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## SOME VERSIONS OF THE HEROIC IN NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S *A GRAIN OF WHEAT* AND KHUSHWANT SINGH'S *I SHALL NOT HEAR THE NIGHTINGALE*

In Bertolt Brecht's play *Galileo*, Andrea, disillusioned with his master for recanting before the Inquisition, makes this anguished pronouncement: "Unhappy is the land that breeds no hero." To this Galileo makes the cryptic reply, "No, Andrea: 'Unhappy is the land that needs a hero.'"<sup>1</sup> Brecht's play is indeed at some remove from the worlds of colonial India and Kenya; this exchange, nevertheless, serves as an apt point of departure for a comparative study of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat*.<sup>2</sup> and Khushwant Singh's *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*.<sup>3</sup> Both novels are situated at a point in history when India and Kenya were involved in protracted struggles for Independence, a period in which the people of these lands witnessed or experienced betrayals, massacres, sacrifices, and several acts of heroism. Galileo's words are particularly appropriate here because it is from such "unhappy" backgrounds that leaders appear and attempt to transcend the lot of a beleaguered community or nation.

The primary object of this study is to evaluate the manner in which these two novelists have presented the motifs of heroism and leadership; in the process, it hopes to prove the thesis that a comparative approach to Commonwealth Literature is both feasible and desirable.

Doubtless, there is a school of thought which contends that, by continuing to employ the label "Commonwealth Literature," critics are guilty of perpetuating the notion of empire. Yet even a critic like Meenakshi Mukherjee, who in her recent writing "seriously question[s] the validity of earlier labels and pigeon holes" like Commonwealth Literature, and contends that "the only tenuous link among them [Commonwealth countries] is the British rule at some point in history," concedes that "the groupings might have served some purpose so long as the Commonwealth writer's

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<sup>1</sup>. Bertolt Brecht, *Galileo*, trans. Charles Laughton, ed. John Willet and Ralph Mannheim (London: Eyre Methuen, 1980) p. 201.

<sup>2</sup>. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *A Grain of Wheat* (London: Heinemann, 1967).

<sup>3</sup>. Khushwant Singh, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* (Bombay: IBH, 1980). In later references, the title is abbreviated to *The Nightingale*.



## SOME VERSIONS OF THE HEROIC IN NGUGI AND KUSHWANT SINGH 2

central concern was the achievement of freedom and racial equality."<sup>4</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Khushwant Singh are emphatically concerned with social justice and with the "achievement of freedom," so they are by one definition at least Commonwealth novelists. The articulation of these themes, however, is coloured by certain national, cultural, historical, and temporal factors; as a consequence, these Commonwealth novels are "simultaneously different and like,"<sup>5</sup> and lend themselves to an intriguing comparative analysis.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's approach to literature is unapologetically polemical. He declares, in *Barrel of a Pen*, that "For the Kenya artist the most minimal step towards his own freedom is a total immersion in the struggles of Kenyan workers and peasants."<sup>6</sup> Such a stance occasionally leads Ngugi to some problems in the presentation of character, especially when he dwells on those individuals who articulate his political views. In *Petals of Blood*,<sup>7</sup> for instance, Ngugi is so supportive of Karega that the latter eventually becomes too obviously his spokesman. The reader tires of Karega's diatribes towards the end of the novel; consequently, Ngugi's "message," which had been so effectively conveyed through the interaction of character and through his judicious use of symbol, is at the end considerably debilitated. In *A Grain of Wheat*, however, Ngugi avoids this pitfall by juxtaposing the flawed hero, Mugo, with the more conventional hero, Kihika. Both the political statement and the artistic design are consequently preserved.

Christopher Wanjala declares, in *For Home and Freedom*, that "in the Mau Mau war experience, the choice is either to fight on the side of the Mau Mau or to abdicate one's racial pride for the position of a faithful dog [to the whiteman]."<sup>8</sup> Even a cursory perusal of *A Grain of Wheat* demonstrates the problems involved in adopting such an inflexible posture. While such an approach could conceivably explain Karanja's role in the novel, it does not fit Mugo. Mugo, after all, is a "villain" when he is lauded by his fellows as their champion against British oppression, and a hero--at least in the eyes of

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4. Meenakshi Mukherjee, "In Search of Critical Strategies," *The Eye of the Beholder: Indian Writing in English*, ed. Maggie Butcher (London: Commonwealth Institute, 1983) p. 52.

5. Kendrick Smithyman, "The Common Experience, the Common Response," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 6.1 (1971): p. 8.

6. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Barrel of a Pen: Resistance to Repression in Modern Kenya*, (Trenton, NJ: Africa World P, 1983)p. 68.

7. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Petals of Blood* (London: Heinemann, 1977).

8. Christopher Wanjala, *For Home and Freedom* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau) p. 145.



Gikonyo, Mumbi, and the reader--when he is executed for treachery. When the Mau Mau war breaks out Mugo makes strenuous efforts to stay away from "a drama in a world not his own."<sup>9</sup> He resents the liberation movement because it threatens the security, prosperity, and peace of mind that he had achieved after years of labour. His plans are shattered, however, when Kihika walks into his hut after killing D.O. Robson, and suggests that he complement the work of the Mau Mau by organizing an underground movement in the village. This leads Mugo to betray Kihika to the British. Ironically, the deed rebounds on him. Instead of being rewarded, he is treated as one of the terrorists, kept in detention, and tortured:

They took us to the roads and to the quarries even those who had never done anything. They called us criminals. But not because we had stolen anything or killed anyone.... Day and night, they made us dig. We were stricken ill, we often slept with empty stomachs, and our clothes were just rags and tatters so that the rain and the wind and the sun knew our nakedness.<sup>10</sup>

Mugo is lionized by the community for his resilience and fortitude, but it is only when he is released from detention and forced to battle remorse and the undeserved plaudits of his fellows that his moral leadership becomes patent. As a survivor from the horrendous Rira camp and as Kihika's friend, Mugo could have played on the susceptibilities of the villagers and fulfilled his ambition of becoming a messianic leader; like the Conradian characters Jim and Razumov, however, Mugo is a slave to his own conscience. He resists all attempts to make him into a patriot, and when he is confronted with the naively penetrating questions of Kihika's sister, he breaks down and confesses. Subsequently, during the Uhuru day celebrations, he reveals his crime to the people of Thabai, and gives himself up to the tender mercies of General R. and Koinandu.

Shatto Gakwandi asserts that Ngugi's purpose in this novel is to warn his society "against an overhasty process of setting up heroes to worship and traitors to persecute."<sup>11</sup> Ngugi achieves this aim by portraying Mugo variously as a lonely householder; betrayer of Kihika; conscious-stricken detainee; reluctant hero; and, eventually, willing martyr. He is, like Kihika, the seed that must perish before it yields new grain. After all, the only positive to emerge from a sombre Independence day celebration in Thabai is Gikonyo's imminent reconciliation with his wife. This synthesis, which is surely symbolic of the need to coalesce all the factions within post-colonial

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<sup>9</sup>. Ngugi, *A Grain* p. 212-13.

<sup>10</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 76.

<sup>11</sup>. Shatto Arthur Gakwandi, *The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa*, (London: Heinemann, 1977) p. 110.



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Kenya, will only be achieved if the various groups frankly confront and reassess the mistakes of the past. Gikonyo is in no doubt that this transformation is brought about because of Mugo:

"He was a brave man, inside," he said. "He stood before much honour, praises were heaped on him. He would have become a chief. Tell me another person who would have exposed his soul for all the eyes to peck at?" He paused and let his eyes linger on Mumbi. Then he looked away and said, "Remember that few people at the meeting are fit to lift a stone against that man. Not unless I--we--too--in turn open our hearts naked for the world to look at."<sup>12</sup>

Ngugi, then, charts Mugo's precipitous journey to martyrdom with considerable artistic aplomb. He describes Mugo's treachery and its repercussions with damning detail; at the same time, however, he understands why Mugo acted the way he did. Furthermore, Ngugi goes on to demonstrate how Mugo transcended his selfishness and fear to become a true leader of the people. Mugo is perhaps a greater hero than the "unblemished" leader, Kihika, because he has to cope with physical, psychological, and moral pressures which the latter never encounters. No such progression is discernible, however, in Khushwant Singh's portrayal of Sher Singh. In an article entitled "Khushwant Singh's Fiction," Chirantan Kulshrestha, having made the point that Khushwant Singh's socio-cultural preoccupations define the nature of his fiction, goes on to say:

To these is brought a novelist's realism, a view of life that is ironic and detached, sometimes deeply satirical but seldom tender. His characters--mostly ordinary people, foolish and stubborn, even pompous, corrupt, and vain--emerge out of the vast amorphous complex of Indian life."<sup>13</sup>

Although Khushwant Singh is "tender" in his treatment of Sabhrai and "detached" in his portrayal of Taylor, it is his satiric bent which is most prominent when he deals with Sher. Sher Singh is afflicted by a chronic feeling of insecurity and inadequacy. The only son of an influential Sikh magistrate, he is pampered as a child; consequently, he never matures. Convinced that he is a failure, Sher becomes the leader of a terrorist organization because he sees in this position an opportunity to achieve fame and success, and a useful way of camouflaging his weaknesses. The social and political climate of the time certainly helped him in this enterprise. *The Nightingale* is set during the last days of the Raj, a period in which it was both fashionable and advantageous to be a

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<sup>12</sup>. Ngugi, *A Grain* p. 76.

