integral part of linguistic expression. Compare for example the following poem:

Sarā sisi räsni pumbu dī väja mī sindu
Jū kandu taḷā hänä risa yey no ka mulā (G.466)

("The ocean (with its) water swelled by the beams of the autumnal moon, having dashed itself against the land and struct at islands, hills and banks, has its conceit gone. Of whom that is deluded (does it) not happen so?")

The poem is written by a Buddhist monk and, as could be expected, it ends in a moral tone. The rendering of *risa* as 'conceit' by Paranavitana is questionable; it means zest or desire. What the poet suggests is that men are drawn towards the beautiful ladies but they fail to possess them; however, in their struggle to possess them, they lose their zest and calm down. This universal fact has particular relevance to the specific situation prevailing at Sigiriya. Humanity, like unto the ocean, is drawn by the beauty of the damsels of Sigiriya, who are like the autumnal moon. Human presence at the foot of the rock is like a tidal wave created by the splendour of women, which is the moon. The moon alone cannot cause the tide to rise; it is the flexibility of the sea that is partially responsible. So also the attachment between men and women. The poet then philosophizes the whole situation as an aspect of the human predicament; in this case all this results from delusion —— the universal cause of all suffering and tribulation, according to Buddhism.

A similar idea is found in G. 86, but it stresses a different point.

> *No(va)nno da puludu guṇabajno varagnan*
> *No siṭiya ve di häda samunda kaḷa puṇsanda udāye*
> (G.86)
>
> ("Just as the ocean does not remain with its water drawn (in) when the full moon has arisen, (in the same manner) do those who love virtue not become enamoured of the noble women?")

In this, the poet does not find fault with the virtuous for being enamoured by the ladies: that is the normal thing. What is significant in the verse is how the poet, by his extremely careful use of language, succeeds in conveying the innocense or indifference of the virtuous. This the poet does by the expression *no siṭiya ve di häda* ("ocean does not remain with its water drawn"), which reflects the attitude of the virtuous. The ocean is indifferent to the tidal pull; it neither swells itself nor tries to stop the tidal pull by withdrawing its water to itself. An extremely virtuous person is compared to the ocean in the Buddhist tradition: the poet

draws his inspiration from the idea that a person with deep virtues, according to Buddhism, is not shaken by the human conditions that assail him; he is indifferent to such conditions.

The poetic figures used by the writers of the graffiti, as could be surmised by the very context, deal with women. Some of the poetic figures found among the graffiti, which deal with the same topic, are: *vāni sisihi pähä äṅge* "the radiance of the body is like that of the moon" (G.11); *dasan miṇitara* "lustre of jewels which are the teeth" (G.52) *tana-has* "swan-like breasts" (G.90) *komuḷ amaḍ leḍ lina-sī* "smile is like the seeds of melon" (G.103); *pulnil upul ässan* "eyes like full bloom lotuses" (G.124); *abula lapataka sey li me* "damsel is like a fluttering tender bud" (G.187); *vijliya van varangnan* "damsels like glittering lightening" (G.192); *nuyuna mahanela* "eyes like blue lilies" (G.215); *varal nilvalā sihil* "hair like the cool dark cloud" (G.331); *banduvada tol* "lips like banduvada flower" (G.332); *sina kond* "smile like white lily" (G.332); *nilmini nuvaṇ* "eyes like blue sapphire" (G.346); *vana niväsi val mī (tī)* "you are like forest bee-honey" (G.360); *neli pala van liya tana* "breasts of woman are like coconuts" (G.379); *bäma nim patek* "eye-brow is like a nim leaf" (G. 394); *la palu nā tol* "lips are like tender *nā* leaves" (ibid); *kalan basa majvit* "speech as auspicious as a cup of wine" (G.627); *vahasa pasini* "snare of the gentle smile" (G.628); *dasan mutu pala* "teeth like pearls" (G.648). A heart without feeling is compared to a dried bottle-gourd, *labu palutaka ḷa sey* (G.373). A beautifully conceived simile is, *saṅd pahanaṭ sulag maṅd van* "like the advent of gentle breeze to the moonlight" (G.175), where a visitor reminds the beauties of Sigiriya that his arrival is of such effect.

