

Nomenclature of Drainage Streams in Sri Lanka

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This paper examines the use of words in the Sri Lankan drainage system as a prelude to a systematic understanding of irrigation in the country. According to Sinhala hydrological analysis, *ganga* is a perennial stream which contains water around the year. *Ganga* is a word derived from Sanskrit, and is also known as *nadiya* in Sinhala literature. Hydrologists studied the size, length, quality, dryness, uses and various names were given accordingly. Upper regions of rivers become dry seasonally and hence termed an *oya* which joins the river at a *modera*. Many *oya* basins directly join the sea or lagoons known as *kalapuwa*. *Aru* was the term used by Tamils for *oya*. In the South, the word *ara* was used for non-river smaller streams but has no reference to Tamil *aru*. *Ara* became *aru* in Tamil. In the Matara district, *Ara* ends at the sea or joins the river. If perennial, a short stream is known as a *ganga*. An example is Madu ganga.

Ela is perennial and runs through the flat basin and allows villages to exist. If the basin is mountainous, it causes a sound and exists seasonally, and is known as a *dola*. A stream can fall through a hill and it becomes an *ella* during rains. It dries during the drought. *Ella* is protected to become a *pibilla* for bathing. The pool down *ella* is the *gangula* which is used for bathing. *Kandura* is the sudden water flow on the hill which dries after the rain. The *Ela* region exhibits a *dola pahara* after a heavy rain and destroys cultivation and houses. *Dora* is the sand that gets collected at the end of a *dola pahara*. Stagnant water in the middle of a *oya* is called *eba*. *Wila* is a large water body caused by digging or naturally stored ground water. Underground flow is known as *gilma*. A lake is known as a *wila*, *wewa* or *kalapuwa*. Marshes are

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connected with *kalapuna* and known as *wagura*. Harbours are identified as *thota*, *thera*, *titta* and if small as a *vella*. Spills are *vana*, *pitawana* or *telawilla*. *Hela* is the marsh over water and the ejected water is known as *Bubula*.

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