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An EXAMINATION of
the COSMOLOGICAL and GEOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES
in SINHALESE LITERATURE and EPIGRAPHY
and of SUCH INFERENCES from
the ARCHAEOLOGY of CEYLON

Thesis submitted for the Degree Of
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PREFACE

What may, by the fullest stretch of imagination, be regarded as a geographical work is unknown to Sinhalese classical literature. Geography, unlike its sister subject history (iti-hāsa or, even, purāna), appears to have been unknown as an intellectual pursuit in Ceylon of the past until it was introduced into the school curriculum during recent times.

Nevertheless, certain aspects of this subject were not altogether unknown, as may be inferred from the numerous incidental and stray references in Sinhalese literature. The universe with its stars and planets - specially the earth with its oceans and continents - and physical phenomena such as eclipses, rain, wind, tides, earthquakes, etc. were known to the Sinhalese of old through the religio-cosmic beliefs held by them. Cosmological details fuse with geographical in their regional descriptions of the Jambudvīpa - the subcontinent of India and Pakistan. Subject-matter pertaining to Ceylon's own historical and human geography appear to have been appreciably well known, and information, though of a very superficial nature regarding fauna and flora is scattered widely over this literature.

It has to be admitted that by far a great majority of these Sinhalese literary works, specially those that contain information regarding the cosmos and the Jambudvīpa, are either translations from or adaptations of Pali originals, themselves based on an earlier oral religious tradition; and, as such, irrationality and a speculative bias, as may reasonably be expected in the treatment of such themes during the period under review, is

The purpose of the present study is to bring together these bits of information which lie scattered over the full range of Sinhalese classical literature, along with relevant material that may be obtained from local epigraphy and archaeology, into a critical and methodical treatise. It is divided into two parts of which the first deals with general information of a cosmological and geographical character. Here, Buddhist cosmology and cosmogony, which the Sinhalese people adopted as their own theory of the creation and structure of the universe, has been subjected to a comparative study with kindred theories possessed by other ancient civilisations of the world; and, where possible these views have been contrasted with what is scientifically known. Information relating to the regional geography of the world has been so arranged as to bring out how the Sinhalese widened their horizon with the passage of centuries. Details pertaining to physical geography have been tabulated under lithosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere, fauna and flora, and the classical theories associated with certain phenomena have been critically examined. In the second part information regarding the historical and functional geography of Ceylon, which is fairly considerable, is treated in two chapters; and here, in the main, an attempt has been made, as far as possible, to throw new light and draw fresh inferences with the aid of appropriate references to literature in the English medium. Certain information which would have burdened the text of the treatise in spite of their alliance with the subject-matter, has been added as appendices.

Special mention has to be made of the linguistic notes that have been provided at places where they were thought to be

necessary, and of the several classical Sinhalese expressions which are of doubtful meaning for the better understanding of which further light has been thrown.

I am thankful to Dr. S.Paranavitana, former Professor of Archaeology, University of Ceylon and Dr. D.E.Rettiarachchi, Professor of Sinhalese, University of Ceylon for their esteemed initial guidance. I owe a deep debt of gratitude to Dr. M.B.Ariyapala, Senior Lecturer in Sinhalese, University of Ceylon for his very valuable suggestions and criticisms throughout my work, and to Dr. E.L.Panditaratna, Lecturer in Geography, University of Ceylon for his suggestions regarding its geographical aspect.

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