For suggestion - the highest virtue of a poetic expression poetic figures as categorized by *alamkarikas* are not particularly necessary. The following verse, written by a novice (*heraṇa:* a Buddhist monk who has not obtained his higher ordination and is obviously a teenager), clearly shows that poetry was an art that was very much practised by the people of Sri Lanka at the time.

Veseyi jana e kī savanihi rakaneya sihi la
Mana maya biyi kara hä puḷahasu vījanina tatanu ya
(G.88)

("That person, who has been spoken about, resides here; therefore, place the wakefulness of mind in (the door) of hearing and guard it (thoroughly); as her broad smile spreads, having caused me fright, my mind trembles exceedingly".)

The impact made by the figure of a lady in a painting on the mind of a tender monk is forcefully brought out in the poem. As the opening sentence, *veseyi jana e kī* indicates, the lady is a complete outsider to him. The moment he sees her, his mind is so agitated that he admonishes himself to apply mindfulness to the ear. *Sihi*, or *sati*, to be "mindful" is of prime importance in the Buddhist way of life. All the six senses are to be mindfully guarded at all times; this however is not an easy task. Here, the novice is only talking of guarding his door of hearing, or the ear. The reason is that the lady has vanquished him and forced herself through his door or seeing. This is indicated by her broad smile, which has captivated him so completely as to cause fear in him. The poem also suggests the often repeated complaint by the other writers that the ladies in the paintings do not talk.

The graffiti also reveals that the poets were much concerned about the mode of linguistic expression through which they wished to convey themselves. There are statements which describe some aspect of Sigiriya (mainly ladies), or convey the reactions of the writers. In some of these we get the (first person) perspective. There are also requests and commands. In some, the ladies in the paintings are imagined to be retorting the visitors. There are controversies between poets. There are also philosophic statements. All these add much colour to the poetic expressions.

Every language has a repertoire of maxims consisting of epigrams, aphorisms and gnomic sayings. Although they may readily diffuse through language boundaries, within each language they serve as part of the cultural code of the language community. This code "manifests itself as a collective, anonymous and authoritative voice which speaks for and about what it aims to establish as 'accepted' knowledge or wisdom".[22]

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22. Ronald Barthes in Terrence Hawkes, *op.cit.* p. 118.

These are gnomic in essence and are based on the realities of life. Classical Sinhalese literature is extremely rich in such expressions, which are mainly drawn from Buddhist thought. They play a cardinal role in the literary diction of the prose writers. A number of them are to be found among the graffiti about which Paranavitana draws our attention (S.G. Introduction Section 649 and 656).

According to the patriarchal attitude entertained by the ancients, winning or losing the affection of women leads to sorrow in the final analysis. The following epigrams contain this view: *Abu minisun isilu kuḷa pinu seyini*, "the supporting of women by men is like leaping from a rock" (G.23); *katak'hi tosna mini akusu hishi lay ganna*, "being attached to a beautiful woman is like applying on ones own head a jewelled driving-hook" (G.306); *Gehinina pasasana minisa gini tapalay usula gata vi no*, "the person who praises women is like one who carries fire on his head after having warmed (himself at it)". (G.672)

If a virtuoso in some art is imitated by a mediocre one, it is like the cuckoo trying to imitate the golden peacock in dancing; *Rana monara vana bita ava naṭay giya e patu da kos* (G.336). The karmic forces work without making any discrimination about the status of persons *Ratagurebu ran giniyam nodath vi da ka*, "who does not realize that gold cast among red hot charcoal melts?" (G.341). When an action leads to a completely different effect: *Ahasa gäsi bara hi poḷo kaṇana men*, "a heavy thing that is thrown into the sky falls down and digs into the earth" (G.445). The knowledge that is circumscribed: *At taṭu kapalu siyotun bita lo ek ge yet*, "in the mind of a bird whose wings have been clipped off, the world is one house". (G.500)

There are many ways of expressing that a thing is extremely difficult of fulfilment: *Vi higuḷa kakuḷayu kaḍ balannaṭa risi* "wish to see the crab's neck in the aperture of the yoke" (G. 482) *Ukaṭäli muhuṁd pihinanu väni aṁda piḷu gele gamana*, "swimming in the sea of despondency is like a journey of the blind man on the neck of a lame person" (G.596); *Duvaya uḍa gaḷa yana men* "going uphill running" (G.54); *Sihineka ahasa laḍa vey*, "obtaining of sky in a dream" (G.609); *Mahalu kaḷa tapas kaḷa se*, "performing ascetism in one's old age" (G.679).