<sup>13</sup>. Chirantan Kulshrestha, "Khushwant Singh's Fiction," *Considerations*, ed. Meenakshi Mukherjee (New Delhi: Allied, 1977) p. 123.



nationalist. While Gandhi and his followers were risking life and limb in their struggle for *swaraj*, Sher Singh flirts with communism, secure in the knowledge that his influential father would protect him if these flirtations led him to any trouble. In the following extract, the author captures the hypocrisy, the egotism, and the insecurity which prompted Sher to crave leadership:

The applause that came from his family and his colleagues was offset by his early marriage. Champak, despite her expressions of admiration, gave him an uneasy feeling of being a failure. To impress her became an obsession. The form it took was to hold out visions of a successful political career by which he would take her to dizzy heights of eminence along with him. The more his physical inadequacy gnawed his insides, the more daring he became in his political activity. From fiery speeches, he went on to uniforms and discipline; from those to believe in force: the worship of tough men and love for symbols of strength, like swords crossed over a shield. These, with the possession of guns, pistols, cartridges, and the handsomely masculine Alsatian as a companion, completed his martial padding. Living with these symbols of strength and among people who vaguely expected him to succeed, Sher Singh came to believe in his own future and his power.<sup>14</sup>

Sher Singh, then, takes upon himself the role of a charismatic leader. But, as the author contends, he is nothing more than a "hot-house plant blossoming in a greenhouse."<sup>15</sup> When he is called upon to take a firm stand against colonial oppression, he proves to be both inept and pathetic.

The only Indian character in this novel who is untouched by the author's satire is Sher's mother. It is largely because of Joyce Taylor's respect for Sabhrai, and her concern for the latter's failing health, that she urges her husband to release Sher from detention. Sher not only revels in the unexpected freedom but he also uses the episode to fulfil his political ambitions.

Sher Singh was flushed with excitement. At long last it had come. An imprisonment and a heroic stand against torture by the police. What more could anyone ask for? He would be the hero of the city for the next few days. If he kept up the citizens' interest and

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<sup>14</sup>. Khushwant Singh, p. 192.

<sup>15</sup>. *Ibid* p. 192.



faith in him, a political career was his for the asking.<sup>16</sup>

Sher certainly achieves his desires. His friends organize events in such a way that his release is taken as a victory for the Indians over the British Raj. He returns home accompanied by police escort, cheering crowds, and brass band. In many ways, Sher's triumphal march is reminiscent of the processions that were sometimes used at the end of Greek comedies to indicate that all the conflicts were at an end, and the difficulties resolved. In *The Nightingale*, however, the accolades and the fanfare are parodic and satiric in their intent. The reader is not allowed to forget that the man who pompously declares, "they [the British] could not break the spirit of this son of India"<sup>17</sup> to the malleable mob outside the prison, had denounced the various liberation movements to Mr. Taylor, had wept like a child when the police beat him, and would have betrayed all his friends at the first sign of further punishment. Thus, what Sher Singh considers to be the launching of a triumphant political career, is really an authorial *coup de grace*. The "hero's" welcome that Sher receives is an indictment of both the pseudo hero and the gullible people who unquestioningly accept Sher as their leader. Although Ngugi castigates the people of Thabai for the nonchalance with which they make and destroy heroes, he insists that their lapses be regarded in a more ameliorating spirit because the entire nation was devastated by the colonial experience. Khushwant Singh ascribes no such redeeming features to Sher or to his acolytes. While Ngugi shows that Mumbi and Gikonyo are able to recognize the personal and political implications of Mugo's moral triumph at the end of the novel, Khushwant Singh asserts that Sher's victory is a hollow sham; consequently, the political and moral ideas articulated so convincingly by Mugo and Kihika in *A Grain of Wheat*, become in *The Nightingale*, a subject for satire.

The two individuals examined so far are those who could be labelled "problematic heroes;" Kihika and Sabhrai, however, are more traditionally conceived. Once again a perusal of the manner in which they have been presented by Ngugi and Khushwant Singh reveals intriguing patterns of convergence and divergence. Ngugi does not portray Kihika with the same complexity as he did Mugo. Indeed, there are some infelicities in Ngugi's characterization of Kihika that have been well documented by commentators like Gakwandi. He describes the weaknesses in the novel thus:

The reader gets a discomfoting impression that the events of the novel have a much wider significance than can be grasped in the interactions of peasant characters. Sometimes the author tries to overcome this by attributing to his characters a greater social awareness than is convincing, for instance when at their local meetings they discuss

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<sup>16</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 223.

<sup>17</sup>. *Ibid* p. 225.



Gandhi and Indian politics and the American war of Independence.<sup>18</sup>

The undue historical and political awareness given to Kihika is undoubtedly an artistic lapse, but Ngugi's portrayal of Kihika works in spite of this blemish because such blemishes are the exception rather than the rule in *A Grain of Wheat*. He is, no doubt, an idealized figure, but he is more than a sentimental version of a revolutionary hero who is invincible until he is betrayed. Furthermore, while Kihika's actions and pronouncements have the author's sanction, he does not become a mere authorial mouthpiece. The challenge before the critic is to discover how Ngugi achieves the success that eludes him in his depiction of Karega.

Eileen Julien, in an article entitled "Heroism in *A Grain of Wheat*," makes this perceptive observation about Kihika:

Kihika can be likened to heroes typical of romance or epic. Such figures are, Northrop Frye tells us in *An [sic] Anatomy of Criticism*, "superior in degree to other men" and sometimes to their environment as well. Like other warrior heroes in literature ... Kihika is elevated above his companions and comrades.<sup>19</sup>

Ngugi states in the first chapter that "Kihika, a son of the land, was marked out as one of the heroes of deliverance,"<sup>20</sup> and after the successful raid on the police garrison at Mahee, "People came to know Kihika as the terror of the whiteman. They said that he could move mountains and compel thunder from heaven."<sup>21</sup> Once Ngugi has established that Kihika is an exceptional individual, the reader has no difficulty in accepting the Christlike aura that surrounds him. He comes to realize that Kihika is the kind of individual who is capable of making the supreme sacrifice, not for self-aggrandizement or for the purpose of satisfying a personal whim, *a la* Sher Singh, but because he has an abiding love for the land of his birth. Not only does Kihika display his potential for leadership, but from his youngest days, he has that rare ability to articulate his views on heroism and martyrdom. This is what he declares to Karanja long before the Emergency was declared:

All oppressed people have a cross to bear. The Jews refused to carry it and were scattered like dust all over the earth. Had Christ's death

<sup>18</sup>. Gakwandi p. 111.

<sup>19</sup>. Eileen Julien, "Heroism in *A Grain of Wheat*," *African Literature Today* 13 (1983): p. 139.

<sup>20</sup>. Ngugi, *A Grain* p. 18.

<sup>21</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 20-21.



a meaning for the children of Israel? In Kenya we want a death which will change things, that is to say, we want a true sacrifice. But first we have to be ready to carry the cross. I die for you, you die for me, we become a sacrifice for one another. So I can say that you, Karanja, are Christ. I am Christ. Everybody who takes the Oath of Unity to change things in Kenya is a Christ.<sup>22</sup>

This passage demonstrates a maturity in Kihika which belies his youth. It focusses on the altruism and self-sacrifice that characterize his heroism. This maturity is seen yet again when in a later passage he insists that the masses too should be given a prominent place in this struggle. Contrast this with Sher Singh's attitude in *The Nightingale*. In spite of his grandiose socialist pronouncements, Sher Singh is a snob at heart and in deed--witness his disgust at the realization that he is beholden to an "uncouth" villager. To Kihika, however, the struggle cannot be carried out by the leaders alone. He declares:

We want a strong organization. The white man knows this and fears. Why else has he made our people move into these villages? He wants to shut us from the people, our only strength. But he will not succeed. We must keep the road between us and the people clear of obstacles. I often watched you in old Thabai. You are a self-made man. You are a man, you have suffered. We need such a man to organize an underground movement in the new village.<sup>23</sup>

Kihika's insistence that the masses be included in the vanguard of the movement does not imply that there is a reduction in the stature and usefulness of the leader. Cook and Okenimkpe conclude, somewhat erroneously, that Ngugi rejects the messianic role that Kihika gives himself. They state that according to Ngugi, "this individualistic obsession is to be deplored."<sup>24</sup> This observation is questionable. Nowhere does Ngugi suggest that he has any quarrel with Kihika's vision of being "a saint, leading the Gikuyu people to freedom and power."<sup>25</sup> On the contrary, Ngugi asserts that Kenya needs individuals like Kihika who by their charisma and self-sacrifice can inspire others to follow their example.

In *A Grain of Wheat*, the concepts of heroism and leadership are closely allied

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<sup>22</sup>. Ngugi, *A Grain* p. 110.

<sup>23</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 218.

<sup>24</sup>. David Cook, and Michael Okenimkpe, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: An Exploration of His Writings* (London Heinemann, 1983) p. 84.

