



**AN INVESTIGATIVE STUDY OF FOOD CULTURE IN ANCIENT
CEYLON THROUGH INSCRIPTIONS
(FROM 1st CENTURY A.D. TO 13th CENTURY A.D.)**

L.Thilini Tharushi De Silva*

University of Sri Jayewardenepura

In any country 'food' receives precedence over all the other main cultural aspects. Food culture is interconnected with other cultural aspects of a society. Inscriptions, chronicles and literature works provide evidence to the early existence of a developed food culture in ancient Ceylon. Inscriptions are the most trustworthy archaeological source. The research problem of this study is to explore the rich food culture of ancient Ceylon, from 1st century A.D. to 13th century A.D. (up to end of the Polonnaruwa era) by scrutinizing inscriptions. The objective of this study is to find out the food culture through inscriptions erected from the 1st century A.D. to 13th century A.D. Out of the inscriptions written during this period food is mentioned in the Maharatmale inscription, Eppavala inscription, Madirigiriya inscription, Rambawa inscription, Anuradhapura slab inscription, Galapatha Vihara rock inscription, Udakandara rock inscription, Polonnaruwa council chamber inscription, Tonigala inscription, Budanhela pillar inscription, Mihintala pillar inscription, Anuradhapura Gal Oruwa inscription and the Badulla inscription. The food items mentioned are boiled rice, gruel, green gram, curd, honey, sweet (madu), sesame, flemingia (undu), butter, salt, green herbs, coconut, turmeric, fenugreek, ginger, eight kinds of beverages (the juice of rose apple, mango, plantain, kind of wild plantain, eugenia - kind of rose apple, water lily, honey, and plum mixed with water). These items are mentioned in various forms. Most inscriptions show them as offerings to the sangha community. Inscriptions about food offered to sickly or morbid sangha, are also found. A completely different kind of inscription has also been found. This is the Tonigala inscription where deposits were made in a banking system. The items included paddy, flemingia and green gram. In addition, it is evident that chena cultivation and home cultivation were well established. This shows that Ceylon was an agricultural country. The Badulla inscription mentions an occasion where a ban had been imposed on food. In this study, it was apparent that the diet of ancient Ceylonese basically comprised plant origin carbohydrates, with high fibre content, fats and oils, vitamins, minerals, and all other nutrients from cereals and green vegetables. The diet fulfilled the daily basic energy requirement to satisfy the large caloric demand required for the immensely hard life style of the time with limited facilities, erratic weather conditions as well as a nutritionally balanced healthy diet.

Keywords: Consumption, Food culture, Inscriptions, Sangha community, Social class of donor

**Corresponding Author: ltharushi92@gmail.com*