Freedom won by neglecting one's duty is like the bull who runs away after dropping off the yoke and stands on the road thinking, "I shall dance", *Viya gala duven maga iňdi gona rangamiyi hangna* (G.681). Infatuation comes automatically: *Itana hir kumbur vävin seyin*, "in the manner of itana and hir grass coming out of fields and lakes (G.605). Desire increases when partially fulfilled: *Aḍbud sā diyun keḷe* "what is half eaten increases hunger" (G.517). What comes out incessantly: *Diyavannekin hädi vähuna gilma seyin*, "with the force of a cascade that pours down from the spillway of a reservoir" (G.602). A joyous confrontation: *Hasun seyin vil duṭ....* "like swans who have seen a lake" (G.484). Something precious is obtained after much toil: *Ganagal bindära silaga duṭ pänittak sey*, "like unto a drop of water seen after a hard rock is blasted away" (G.190)

Some of these are essentially Buddhistic: *Yeta muḷa nuba pu se muḷa ele*, "when desire passes away ignorance also will fall like what is thrown into the sky" (G.540). *Suve nama dukaṭa pade duk suva viňdna bandu ye*, "pleasure is the basis of pain and pain is (therefore) like experiencing pleasure" (G.525).

IV

The graffiti provide a remarkably well preserved corpus for the structural study of the contemporary Sinhalese language. Paranavitana's analysis of the language, contained in his section on *grammar*, is an important contribution. Whilst analysing the language of his corpus, he was interested in substantiating the rules of grammar with examples from earlier and later developments in the language. In fact, he provides a historical grammar covering a long period of over fifteen centuries. Unfortunately, this grammar is mainly useful for experts in philology. The structuralist principle demands that a given corpus of language be analysed independently so that the grammatical structure of that particular corpus be clearly delineated; any historical comparison, whether it pertains to the earlier period or the later period should accordingly be done only after a thorough structural study. It is a basic grammar that is required to explicate the grammatical

structure of a particular corpus; not a historical grammar. Although Paranavitana does try to analyse the language of the Sigiri poems in the minutest manner, his pre-occupation with historical problems, notions of grammar provided by the classical Sinhalese grammar, the *Sidathsangarava*, his extremely critical stance towards philologists like Geiger, and his long drawn polemics to prove his own theories on language make it certainly difficult to understand the exact nature of the Sigiri language through this grammar. It is true that tracing the history of a form (whether phonological, morphological or syntactic), partially explains it. However, its function within a corpus should be the main concern of a grammarian. The undue importance attached to historical details is the only grammatical treatment we find in sections like nominal derivatives (section 408-410), absolutive (section 480), past participles (section 509-512) and Particles (section 519).

Paranavitana did away with some of the theoretical propositions of earlier philologists, like Geiger, as untenable.[23] For example, he severely criticizes Geiger with regard to his theory of Umlaut, whereby he tries to explain the origin of *'ä'* in Sinhalese. Geiger's theory demands that early Sinhalese inscriptions be read on the basis of Middle Indo-Aryan forms with regard to vowel length and conjoint consonants; this he does in order to facilitate his own theory of the origin of 'ä'. Accordingly, words like *naga* and *pati* in the early Sinhalese inscriptions should be read as *naga* and *patti*.[24]

Paranavitana rightly criticizes this view and devotes a long portion (section 114-157) of his grammar to explain the origin of 'ä'. Here he comes out with a theory that in certain contexts an indistinctly heard 'y' causes 'a'. (He exemplifies this by forms like *de+ata*, which becomes (da+y+ata and dāta). He then extends this notion of indistinct sounds to all consonants other than stops and nasals. His theory of indistinct sounds is indeed unconvincing.