<sup>25</sup>. Ngugi, *A Grain* p. 77.



to Ngugi's version of Christianity. Ngugi always regarded Christianity with some ambivalence. In *Weep not Child*, and certain sections of *Petals of Blood*, he illustrates how the church supported the state in its efforts to subjugate the masses. This "mission," which had its origins in the colonial era, is carried out with renewed vigour after Independence. Even *A Grain of Wheat*, a novel which does not attack the church with the same vehemence, admonishes this institution for its role in sanctioning colonialism. Kihika states:

We went to their church. Mubia, in white robes, opened the Bible. He said: Let us kneel down to pray. We knelt down. Mubia said: Let us shut our eyes. We did. You know, his remained open so that he could read the word. When we opened our eyes, our land was gone and the sword of flames stood on guard. As for Mubia, he went on reading the word, beseeching us to lay our treasures in heaven where no moth would corrupt them. But he laid his on earth, our earth.<sup>26</sup>

Both the author and his hero, then, question the motives and actions of institutionalized religion, but at the same time they are aware that Christianity can be harnessed into a powerful moral force capable of destroying the evil that is colonialism. Peter Nazareth goes to the extent of insisting that Kihika's "moral inspiration comes from the bible."<sup>27</sup> It must be emphasized, however, that although Kihika views himself as a modern Christ, his acceptance of Christianity is not unqualified. He takes Christianity and modifies it to suit the needs of the Kenyan people. Consider the following passage:

We only hit back. You are struck on the left cheek. You turn the right cheek. One, two, three--sixty years. Then suddenly, it is always sudden, you say: I am not turning the other cheek any more. Your back to the wall, you strike back. You trust your manhood and hope it will keep you at it. Do you think we like scuffling for food with hyenas and monkeys in the forest? I, too, have known the comfort of a warm fire and a woman's love by the fireside.... I despise the weak. Let them be trampled to death. I spit on the weakness of our fathers. Their memory gives me no pride. And even today, tomorrow, the weak and those with feeble hearts shall be wiped from the earth. The strong shall rule.... These are not words of a mad man. Not words, not even miracles could make Pharaoh let the children of Israel go. But at midnight, the Lord smote all the first-

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<sup>26</sup>. Ngugi, *A Grain* p. 18.

<sup>27</sup>. Peter Nazareth, "Is *A Grain of Wheat* a Socialist Novel?" *Critical Perspectives on Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, ed. G.D. Killam (Washington: Three Continents, 1984) p. 256.



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born of the captive that was in dungeon. And all the first-born of the cattle. And the following day, he let them go. That is our aim. Strike terror in their midst.<sup>28</sup>

The extract has an intertextual relationship with the Book of Exodus and the Sermon on the Mount, but it is readily apparent that neither the spirit nor the sentiments expressed here are consonant with the tenets of Christianity. "The use of biblical text and typology," as Sharma declares, displays "a curious and baffling ambivalence;"<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, it becomes clear towards the end of the novel that Kihika, in the main, advocates a combination of the militant, Old Testament brand of Christianity and the Christlike martyrdom of self as the principles that will free Kenya from the shackles of colonialism. Not only does Kihika make the people aware of these principles, but he acts on them. Thus Ngugi has created his hero in such a manner that the reader has no hesitation in accepting the villagers' view that Kihika's martyrdom was justly obtained.

It is important to note that Kihika, while upholding all the values that the author reveres, still convinces as a character. In *Petals of Blood*, Karega, who performs a similar function, languishes into a type. Kihika, fortunately, does not degenerate in this manner because he is drawn with greater care. Although Ngugi's endorsement of Kihika's actions is total, this does not prevent the author from giving Kihika some human foibles. General R. complains that Kihika talked too much while the others fought. There is more than a touch of presumption and arrogance when Kihika instructs Mugo to help the Mau Mau without ensuring that Mugo is willing to risk his life for a cause he had never intended to join. Then, there are the other failings which Killam has identified: "a certain pomposity about him and a tendency to show off, to draw attention to himself."<sup>30</sup> These peccadillos, while not robbing Kihika of the exemplary qualities he otherwise displays, certainly succeed in humanizing him.

In spite of Maughan Brown's strenuous efforts to prove otherwise,<sup>31</sup> it is patent that Ngugi emphasizes, in *A Grain of Wheat*, that violence is an inevitable, even necessary corollary to a liberation struggle. This view, however is not shared by Khushwant Singh: the policemen who perpetrate violence are bullies and the individuals

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<sup>28</sup>. Ngugi, *A Grain* p. 216-17.

<sup>29</sup>. Govind Narain Sharma, "Ngugi's Christian Vision: Theme and Pattern in *A Grain of Wheat*." *Critical Perspectives on Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, ed. G.D. Killam (Washington: Three Continents, 1984) p. 203.

<sup>30</sup>. G.D. Killam, *An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi* (London: Heinemann, 1980) p. 58.

<sup>31</sup>. David Maughan Brown, *Land, Freedom, and Fiction: History and Ideology in Kenya* (London: Zed, 1985) p. 230-65.



like Sher who regard themselves as politicians and revolutionaries are cowards; it does not follow, however, that his entire work is an unremitting exposure of violence and political chicanery. Khushwant Singh views himself as a responsible satirist; as a consequence, he does not make ridicule an end in itself, but balances his criticism by invoking certain norms that are placed in opposition to these aberrations.

In *The Nightingale*, these values are located in Sabhrai, and Khushwant Singh's portrayal of her gives the lie to Kulshrestha's conclusion that "an utter indifference to values"<sup>32</sup> is essentially a part of the author's world view. Sabhrai is portrayed in a manner reminiscent of Nyakinyua, a character in Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*, but there are certain differences. She does not possess the powerful personality which allows Nyakinyua to make a whole community act according to her wishes, but like Ngugi's heroine, Sabhrai upholds ancient virtues; and although her range of influence is small, within these limits she is supreme.

What makes Sabhrai different from the other members of her family is her integrity. While Buta Singh and Sher Singh have no real convictions (even their nationalism is open to doubt), and are devious in their pursuit of political power, no such charge could be levelled at Sabhrai. She is deeply anchored to Sikh traditions, rituals, and beliefs, and the tenacity with which she maintains these beliefs allows her to transcend the mediocrity and hypocrisy that are so much a part of the more "educated" members of her household. Her attitude to life, controlled as it is by the dictates of the Guru, might appear reductionist, and it is too simplistic to suggest that the author recommends a total emulation of her principles. Yet in a novel that is mainly concerned with the repudiation of the false values held by aspiring politicians, Sabhrai serves as the moral criterion against which these other peccant characters are judged.

Although Ngugi establishes Kihika's strengths from the beginning, he only gradually informs the reader that Mugo has the propensity to be a leader. Khushwant Singh chooses the latter option in his delineation of Sabhrai. Initially, the reader recognizes in Sabhrai a "simple," peasant woman who except for her homespun wisdom has little to offer the novel. It is only when her son is jailed that Sabhrai's true nature surfaces. At this point, she is able to prove Taylor's comment that Sabhrai "has the dignity of an ancient people,"<sup>33</sup> and the ability to perform acts of courage and sacrifice that make her what her husband and son could never be, a true hero. Taylor promises that Sher will be freed if he turns King's evidence and reveals the names of the other terrorists who killed the police informer. Buta Singh, horrified that Sher has jeopardized his chances of being mentioned in the New Year's Honour's list, is adamant that his son should act accordingly. Sabhrai, however, seeks counsel of the Guru.

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<sup>32</sup>. Kulshrestha p. 124.

<sup>33</sup>. Khushwant Singh, *op.cit.* p. 220.



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The passage in chapter ten which describes Sabhrai's visit to the Golden Temple is one of the most moving in the entire novel. Khushwant Singh not only creates the environment of a place of worship, but he also captures the mental torment that Sabhrai undergoes as she tries to obtain direction from the gods. Her predicament is certainly disturbing. If Sher does not confess, he will be subjected to further physical harassment, and as a mother she recoils from placing her son in such a situation. But if Sher gives the names of the others, he will become a traitor. Sabhrai finally chooses the former course, and the reasons which prompted her to take this decision are given in the following quotation:

Sabhrai also recalled the terrible days when the Sikhs wanted to take over their shrines from the clutches of corrupt priests and the police had decided to help the priests against the people. They had killed and tortured passive resisters. But for each one who was killed, beaten, or imprisoned, another fifty had come. Word had gone round that whenever a band of passive resisters prayed with faith, the Guru himself would appear in their midst and all the lathi blows the police showered on them would fall on him and not on them. That was exactly how it had happened. Frail men and women, who had not known the lash of a harsh tongue, had volunteered and taken merciless beatings without wincing. The police had tired and the priests had panicked. The faith of the Sikhs had triumphed. Was her faith shaking? She tried to dismiss all other thoughts and bring the picture of the last warrior Guru to her mind. He came as he was in the color print on her mantelpiece: a handsome bearded cavalier in a turban, riding his roan stallion across a stream... *There was a man.* He had lost all his four sons and refused to give in to injustice. She was to lose only one. How had the Guru faced the loss of his children?... She was a Sikh; so was her son. Why did she ever have any doubts?<sup>34</sup>

Sher too relives the halcyon days of the Sikhs, but there is a crucial difference in the postures adopted by mother and son. Sher surrounds himself with all the insignia of Sikh heroes because he feels that these will give him a martial air. Sabhrai, on the other hand, sees in the past an inspiration for present action. In earlier times, Sikhs had encountered greater oppression and had come through victorious; consequently, there was no reason why her son could not emulate his sires. Khushwant Singh's treatment of Sabhrai makes it plain that the mantle of the Sikh warriors of old falls neither on the would-be hero Sher, nor on his pompous father Buta, but on a person who constantly describes herself as "an illiterate native woman."<sup>35</sup> Sabhrai's heroism reaches its

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<sup>34</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 203-04.

