

Property Rights of Women in Medieval Sri Lanka

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The discipline of 'Women's Studies' which is included in Social and Human Sciences gained considerable attention among scholars in the 1960s. Also with the expansion of the scope of historical studies the attention of scholars began to be directed towards 'South Asian Women' as a useful area of investigation. Within this multi-faceted subject, Sri Lankan women form the main focus of the present study, the precise topic being 'Property Rights of Women in Medieval Sri Lanka.'

The objective of this study is to identify women's ownership of land and property in the medieval period. There are several valuable studies about ancient and medieval Sri Lanka, but, they mainly focus on the social status of women. They have not paid attention to the economic status and ownership of land and property directly. Consequently, this study is of very great importance in understanding ancient society and its economy.

Details of women's ownership of land and property can be analyzed as, the ways in which land was acquired, nature of women's property ownership, use of property by Women and so on. Furthermore, this research will attempt on the basis of the available evidence, to examine land and property rights of women of both upper and lower social status. This research will also attempt to examine the concept of ownership, sale and other forms of alienation of property by women during this period.

The methodological aspects that one perceives are (1) comparative analysis of primary and secondary sources using modern historical methods (2) engaging in a critical inquiry of the above analysis (3) revision of previous research studies using new evidence and (4) interviewing scholars who are currently engaged in studies relevant to the present study.

According to the historical evidence (especially inscriptional evidence) on grants of property show that they were owned by women who belonged to the royalty and also that they were family donations. According to this information women's property ownership was closely related

to their social status. Therefore it can be concluded that both men and women of the ancient agrarian society had the rights to wield property regulating power. Also the women were not as empowered as the men with regard to property rights and ownership.

Key words: *Historical Evidence; Medieval Period; Social Status; Property Rights; Sri Lankan Women.*

NCAS Symposium Proceedings
2015