Strangely enough, after devoting a large section of his grammar to prove the origin of 'ä', and having established

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23. S.L. Kekulawela, Seminar Paper on Sigiriya, (Unpub.) (1983)

24. Wilhelm Geiger, *A Grammar of the Sinhalese Language*, (1938) Introduction p. vi.

its legitimacy (and also that of its long counterpart 'ā̆') in the graffiti, Paranavitana does not include it as a regular letter in the alphabet. Here he tries to defend the esoteric theory of the *Sidathsaṅgarāva*, according to which 'ā' is only a longer variant of 'a' itself.

Both Paranavitana and Geiger were of Neogrammarian persuasion and in their treatment of phonological developments they resorted to the Neogrammarian dictum that 'sound laws have no exception'. When there were exceptions or parallel developments caused by either dialect inter-mixtures or context-sensitive situations, they tried to postulate fresh laws to account for such deviations. Paranavitana's theory of 'Two Tendencies', namely 'progressive tendency' and 'retrogressive tendency" (section 164-212), which he postulates to explain certain deviant developments in the language, is unconvincing. For example, he takes the development of *nayana* > *nuyun* as retrogressive, and *nayana* > *nuvan* as progressive. He also asserts that certain semantic consideration on the part of the speakers prevented them from allowing some words to change: thus, *paṇayu* 'love' did not undergo its regular development into *paṇa* because it would then be confused with *paṇa* 'comb', a confusion, according to him, that "would have been detested by the youth of the day"! As linguistic developments do not occur in a unilinear manner a multiplicity of forms may be expected. In this, historical survival is an incidental matter. For example, alternative forms such as *avuja/avuj/avuju/avudu/avud/ävi ji/ävida/ävid/ävit/avujini/avudin* 'having come', found in the graffiti, may not necessarily be due to unilinear historical development.

In section V of the grammar, Paranavitana deals with the phonological rules that operated in the language from the old Indo-Aryan period to the time of the documents. Though the derivative rules become clear by this treatment, the structural phonology does not become apparent. Even within the strict limits of historical grammar some observations that he makes are confusing. For example, the appearance of long vowels and conjoint consonants in the language in the seventh century due to internal phonological developments is regarded by him as due to the retrogressive tendency (section 311). It is as though the Sinhalese who lived in the seventh century realized that their giving up long vowels and conjoint consonants in the

pre-Christian era was a mistake and tried to retrieve them in their speech.

The section on sandhi (VI) consists of some examples for traditionally recognized *sandhis* across the morpheme boundary. But this analysis is not exhaustive.

Although the section on morphology (section 320-514) is more successful than that on phonology, there are still unsolved problems. For example, he says that Sinhalese never had the plural form for the neuter nouns (section 331). However, in the very next section he says that forms like *häli* have to be taken as plural. In section 340 he says that the setting up of categories like masculine and feminine should be based on the patterns of suffixation and not on innate conditions of masculinity etc. - which is a valid observation. Then he says that all inanimate forms should be treated under feminine nouns. Though he subscribes to the stand taken by the *Sidathsaṅgaṟava* on this point, we find that according to the *Sidathsaṅgaṟava* inanimate forms are found in both masculine and feminine genders. After a lengthy discussion to establish the two gender theory, in section 345 he sets up a neuter gender for the pronouns. Pronominal substitution is a universal characteristic for all other nouns and, if the pronouns have a three way gender distinction, it should be applicable to the other nouns as well.

The best section of the grammar is that dealing with the Sinhalese verb. The verbal forms are not found in abundance in the sources anterior to this period. Paranavitana in his own independent manner analyses the verbal forms of the graffiti in an exhaustive manner. His treatment of the *ātmane pada*, and its representation in the language of the graffiti and in the subsequent language, in different functional capacities, is an original contribution.

The syntactic aspect of the graffiti is described briefly. At the time Paranavitana was working on the graffiti, new developments in syntactic studies had not begun and hence we cannot expect a detailed study of syntax in the graffiti. This is a field which needs exhaustive treatment.