<sup>35</sup>. Khushwant Singh p. 208.



apogee, when on her visit to Sher's cell, she admonishes her son thus:

He [the Guru] said that my son had done wrong. But if he named the people who were with him he would be doing a greater wrong. He was no longer to be regarded as a Sikh and I was not to see him again.<sup>36</sup>

There is no way of discovering whether Sher would have acted on the Guru's advice. Joyce Taylor's admiration for Sabhrai is such that she persuades her husband to release Sher before the latter could face his interrogators. Ironically, Joyce Taylor's kind gesture brings about Sabhrai's death. Sher and his supporters are so thrilled at the knowledge that they have been "victorious" over the Raj that they disturb Sabhrai on a crucial day of her convalescence, and this leads to her fatal relapse. Her tragedy is brought about by the fact that, except for some maudlin, rhetorical flourishes by Buta Singh after her death, she dies an unsung hero while her cowardly son wins all the kudos.

C.D. Narasimhaiah<sup>37</sup> once declared that "Commonwealth Literature ... affords unprecedented opportunities for the critic to compare works from two or more cultures, not in the attempt to locate affinities (which is a very glib thing to do), but to learn to appreciate differences."<sup>37</sup> A comparative study of the motif of leadership in *A Grain of Wheat* and *The Nightingale*, while endorsing Narasimhaiah's observations, also proves that the points of convergence are equally important. It is not a coincidence, for instance, that Khushwant Singh should deride an individual who has Marxist pretensions and laud another who advocates stoic endurance and passive resistance against adversity. As Raja Rao's novel *Kanthapura*<sup>38</sup> so amply demonstrates, the struggle for Independence from Britain in India was greatly influenced by Gandhi's non-violent campaign. Although Gandhi's representative in *Kanthapura*, Moorthy, is disenchanted with the movement at the end of the novel and decides to become a socialist, his followers still cling to Gandhi's creed. Sabhrai is not portrayed as a *satyagrahi per se*, yet she subscribes to the same values, values that are reinforced by her own Sikh traditions. *A Grain of Wheat* for its part ends with images of fertility and creation, but Gikonyo's concluding vision, and the prospect of his reconciliation with Mumbi does nothing to take away the notion that the change for the better was at least in part brought about by the efforts of Kihika and the other Mau Mau fighters. Although Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Khushwant Singh are post-colonial novelists, they are decidedly not heirs

<sup>36</sup>. Khushwant Singh p. 208-09.

<sup>37</sup>. C.D. Narasimhaiah, "Why Commonwealth Literature?" *Alien Voice: Perspectives on Commonwealth Literature*, ed. Avadesh K. Srivastara. Lucknow: Print House (1981) p.7.

<sup>38</sup>. Raja Rao, *Kanthapura* (New York: James Laughlin, 1963).



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to the same ethos, and their different heritage is reflected in the novelistic strategies they employ.

To focus on the contrasts, however, is not to belittle the similarities without which no comparative study is possible. Both Ngugi and Khushwant Singh grapple with issues that were common to many colonies fighting for Independence such as the importance of religion in a freedom struggle, the nature of charismatic leadership, and the strained relationship between nationalist sentiment on the one hand and individual desires on the other. Perhaps Khushwant Singh does not possess the same range as his Kenyan counterpart, but his contribution is equally noteworthy because he penetrates the facade that pseudo heroes display and exposes the sham beneath. Both writers, in the main, avoid the use of stereotype and display a willingness to experiment in their depiction of exceptional individuals or of those who have heroic pretensions. At best, they play on the reader's expectations of what a leader or hero should be and then proceed to exceed or subvert these expectations. Small wonder, then, that an intertextual analysis of their work becomes a task that is considerably rewarding.

S.W. PERERA



## THE TAMIL SLAB INSCRIPTION OF THE VĪRAKKOTI AT BUDUMUTTAVA, NIKAWERATIYA URUBANIZATION AT MĀGALA.

The existence of stone inscriptions engraved in medieval Tamil characters at the Rajamahavihara, the Buddhist temple at Budumuttāva, has been known to epigraphists and archaeologists for quite a long time. Three of these epigraphs were recognized by E. Muller, who mentions them in his *Inscriptions of Ceylon*, though their contents were not within his comprehension.<sup>1</sup> They were later examined by H.C.P. Bell, whose brief notes on each of these were published in the Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of Ceylon for 1911-12.<sup>2</sup>

In 1929, S. Paranavitana recopied them and his accounts of these inscriptions were recorded in the Epigraphical Summary published in *The Journal of Science* (G), Vol. II.<sup>3</sup> Two of these inscriptions, which are found on granite pillars supporting the superstructure of the hall of a shrine, were successfully deciphered, edited and published by him subsequently in *Epigraphia Zeylanica*.<sup>4</sup>

The two inscriptions edited by Paranavitana are dated in the eighth regnal year of Jayabāhu, successor to Vijayabāhu I (1055 - 1110) at Polonnaruwa and contain references to Mānābharāṇa I, his nephew and heir-apparent. One of these pillar inscriptions records the donations made by Cuntamalli, a Cōḷa prince and consort of Mānābharāṇa, to the Saiva shrine of *Vikramacalāmēka-īśvaram*. This inscription provides the interesting information that this particular shrine was at Mākāḷ, otherwise called *Vikkiramacalāmēkapuram*.

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<sup>1</sup>. He has made only the following observations about these inscriptions: "Three Tamil inscriptions on two pillars inside the temple and one large slab lying outside. On one of the pillars we read the words *kalinga makan*, 'the son of the Kalinga (King)'. E. Muller, *Ancient Inscriptions in Ceylon*, London (1883) p. 60.

<sup>2</sup>. Though H.C.P. Bell found the inscription to be "much damaged" he could recognize the words *Lokamata* and *Viramakalam*, which were, in his opinion, names of a goddess. H.C.P. Bell, *Archaeological Survey of Ceylon*, Annual Report 1911-1912 Colombo (1915) p. 115.

<sup>3</sup>. *The Ceylon Journal of Science*, Section G., Vol. II, ed. A.M. Hocart and S. Paranavitana, Colombo (1933) p. 117 (inscr. no. 475).

<sup>4</sup>. S. Paranavitana, 'Two Tamil Pillar Inscriptions from Budumuttava', *Epigraphia Zeylanica* (EZ), Vol. 3, p. 302-312.



The second pillar inscription records a 'royal order' relating to the settlement of a dispute between artisans (Kammālar and washermen (Vannār) subsequent to an inquiry conducted by royal officers. These inscribed pillars seem to have been set up originally to support a hall attached to the Saiva shrine referred to in one of the inscriptions. Two polished figures of Sivalinga built into the walls of the Buddhist temple, where these inscriptions are found, and the uniform shape, size and workmanship of about a dozen rectangular pillars, including the ones bearing these inscriptions, which support the superstructure of the present Buddhist shrine, suggest that the architectural remains of the twelfth century Saiva shrine were used for the construction of parts of the Buddhist temple at Budumuttāva during the period of the Kandyan kings.

The contents of the third inscription - the one indited on a rectangular stone slab - found near the Bo-tree at the Rajamahavihara could not be read by S. Paranavitana. He remarks:

"Near the modern stupa there is a slab containing another Tamil inscription which is too weathered to admit of its being satisfactorily deciphered".<sup>5</sup>

After a preliminary examination of this slab in July 1986 we made the following observations on it:

"The present author's examination of the Tamil slab inscription at Budumuttāva has revealed that it records some transactions of the Aññūruvar and the military community allied to them. *Aññūruvanpalḷi*, *Patineṇpūmi* and *Vīramākālam* are some of the expressions recorded in that inscription which enables one to identify that epigraph as one set up by the Aññūruvar and the warriors in their service.

The most important detail in the inscription pertains to the *Aññūruvanpalḷi*, a Buddhist monastery named after the *Aññūruvar*. A major portion of the inscription is badly damaged on account of the fact that the stone slab had been used roughly for different purposes. The concluding portion of the inscription which consists of twenty-seven lines of writing could be deciphered if an estampage of it could be prepared. The slab is also of unusual interest on account of the

<sup>5</sup>. *ibid.* p. 302. For what is readable of this inscription, together with a translation there of, see at the end of this article.



variety of symbols depicted on it."<sup>6</sup>

These impressions have been confirmed by the efforts made by A. Velupillai to decipher this inscription on the basis of an estampage prepared and supplied to him by H.M. Piyatissa Senanayake. Commenting on the present state of the inscription he says:

"The markings of twenty-eight lines can be recognized. But words and letters can be made out only in about twenty-two lines. The beginning of the inscription is unfortunately lost. Of the readable portion of twenty-two lines, the first eighteen cover the entire breadth of the slab while the last four lines are small. The last three lines can be made out fairly accurately. In every other line, some letters cannot be made out. So, the translation of the text is impossible".<sup>7</sup>

These remarks could be endorsed without reservations and it may be added on the basis of our personal observations that the initial portion of the inscription contained a brief version of the *prasasti* of the *Nānādesis* as suggested by the occurrence of the word *Vakshasthala* on the right side of a line on the upper part of the stone. In the inscriptional preambles of the *Nānādesis* found in several parts of the island this particular expression is preceded by the words *Lakshmī alamkrta*. All these expressions taken together amount to their being a poetic description of the *Nānādesis* as those whose breasts were adorned by Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune. In an eulogy this is nothing but a figurative allusion to their prosperity.

A. Velupillai's attempt to decipher this inscription represents a major contribution towards the understanding of its contents. However, a closer scrutiny of the copy of the photograph of the inscription found in his paper reveals that the version of the decipherable portion of the text as given by him requires improvement and revision. Besides, some of the expressions and concepts recorded in that inscription deserve a much more detailed examination than has been attempted, especially on account their unusual significance. The present author, whose interest in this inscription was further stimulated by these considerations, made a second visit to the Rajamahavihara at Budumuttava in March 1993 in order to scrutinize the inscribed slab

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<sup>6</sup>. S. Pathmanathan, "The Naragam of the Nanadesis in Medieval Sri Lanka, Circa A.D. 1000-1300", *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, University of Peradeniya, Vol. IX, Nos. 1 & 2 (1984: published in 1987), p. 125-126.

<sup>7</sup>. A. Velupillai, "A Note on A Fragmentary Inscription of the Virokkoti from Budumuttava", *Journal of Tamil Studies, International Institute of Tamil Studies, Madras* (December 1987) p. 57-65.



again with the help of H.M. Piyatissa Senanayake.<sup>8</sup>

In recent years the slab inscription has been built into the structure of the wall of a newly constructed building and in its present state the edges of the slab remain covered with deposits of cement. Even before the slab was incorporated into the wall, the letters on the edges of its right and left sides were in such a state of damage as to be invisible. Besides, there are indications to suggest that the topmost portion of the slab, containing the initial portion of the text indited on it, was chopped off for some reason. As this stone slab, according to local tradition, was used as a base for grinding sand for constructional purposes, the top portion has been completely damaged. Only a few letters and words here and there could be recognized and little could be made out of them except for the references to the *Vīrakkoti*, *patinenpūmi* and the *Aññūruvar* and the indication that the text of the epigraph commenced with the *prasasti* of the *Nānādesis*.

Even the portion of the text engraved on the lower portion of the slab cannot be retrieved in its entirety on account of the damage on the edges of the stone, as stated earlier, and a damage in the form of a thick line descending from the top right side with a slant towards the left as it reaches the lower portion at the middle of the slab. The traces of some letters on almost all lines have been obliterated on account of this damage and because of this circumstance even the portion of the text indited on the lower portion cannot be satisfactorily deciphered. Yet, the words and expressions that could be deciphered are sufficient to provide an indication of the identity of those who set up the inscription and the purpose for which it was engraved.

This slab inscription deserves a serious and detailed investigation on account of several considerations. It is one of the longest among the inscriptions set up by the *Nanadesis* or their associates in the island. It records useful information on a variety of items not obtainable elsewhere. It provides insights into the development of Māgala, otherwise called *Vikrama Cālamēkapuram*, as an urban centre of some significance. The importance of this record is further enhanced by the consideration that it records information which enables one to determine precisely the functions of the *Vīrakkoti*, who are also referred to in many other epigraphic records from several places in Sri Lanka. The last but by no means the least important consideration is the fact that it contains the

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<sup>8</sup>. In March 1993, accompanied by H.M. Piyatissa Senanayake the present author visited the site and examined the inscribed stone once again. An estampage of the inscription prepared by Piyatissa senanayake on this occasion has been found to be very useful for the present study. We acknowledge our indebtedness to Revd. Thamburambuwe Sumanajoti, the Viharadhipati, for the courtesy of granting permission for these purposes and for providing some useful information about the inscribed slab. We would also like to record our appreciation of the support and encouragement given to us by the inmates of the monastery.



representations of the figures of a number of weapons depicted in a manner not found elsewhere in Sri Lanka and also probably not even in South India.

That the slab inscription is a medieval monument of Māgala is suggested by its present location as well as the testimony of the monks of the Rajamahavihara. Its present location may provide an indication that it was removed from its original site some where in the vicinity of the Buddhist temple when materials including the architectural remains of earlier buildings were gathered for its construction. The monks attached to the Rajamahavihara informed us that this stone slab was in fact removed from its original location close to two mounds in a coconut grove adjacent to the canal, which is at a distance of approximately 400 yards from the Rajamahavihara. There is, therefore, no reason to doubt that the communities whose activities are recorded in this inscription were established at Māgala.

The correlated testimony of the three inscriptions at Budumuttava provides an indication of the nature of the town of Māgala and its social and cultural institutions in the Polonnaruwa period and particularly during the twelfth century. One of the pillar inscriptions states that Mākal had the alternate name *Vikkirama Cālāmeḱa-puram*. The fact that this name ends with the suffix *puram* may be conceded to be of some significance. As the expression *pura(m)* is generally applied to the names of towns and cities, it may be assumed that *Vikkirama Cālāmeḱa-puram* had reached a state of development so as to be reckoned as a town during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The slab inscription suggests that its growth was at least partially due to the development of marketing centres of considerable significance in that locality.

The name Māgala (Mahagalla in Pali) was applied not only to the large tank at Nikaweratiya but also to a locality in its proximity. The modern village of Budumuttāva occupies an area that was included in the unit known as Māgala in medieval times. Māgala has been a flourishing agricultural settlement from the early centuries of the Christian era and the principal source of its prosperity was the Mahāgalla tank said to have been constructed by Mahāsenā.<sup>9</sup> That there was a Buddhist establishment around Budumuttāva during the Anuradhapura period is suggested by two headless dolomite images of the Buddha datable to the 8th or the 9th century and presently found within the premises of the Rajamahavihara.

That Māgala was an area of some strategic importance is suggested by some notices in the Pali chronicle. When Sanghatissa secured the throne at Anuradhapura, his rival Moggallāna is said to have occupied Mahagalla and fortified it with a view to advancing towards the north against the ruler of Anuradhapura.<sup>10</sup> Later, in the eleventh century, Mahāgalla was one among the many strongholds occupied by the Cōlas in

<sup>9</sup>. *Mahavamsa* trans. into English by Wilhelm Geiger, London (1964) 37:49.

<sup>10</sup>. *Culavamsa*, 44:13.



Dakkhinadesa.<sup>11</sup>

During the second quarter of the twelfth century the activities of Parakramabahu I provided some impetus for further development in the area. When he was ruling over Dakkhinadesa for some years until 1153 A.D. Parakramabahu constructed a dam on the confluence of two rivers, SaṅkaVaḍḍhamānaka and Kumbhīlavāna at the locality of Sūkharanijjhara.<sup>12</sup> From there water was diverted to the Māgala tank by means of a canal. Besides, large tracts of land between the tank and the site of the dam were brought under cultivation.

Māgala derived its importance on account of political, military and economic considerations. Owing to its central agricultural hinterland it had developed over a long period of time as a local centre of authority and cultural activities. Besides, occasionally in different periods it had served as a military outpost. The slab inscription indicates that it had attained another dimension, at least during the period between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, by developing as a major marketing centre. The establishment of the *Aññūrruvar* and their associates at Māgala suggests that it had become one of the major centres of commercial activity in Dakkhinadesa.

The development of Māgala as an urban centre with a commercial orientation was not an isolated phenomenon. It was one among several such centres which had a wide distribution in the island. Most of such towns were linked to the arteries of seaborne commerce in which the *Nānādesis* and their associates had played a significant role during the period under consideration. It may be recalled that the *Nānādesis* otherwise called *Aññūrruvar* in local inscriptions had established a Nagaram in the environs of Pāṇḍuvasnuvara as suggested by the references to *Nanateciya-pattinam* and *pattinappātai* in the inscription from Detiyaymulla.<sup>13</sup> They were also established at two other places-Galtenpitiya and Ataragalla-within Dakkhinadesa.<sup>14</sup> The reference to the *Aññūrruvanpalli* in the slab inscription and the influence exerted by their associates, the *Vīrakkoti*, over the locality suggest that the *Nānādesis* had their commercial establishments at Māgala on a durable basis with adequate arrangements for their security.

<sup>11</sup>. *ibid.* 58:42 - 43.

<sup>12</sup>. These rivers are identified with Hakvatuna Oya and Kimbulavana Oya respectively. *Culavamsa*, 68:32 -35.

<sup>13</sup>. S. Pathmanathan, "The Nagaram of the Nanadesis in Medieval Sri Lanka, Circa A.D. 1000 - 1300", *The Sri Lanka Journal of Humanities*, Vol. IX, Nos. 1 & 2, p. 122 - 163.

<sup>14</sup>. *ibid.*



The slab inscription mentions of two religious institutions which were supported and maintained by the *Aññūrruvar* and their associates, the *Vīrakkoti*. The *Aññūrruvanpalli* referred to in this epigraph seems to have been a Buddhist temple established or restored and maintained by the mercantile community called *Aññūrruvar*. The association of *Aññūrruvar* with some Buddhist institutions in the island is known also from some other inscriptions. An undated epigraph from Polonnaruwa which could be assigned to the early eleventh century on paleographic considerations mentions a Buddhist temple or monastery at a settlement of the *Aññūrruvar* (*Aññūrruvarpati palli*) in that city.<sup>15</sup> As there is reason to believe that Māgala was the site of an ancient Buddhist establishment it would appear that the *Aññūrruvar* were involved in its restoration and maintenance. It could also, perhaps, be argued that the support extended by the *Aññūrruvar* to Buddhism in this manner was motivated by a desire to encourage local traders who bought commodities to their markets at Māgala from its hinterland.

The expressions *aññūrruvanpalli-illāta pērum cātti*, "having bestowed a name that was not *Aññūrruvanpalli*", as found in the slab-inscription may probably suggest that the original name was changed into another by the *Vīrakkoti* by the time this inscription had been engraved. The inscription records that the *Vīrakkoti* had made an endowment to this institution in the form of money (*paṇam*) and lamps (*Vilakken.....*). Besides, they claim to have made arrangements for the incorporation of a fraternity of monks at this institution (*Caṅkam Amaittuk Kututtōm*).