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V

The Sigiri poems are of great historical significance. Literature is usually preserved in the form of textual or oral traditions, and it is natural that minor changes, purposely or inadvertantly introduced, will usually be found in any textual tradition. The literary works or literature of the oral tradition, if they are to be used as genuine original material, can only be reconstructed on the basis of available traditions. The graffiti at Sigiriya are genuine autographs of their writers. Apart from what has become illegible due to natural causes or human negligence, the documents are in their pristine form. So far as we are aware, there is not a similar corpus of poetical literature of such an early date preserved elsewhere, with the original text intact.

Paranavitana has indicated the significance of the graffiti for reconstructing the history of the Sinhalese language. Although we have inscriptional records dating from about the third century B.C., language material contained therein is limited. Due to paucity of material some of the grammatical forms cannot be traced in them. The graffiti provides for us, for the first time in our language, a corpus that is rich in detail, and more interestingly, a poetic language representative of regional and social variations. Although the poets use a kind of standard literary medium, there are differences with regard to the diction of individual writers. There are forms that could be recognized as belonging to colloquial usage. If we take for example, the alternative forms as a criterion, the corpus here is much richer than the literary language of any subsequent period. In the graffiti some of the extremely developed forms are found: the genetive forms *maya* and *taya*, which are now restricted to the spoken language, are found in the graffiti. There are also forms like *kiyavi* 'you may say' which is comparable to the spoken form *kiyāvi*; these are not represented in the classical texts.

A historical problem that crops up when we deal with the graffiti is whether the material there should be taken as homogeneous or whether we have to subdivide it into more than one sub-set on the basis of chronological phases. It is thought

that these documents belong to the 8th and 9th centuries. There may however be records belonging to 7th and 10th centuries as well, even among those which Paranavitana has included in his *Sigiri Graffiti*. If on linguistic grounds we could distinguish different stages of the graffiti, the results would be useful for

(i) the clear delineation of the synchronic phases of the Sigiri language, and

(ii) the dating of the graffiti on the basis of language.

Paranavitana, though not concerned about synchronic systems, tried to utilize certain linguistic criteria for dating the documents (*S.G.* section 547-550). However, this was beset with difficulties and he concluded that, since these documents were written by various hands at different times, there is no uniformity in the language and that linguistic evidence cannot be used for dating. He finds that there is overlapping of criteria used for testing, when applied to individual poems. This kind of confusion is to be expected, because it is the habit of language-users to utilize both old and new forms without any reference to their history. Indeed it is a difficult task if we take the distinctive characteristics one by one and try to apply them. Instead, if we take bundles of distinctive features that are indicative of different historical stages, selected from among the documents, and test each poem for them, it would not be difficult to arrange these documents according to some relative chronology.

Paranavitana, who did not use linguistic criteria for dating, uses palaeographical evidence instead. Palaeographically Bell assigned the graffiti to the 10th and 11th centuries. According to Paranavitana however, they belong to the 8th and 9th centuries. It is unfortunate that some of the earliest graffiti and those of late times are not included in the *Sigiri Graffiti*, for purposes of comparison. For this purpose, even fragmentary records and incomplete ones would have been quite useful. As Paranavitana himself says, even palaeographic evidence is not fool-proof for dating these documents. There are overlappings and inconsistencies. For the latter 'a' alone he

himself has given 50 different graphemic forms. There are certain letters which have several graphemic shapes. Some letters have features that belong to the 3rd century B.C. According to Paranavitana, "the same document which shows a very archaic form in one letter often exhibits much more developed forms of letters" (*S.G.* xxx, p. 106). Actually, it appears that the problems of palaeography are as complex as those of the language. It might be a good idea if both linguistic and palaeographic criteria are combined for the dating of these documents.

The Sigiri poems represent the earliest literary records in New Indo-Aryan languages. It is generally agreed that the Sinhalese language, after its separation from the Middle Indo-Aryan languages of India in pre-Christian times, became isolated in Sri Lanka and developed on its own independent lines much earlier than the New Indo-Aryan languages of India, which were under the domination of various literary Prakrits until about the 10th century. Sinhalese, once separated from the parent languages, came to be used as a literary language, and exhibits some insular characteristics right from the early times. Thus, while the proto stage for most of the New Indo-Aryan languages is about the tenth century, for Sinhalese it is about the 7th century. The New Indo-Aryan literatures in the Indian languages begin after the 10th century, but in most cases actual literary works appeared only after the 12th century.