The existence of a Hindu temple dedicated to the worship of the Mother Goddess, *Paramesvarī* - the tutelary deity of the *Nānādesis* - at Māgala during the period when they were established there is suggested by the expressions *Paramatta lōkamātāvai Vīramākālamenru pēr cātti*, found in the slab inscription. These expressions translate : 'having named the supreme Goddess as *Vīramākālam*'. Idiomatically these expressions have the connotation that either the image of the Supreme Goddess, the presiding deity of a temple or a temple dedicated to the worship of the Supreme Goddess was named *Vīramākālam* after the name of a group of Warriors. The validity of such an explanation is confirmed by the reference to the *Aññūrruvanpalli* in the same inscription. Just as a 'Buddhist temple was named *Aññūrruvanpalli* after the name of a community of merchants, the *Aññūrruvar*, the name of a military community, allied them, *Vīramākālam*, could have been applied to a temple of the Mother Goddess. It is also noteworthy that there are many instances where temples and images of deities enshrined in temples have been named after kings, and mercantile or military communities.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup>. *Ceylon Tamil Inscriptions*, pt. II. ed. A. Velupillai, Peradeniya, (1972) p. 9-12.

<sup>16</sup>. *Rājarājesvaram*, *Rājendracōlesvaram*, *Tribhuvanavīra-īsvaram* and *Uyyakkontan tirumalai* are some of the temples named after the titles or epithets of kings. There are some epigraphic notices on temples called *Aññūrruvan īsvaram* and *Vanniśvaram* named respectively after the mercantile community of *Aññūrruvar* and the military community of *Vanniyar*.



An alternate interpretation of these expressions is also possible because of the different connotations attached to the words *pēr cātti* as found in epigraphic usage. A corresponding expression *tirunāmam cāttiyatu*, 'having named', is employed to convey an altogether different idea in the Tamil slab inscription from Palamottai, which records an endowment made by a Brahmin widow to a Saiva shrine at the Brahmadeya of Kantalāy.<sup>17</sup>

The endowments and the performance of specific duties attached to them were placed under the custody of a regiment of the Vēlaikkāṇar. The phrases '... Valāṅkai Vēlaikkāṇar enṟu tirunāmam cāttiyatu' as found in this inscription were intended to convey the idea that endowments made by the Brahmin widow were registered in the name of the Vēlaikkāṇar and placed under their custody. The expressions *Paramatta lōkamātāvai Vīramākālam - enṟu pēr cātti* as found in the slab inscription from Budumuttāva may have been employed to describe a similar arrangement. It could also, therefore, be assumed that the military unit called *Vīramākālam* at Māgala assumed a custodial relationship in respect of a temple of the Mother Goddess. Nevertheless, it is significant that the inscription contains information relating to a temple of the Mother Goddess and that a military unit called *Vīramākālam* was closely associated with it. Whether the *Aññūṟuvan palli* and the temple of the Mother Goddess were located at the site of the mounds found in the vicinity of the canal, from where the slab inscription is said to have been removed to its present location, is a matter that requires archaeological excavations in the future.

The description of Durgā or Paramesvarī, the favourite deity of the *Nānādesis*, as *Paramatta lōkamātā* is of unusual significance and reminiscent of the ideas of Advaita Vedānta advanced by Sāṅkara.<sup>18</sup> Such a description of the Mother Goddess is not encountered in other inscriptions in the island. Etymologically the Tamil expression *paramatta* could be explained as one derived from *paramārtha*, which connotes 'the highest or whole truth', 'spiritual knowledge', 'an excellent or the most exalted object' and 'reality in the true sense of the word'.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup>. S. Parānavitana, "A Tamil Slab Inscription from Palamottai", *EZ*, Vol. 4, p. 191-196.

<sup>18</sup>. The reading *Vīramatta Lōkamāta* as given by A. Velupillai is obviously incorrect. What he has constructed as *Vīra* is in fact *para*. There is no trace of any sign representing the medial *i* over the first letter. The second letter could be clearly identified as *ra*. Besides, as an expression *vīramatta* has no meaning. It is not possible that those who drafted the text of the inscription would have used an expression which did not convey any meaning.

<sup>19</sup>. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit English Dictionary* (1899: Reprint 1976) Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, p. 588.



*Paramārtha* and its Prakrit form *Paramattha* are common to both the Hindu and Buddhist traditions. The word *Paramārtha* sometimes occurs as a personal name. For instance, Paramartha was the name of a reputed monk of Ujjain, who was a disciple of Guṇamati and translated his monumental treatise *Lakṣaṇānusāra Sāstra* and a large number of other Sanskrit Buddhist texts into Chinese.<sup>20</sup> There are many Pali texts which have names with *Paramattha* as the first component.<sup>21</sup> In Hindu thought, the word *Paramārtha* is usually applied in connection with the concept of the qualityless (*nirguṇa*) transcendent Absolute Brahman, a state higher than that of *Īśvara*.<sup>22</sup> The description of the Mother Goddess as *Paramatta Lōkamāta* in an epigraph set up by the associates of the Nānādesis suggests that there were among them and their associates persons influenced by the Advaita school of Vedānta.

Another religious institution at Māgala in the twelfth century was the Saiva Shrine called *Vikkirama-calāmēka-īśvaram* referred to in one of the pillar-inscriptions from Budumuttāva. As there are indications to suggest that merchants were closely associated with the foundation and/or maintenance of Saiva shrines in the eleventh century, at such localities as Mantai and Padaviya, it is not unlikely that the *Nānādesis* were associated with the establishment and maintenance of the Saiva temple dedicated to Siva at Māgala.<sup>23</sup> The endowment made to this temple by Cuntamalli, a consort of the ruler Mānābharaṇa, consisted of a lamp and ten gold coins. Her concern for this shrine located at considerable distance from the establishments of the royal court probably suggest that *Vikkirama-Calāmeka-īśvaram* was significant both as a centre of religious tradition and as an architectural monument of imposing proportions. The square, solid granite pillars of about ten feet in height and a large number of granite blocks which had been removed from the site of its remains and built into the parts of the Rajamahavihara suggest that the twelfth century Saiva shrine was a stone structure of relatively large proportions by local standards, involving the investment of resources in considerable measure. Such an impression implies a remarkable degree of prosperity

<sup>20</sup>. *The Classical Age*, ed. R.C. Mayumdar, Bharata Vidya Bhavan, Bombay (Second Impression 1962) p. 390, 611.

<sup>21</sup>. *Paramatthajotika*, *Paramattha dīpa*, *Paramattha bindu*, *Paramattha mānjusa* and *Paramatthavinicchaya* are such texts. *Paramārtha Saptati* was one of the Sanskrit texts composed by Vasubandhu.

<sup>22</sup>. The compartmentalisation of reality into *Paramārtha* (ultimate) and *Vyavahārika* (relative or practical) in Advaita is severely criticised by Ramanuja.

<sup>23</sup>. The participation of the *Nānādesis* in the establishment and maintenance of Siva devale No. I, which was known as *Iravikula Mānikka-īśvaram* during the period of its existence, is attested by a few inscriptions from Padaviya. In the early eleventh century three mercantile groups had accepted deposits of money for burning in perpetuity lamps at the shrine of Tiriviramiśvaram at Māntai.



among those of the locality where it was established and maintained.

While his consort, Cuntamalli, gave expression to her religious piety by making an endowment to the Saiva temple at Magala, Manabharana the ruler of Dakkhinadesa, demonstrated at Magala his concern for stability and the effectiveness of his authority as the custodian of customary laws in his capacity as ruler.

One of the pillar inscriptions at Budumuttāva indicates that some degree of social tension had prevailed at Magala at an occasion owing to an inter-caste dispute between the artisans (*Kammālar*) and Washermen (*Vannār*). The refusal of the Washermen to perform some services in connection with funeral rites of the artisans was the cause of the dispute. The matter had become so serious that it had to be referred to the ruler Manabharana on whose instance the case was examined by a group of five royal officers (*pañca pradhānikal*). After having investigated the customary practices concerning the issue, they decided that the artisans were entitled to the services of the washermen, who were obliged to provide head cloth (*mukattiṭṭu*), foot cloth (*koṭasalu*) and cloth for spreading on the ground (*pāvatai*) at funeral processions.<sup>24</sup>

Their decision was drafted in the form of a royal order and caused to be inscribed on stone by Mākkalīṅkam Kaṇavati, one of the five principal dignitaries serving under Mānābharaṇa.<sup>25</sup> The engraving of a royal order meant to be read and adhered to by the public and the parties to the dispute in particular, on a pillar at a temple at Māgala suggests that the two communities involved in the dispute were local residents who were in some capacity associated with the temple. It could also be inferred that the inquiry on matters relating to the dispute were conducted by the king's officers from a hall of the temple.

The slab inscription at Budumuttāva provides the indication that the group of people called *Virakkoti* were included in the composite population of Māgala during the period under consideration. The text of this inscription was undoubtedly drafted by the *Virakkoti* as they are referred to therein in the first person plural as *Vīrakkotiṭṭōm*, "we of the *Vīrakkoti*". The *Virakkoti* are referred to also in some other inscriptions of the Polonnaruwa period and in some of them they are closely associated with the *Nānādesis*.

In the Tamil slab inscription from Vahalkada they figure prominently as the

<sup>24</sup>. EZ, Vol. 3, p. 302 - 312.

<sup>25</sup>. The slab inscription at Vahalkada was set up by the *Vīrakkoti* as they describe themselves therein as *Vīrakkotiṭṭōm* in the first person plural. There is also a conventional reference to rank, honour and privileges as evident from the expressions 'pituñ cīrumāy vantatāka. Moreover, they are also described as *patinenpūmi Vīrakkoti* as in the slab inscription from Budumuttava. *Ceylon Tamil Inscriptions*, pt. 2 ed. A. Velupillai, Peradeniya (1972) p. 14.



close associates of the *Nānādesis* and as a group invested with certain responsibilities connected with the maintenance of the *Vīrapattinam*.<sup>26</sup> In these two inscriptions the *Virakkoti* are described as those who were endowed with rank, honour and privileges (*pitum cirimayavum*). It is also noteworthy that the slab inscription from Budumuttāva describes them in similar terms (*pitun cirumaya*). The *Vīrakkoti* were, therefore, a group of people who held a position of high rank among the communities of people associated with the *Nānādesis*. The aforementioned inscriptions, however, do not reveal the manner in which the *Vīrakkoti* attained a status invested with rank and honour. There has been some speculation about the *Vīrakkoti* in contemporary Sri Lankan writings. K. Indrapala, for instance says:

"The *Vīrakkoti* or *Vīrakkotiyar* were another mercantile community found in Ceylon about the twelfth century. They are recorded in the Vahalkada inscription to have associated themselves with the Cettis in taking certain steps to protect a town. In May 1969, another Tamil inscription of the *Vīrakkoti* was discovered at Illakattā Eba near Chilaw. In this record, they are referred to as the *patinenpūmi* *Virakkoti*. They are mentioned in a few South Indian inscriptions too, but do not seem to have been a prominent trading body".<sup>27</sup>

Indrapala's contention that the *Vīrakkoti*, were a mercantile community is, as will be seen later, unfounded. That 'the *Vīrakkoti* were presumably a military corporation or a community given to martial pursuits' is the opinion expressed with some hesitation by A. Velupillai.<sup>28</sup> Our examination of the epigraphic notices on the *Vīrakkoti* suggests that they were in fact a military community.

In a literal sense the word *Vīrakkoti* could be interpreted as 'the banner of heroism'. It is in this sense that this word is used in the inscriptional preamble of the Cōla King Vīrarajendra (1062-69).<sup>29</sup> In the traditions of the Cōla monarchy 'the banner of heroism' is associated with their peculiar conceptions of heroic kingship, and was

<sup>26</sup>. *ibid.* p. 15.

<sup>27</sup>. K. Indrapala "Some Medieval Mercantile Communities of South India and Ceylon", *Journal of Tamil Studies*, Vol. II, No. 2, International Institute of Tamil Studies, Madras (1970) p. 1 - 15.

<sup>28</sup>. Curiously in one instance he says: 'This inscription mentions in many places the name of *Vīrakkoti*, a medieval mercantile community'. A. Velupillai, 'A Note on A Fragmentary Tamil Inscription of the *Virakkoti* from Budumuttava', *Journal of Tamil Studies* (December 1987) p. 58.

<sup>29</sup>. T.V. Catāciva Pantārattār, *Pirkālac Cōlar Varalāru* University of Annamalai (1974) p. 58.



prominently displayed in ceremonial martial parades conducted in the celebrations of Victories in war. This suggests that the expression *Vīrakkoti* had close connections with Chivalry, martial prowess and the military profession.

The impression that the *Vīrakkoti* were warriors is confirmed by the contents of the slab inscription at Budumuttāva. There are references in this epigraph to the *tantiram* (army) and the *Vīramākālam* in connection with the *Vīrakkoti*. The *Vīramakalam* referred to in this epigraph was not a name of Kali as suggested by A. Velupillai but that of a military unit is confirmed by the evidence from the *Kantapurāṇam*.<sup>30</sup> An entire section, the *Mākālar Varu pātalam* in the *Acura Kāṇṭam* of that work contains a description of *Vīramākālar*, an invincible valiant warrior who terrorized the Asuras guarding the consort of Indra while she was in captivity. While focusing on the relevance of the account of *Kantapurāṇam* for an elucidation of the word 'Vīramakalam' it should as a matter of caution, be noted here that this *purāṇam* is elevating to the plane of the gods matters relating to worldly affairs in respect of the *Vīramākālar*. In the *Kantapurāṇam* the form *Vīramākālar* appears as one with an honorific singular termination. The word *Vīramākālar* as found in this text could be explained as one which denotes a person who belonged to a group called *Vīramākālam*. That such a group was a military unit is clear from the descriptions found in this work.

"The leader of the hosts of the warriors of Cāttan (Aiyānār)", "The hero among heroes", "the most terrible among fierce warriors", "the one who spells death to the lord of death' (*Kālanukkum Kālan*) and "the one who is unsurpassed in swordsmanship" are some of the descriptions about *Vīramākālar* in the *Kantapurāṇam*.<sup>31</sup> Its author seems to have based his description of the *Vīramākālar* on local traditions relating to a group of warriors known collectively by that name and reputed on account of their chivalry and heroism in Medieval South India.

The reference to *mākālat tantiram* in the slab inscription is of unusual significance. Although the word *tantiram* has a number of connotations, whenever it

<sup>30</sup>. His failure to identify the *Vīramākālam* has led to much futile speculation. He observes: 'The Mother Earth riding a heroic bull has been designated as *Vīramākālam* - and then Paramesvarī and *Vīramākālam* are identified. The goddess Kali is a folk deity, very popular with the masses. In order to raise her to the conception of the Supreme Goddess, she had to be given the epithets, *Vīra*, 'heroic' and *mā* (great). In this way *Vīramākāli* becomes a deity of the Great tradition of Hinduism. There is a *Vīramākāli* temple in Jaffna, said to have been worshipped by the Tamil kings of Jaffna four or five centuries ago. It is not known why this inscription refers to the Supreme Goddess as *Vīramākālam* and not as *Vīramākāli*.

<sup>31</sup>. *Kantapurāṇam* Ed. Arumuka Nāvalar, Vittiyānupalana Yantiracalai, Madras (9th impression 1958) p. 307, vv. 4, 12.



occurs in association with words and expressions connected with warriors in literary and epigraphic notices it has to be construed as synonymous with the Tamil word *paṭai* meaning an army. It may also be noted here that the Vēlaikkārar describe themselves as the members of the *Mahātantiram*, '*Mahātantirattōm*', in their slab inscription at Polonnaruwa. Besides, that inscription also employs the term *paṭai* meaning 'army' with reference to the subdivisions of the *Mahātantiram*. On account of these considerations the word *tantiram* found in the inscription at Budumuttāva may be construed as one that denotes an army unit. The *Mākālattantiram* may, therefore, be defined as an army designated by the name *mākālam*. This particular military unit is in one instance referred to as *Vīramākālam*.<sup>32</sup> The *Vīrakkoti* who had set up the slab inscription and are referred to several times therein appear to have belonged to the army (*tantiram*) called *Vīramākālam*.

The faint traces of the *prasasti* of the *Nānādesis* found in the slab inscription, the reference to *Aññūruvanpalli*, the description of the *Virakkoti* as *Patinenpūmi Vīrakkoti* and as "the children of Paramesvarī" are strong indications showing that the *Vīrakkoti* were established at Māgala as associates of the *Nānādesis*. As in the case of other groups associated with the *Nānādesis* the *Vīrakkoti* also appear to have adopted the traditions of the *Nānādesis* in respect of the tutelary deity, the use of the *prasasti* and the descriptive spithets including of the expression *patinenpūmi*, 'of the eighteen countries'. The *Vīrakkoti* had as their primary function the protection of the mercantile communities, their dependents and establishments. Besides, they appear to have enjoyed considerable authority and influence over the settlements of the mercantile communities and to have been deeply involved in their affairs. Their military function and the authority they exercised in matters concerning the mercantile establishment seems to have provided the basis for their claim to rank, honour and privilege. In the present state of knowledge it would appear that the influence exerted by the *Vīrakkoti* at Māgala was the most conspicuous of the urban centres in the island.

The slab inscription at Budumuttāva deserves our attention also on account of the symbols represented on it. Below the inscribed portion of the slab are to be found the representations of seven objects, namely, a sword-case, a money bag (*pacum pai*), a long knife, a bow and arrow, a sabre and a weapon referred to a *Kōlam* in Tamil found in Sri Lanka and South India. Some of these items are depicted also on some of the inscribed slabs set up by the *Nānādesis* or their associates at other localities in the

<sup>32</sup>. *Vīramākālar* is wrongly defined in some dictionaries as the leaders of the armies of Jains. This error is found in the dictionaries of Miron Winslow and Fabriciuss. The *Kantapurāṇam* records the tradition that they were leaders of the armies of Cāttan. Aiyānar was probably their favourite deity. Dr. Winslow's *Tamil and English Dictionary*, p. 955, *A Dictionary of Tamil and English* based on Johann Philip Fabriciuss' "Malabar - English Dictionary" (Third edition, revised and enlarged, Tranquebar (1933) p. 894; *Tamil Lexicon*, University of Madras, Vol. VI, p. 3758.



island. In the inscribed stone slab at Vahalkada the money bag is the only symbol depicted. A variety of figures including those of a pair of lamps, a spread out umbrella, a sword and a long knife are found on the inscribed slab recording some arrangements relating to a *Vīrapattinam* of the *Nānādesis* at Viharehinna. The representations of a sword, a knife, bow and an arrow are depicted at the bottom of the inscribed slab of the *Nanadesis* found at Detiyamulla. Yet, there is no other inscription in Sri Lanka which contains the representations of so many weapons as the one at Budumuttāva.

The representation of many weapons on a stone slab on which the text recording the activities of the *Vīrakkoti* is engraved also confirms the explanation that they were a military community organized on a corporate basis like the *Vēlaikkārar* at Polonnaruwa. The inclusion of the figure of a money bag among the objects carved on the stone slab suggests that the *Vīrakkoti* were affiliated to the *Nānādesis* and were settled at Māgala in that capacity.