This difference of time is not so important for comparative purposes. Just as much as there exists inscriptional and other fragmentary evidence to represent the Indian languages prior to the 10th century, there are also subsequent literary works in Sinhalese that could be compared with the regular literature of the other New Indo-Aryan languages. However, in such a comparative study the graffiti would enjoy a very special position.

From the point of view of comparative linguistics, the graffiti are unique for the New Indo-Aryan languages. While Sinhalese changed radically, the New Indo-Aryan languages, even those that belong to the outer groups, such as Kāsmirī, developed at a slower pace as could be seen from the following verses of the *Lallavākyāni*, a Kāsmirī work belonging to about

14th century.[25]

Tanthar gali töy manthar mŏtsē
Manthar golu töy motuy tsĕth
Tsĕth golu töy kēh-ti nā kunē
Shūnes shūñah mīlith gauv

(*Lal.* II)

("Holy books will disappear, and then only the mystic formula will remain. When the mystic formula departed, naught but mind was left. When the mind disappeared naught was left anywhere. And a void became merged within the void".)

Words like *tanthar* (tantra), *manthar* (mantra), *tsĕth* (cetas) *shūñah* (*sūnya*) are easily identifiable and have evolved only slightly from the Old Indo-Aryan forms.

The Bengali *Caryapadas* are cryptic philosophical passages meant to be sung. They belong to about the 10th century. They could be compared to the graffiti for linguistic purposes. They are like the Japanese Haiku poems and consist of more than one meaning. Although the overt meanings of these are clear, their covert meanings are mystical and are meant to be understood only by the Yogins. We may quote one example:[26]

'Ēka se śuṇḍini dui ghare sāndhaa
Ciaṇa bakalaa baruṇi bandhaa
Sahaje thira kari varuṇi sandhe
Je ajarāmara hoi diṛha kandhe

("A wine woman enters two rooms
She brews her varuni wine with a thin bark
Take your wine in a state of composure, in the 'Sahaja' way; so that you can attain immortality".)

(*Car.* I)

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25. *Lallavākyāni:* tr. and ed. by George A. Grierson, and L.D. Barnett, The Royal Asiatic Society, London (1920).

26. *Caryāpada:* tr. and ed. by Atindra Majumdar, Gopal Press, Calcutta (1961).

In Gujarati literature of the earliest period there are some special literary types, of which, the *Rasas*, *Kathas*, *Phagus*, *Bara-masis* and *Garbis* contain romantic lyrics.[27] A comparison of the graffiti with such genres would surely broaden our views about, not only the graffiti but also the matters for which the vernacular languages were used during this medieval times, when the languages of religion like Sanskrit, Pali and Ardha Magadhi were holding sway over them.

VI

In this paper I have tried to highlight not only the poetic significance of the language of the graffiti but also other relevant types of investigation that are necessary to make the graffiti more meaningful to us. It may seem, however, that at some points this appears as a review of the *Sigiri Graffiti* of Paranavitana; this was inevitable, though unintentional. Despite our criticisms, anyone who wants to study the graffiti will have to depend heavily upon his great work. However, it is necessary that scholars should strive to reinterpret this work so as to discover more and more of the experiment of writing poetry by our ancients. Any genuine work of literature, be it a lyric or a *mahakavya*, is inevitably an experiment of the language in which it is written. At this juncture, when we are drawn towards the world literatures, especially Western literature, for inspiration to 'develop' our modern literature, it is important not to lose completely our interest in the experiments done by our own writers with our own language. If we are convinced of this, the gap of twelve odd centuries that separate us from the graffiti is not such a wide gap as between us and any other foreign literature. At the same time, the twelve centuries have not really made us more advanced in our outlook or experiments on literature. We might confess that the truth is actually the other way round. There is much to be learnt from their experiments of the language, although they may not have had the same 'advanced' education that we enjoy now. However, the type of learning that

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27. Suniti Kumar Chatterju, *Languages and Literatures of Modern India*, p. 236.

they had, a learning that allowed for kings and commoners, monks and laymen, males and females to be at liberty to try their hands at poetry on a basis of equality, and the discipline that they all display in handling the language, are positive achievements of "their" culture that "we" could envy now.

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