In conclusion it may be stated that Māgala otherwise called *Vikkirama calāmēkapuram* in the twelfth century had attained the status of a town of considerable significance supporting a composite population on account of commercial prosperity. As a focal point of commercial intersection, cultural activities and inter-cultural communication it had attained a level of development that was surpassed only by Panduvasnuwara in the whole of Dakkhinadesa. It was linked to the arteries of internal and international trade through the agencies of the *Nānādesis* whose establishments in that town were protected and maintained by the military units of the *Vīrakkoti*.

In this town there were three temples, of which the *Aññūrruvanpalli* and a shrine of the Mother-Goddess were under the custody of the *Vīrakkoti*. The archaeological remains of these two institutions perhaps lie buried in the two mounds found on a strip of land adjacent to the canal approximately 400 yards away from the *Rajamahavihara*, from where the slab inscription is said to have been removed to its present location.



Text of the Inscription

1. ....(Bhuvanāśraya)
2. ....parama.....Vakshsthala .....
3. ....Ayyappolilpura .....
4. Paramesvarikku makkaḷ ..... mākalāna Vikkīrama calā
5. mēka (purattu)<sup>33</sup> Vīrakkotiyo (r) makkaḷ patinenpūmi  
Vīrakkoti
6. nānkaḷ cīrappu ceya Vantatena paramatta .....
7. .... aram Vīrakkotiyaṇ aṇṇūruvarkku (Kanakum)
8. ....
9. ....Koṇṭatalum aṭai kuttuvitta paṭi
10. yālum intapūmi viṭuttamaiyālum .....
11. ....
12. ....taṇṇūruvan paṭṭinattu mākalat tantirattu<sup>34</sup> vīra (kotiyaṇ)
13. (kku) Katti vaittamaiyal marum vīrakkotiyaṇai
14. Ākkuvittamaiyālum patinenpūmi yaṇṇū
15. rruvar paramatta lōkamātavai Vīramākālam - enru pēr catti
16. nāmaiyaḷum paramesvarikkum aṇṇūruvan paḷli-illāta pēruṇ
17. catti nānkaḷ unnakkaṭava paṇamum vetti viḷakkeṇ .....
18. .... yōm paṇam uṇṇalakku vīrakkotiyaṇarkku varu .....
19. .... nāl pōka kantu corittu ivvūṭaikkumē nāṭai āka
20. itakkaṭavitāka amaittuk kututtōm patinenpūmi
21. Vīrakkotiyoṇ pituṇ cīrumāy patinenpūmi vīra
22. kotiyoṇ can (ka)ṇ amaittuk
23. kututtōm patinenpūmi
24. Vīrakkotiyoṇ Ara
25. Maravarka manātāka.

<sup>33</sup>. The expressions *mākalāna Vikkīrama Calāmēka...* are clearly recognizable on the inscribed slab.

<sup>34</sup>. The words following the expression are not clearly recognizable on account damage.



Translation

11. 3.4      The Vīrakkoti of the eighteen lands who are the children of Paramesvarī of Ayyappolil ..... We the Vīrakkoti of the eighteen lands, the Vīrakkoti of Makal otherwise called Vikkīrama Calāmēka (puram) have accepted responsibility for the custody of the temple of the Supreme Goddess from the Aññūruvar.
11. 12-13      The Vīrakkoti of the army of ..... mākalām of the Aññūruvan pattiṇam who were engaged for (this) service ..... having given the tolls from this locality the limits of which have been defined.
11. 14-25      Having bestowed the name Vīramākalam on (the temple of) the Supreme Mother Goddess of the Aññūruvar, and having conferred (on another temple) a name other than that of Aññūruvan palli, we, the Vīrakkoti have made a grant of money from our resources and an endowment of (eighty) lamps with arrangements for daily services and regular feeding.

We, the Vīrakkoti of the eighteen lands, who are endowed with rank, honour and authority, have made arrangements for the incorporation of the Sangha (at a temple). This charitable act of the Vīrakkoti of the eighteen lands shall never be abandoned. Let this be (always) borne in mind.

S. PATHMANATHAN



# TWO MONKEY TALES

## I

From the time of my first reading the *Sumsumara Jataka* (No. 208) and its briefer version, the *Vanara Jataka* (No. 342) - that is, in the translation of the *Jatakathavannana* done under the editorship of Prof. E.B. Cowell<sup>1</sup> - the thought has impressed me that they owed their common motif [as I have found several other jatakas doing]<sup>2</sup> to an Aesopic fable. In this case it is none other than the fascinating little story of 'The Monkey and the Dolphin'<sup>3</sup> But, as in the instance of other such derivations of motifs, the genius of the jatahist, be he Indian or Indo-Greek, is quite evident. For, what we have in the jataka is not a mere re-presentation of the Greek fable's motif with characters and details that could pass off as Indian and at the same time accommodate itself to the teaching of a Buddhist value, but a rather more consummate rehandling in which in fact the motif will be found to be inverted - and yet also losing nothing of the quaintness and humour of the original narrative.

In the order in which the two jatakas appear, the *Sumsumara* precedes the *Vanara*. One might therefore be led to suppose that the *Vanara* is a condensed version of its predecessor. The order of the jatakas of the *Jatakathavannana* is, however, in the broad determined by the number of gathas upon which they are commentarial (the *Sumsumara* is upon two, the *Vanara* upon three), so that when one takes this along with the fact that the *Vanara* still has all the ingredients necessary for the motif, plus also the brevity and terseness of a core fable, which, like the Aesopia, leaves the individual narrator to elaborate upon it as he likes, it cannot but seem to be the Indian prototype. For this reason, and for the reason also that it approximates to the simplicity and extent of the comparable Aesopic fable, 'The Monkey and the Dolphin,' I shall use the *Vanara* for the present discussion, adverting to the *Sumsumara* and the other versions of the story, the *Markata Jataka* in the *Mahavastu*, the *Pancatantra*'s 'The Monkey and the Crocodile' (which constitutes the frame-story of Bk. IV, the *Labdanasam*) and Somadeva's *Kathasaritsagara* as and when I need to make a point involving some quality or detail in them or in the *Vanara* itself.

The *Vanara Jataka*, we are given to understand by the *paccuppannavatthu* thereof, was narrated by the Buddha when resident in the Bamboo Grove, while the *Sumsumara* is assigned to him during his residence at Jetavana. Though the former is called the 'Monkey Jataka' and the latter the 'Crocodile Jataka', both were apparently

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<sup>1</sup>. The *Jatakas* (translated from Prof. Fausboll's edition of the Pali text by various hands) London. First publ. 1895.

<sup>2</sup>. For a comparative catalogue of these, see my 'Greek Motifs in the Jatakas' *J.R.A.S (Sri Lanka)* vol. XXV (1980-81) p. 136-183.

<sup>3</sup>. *Pithekos kai Delphis* (Chambry 305; Halm 363; Perry 73; Hausrath 75).



narrated of that same past life when the proverbial Brahmadata was ruling in the proverbial Benares [a circumstance which occurs in around 393 jatakas] and the Bodhisatta took life as a monkey in the Himalayas, the provocation for the narration on both occasions being the Buddha's hearing of the attempts made by his persistent enemy, Devadata, to kill him.

What the Buddha said on the occasion in the Bamboo Grove was as follows  
[- the translation is by H.T. Francis]:

Once upon a time when Brahmadata reigned in Benares, the Bodhisatta came to life as a young monkey in the Himalaya region. And when fully grown he lived on the banks of the Ganges. Now a certain female crocodile in the Ganges conceived a longing for the flesh of the Bodhisatta's heart, and told it to her husband. He thought, "I will kill the Bodhisatta by plunging him in the water and will take his heart's flesh and give it to my wife". So he said to the Bodhisatta, "Come, my friend, we will go and eat wild fruit on a certain island".

"How shall I get there?" he said.

"I will put you on my back and bring you there", answered the crocodile.

Innocent of the crocodile's purpose he jumped on his back and sat there. The crocodile after swimming a little way began to dive. Then the monkey said, "Why, Sir, do you plunge me into the water?"

"I am going to kill you", said the crocodile, "and give your heart's flesh to my wife".

"Foolish fellow", said he, "do you suppose my heart is inside me?"

"Then where have you put it?"

"Do you not see it hanging there on yonder fig-tree?"

"I see it", said the crocodile. "But will you give it me?"

"Yes, I will", said the monkey

Then the crocodile - so foolish was he - took him and swam to the foot of the fig-tree on the river bank. The Bodhisatta springing from the crocodile's back perched on the fig-tree and repeated these stanzas:

Have I from water, fish, to dry land passed  
Only to fall into they power at last?



A



Relief sculpture from Śrīvijaya, 8th Century A.D., showing the story of the Monkey and the Crocodile. Chandi Mendut, near Borobudur, Indonesia.

B



Sherd from the shoulder of a red polished-ware sprinkler depicts a monkey upon the back of a crocodile. 1st-4th Century A.D. Found at Mantai.







Of bread fruit and rose apple I am sick,  
 And rather figs than yonder mangoes pick.  
 He that to great occasion fails to rise  
 'Neath foreman's feet in sorrow prostrate lies;  
 One prompt a crisis in his fate to know  
 Needs never dread oppression from his foe.

Thus did the Bodhisatta in these four stanzas tell how he succeeded in worldly affairs, and forthwith disappeared in the thicket of trees.

The *Vanara* gives no reason why the crocodile's mate desired to eat the heart's flesh of our monkey; it leaves the reader to supply his own, which may range from simple greed to a pregnancy desire.<sup>4</sup> The *Sumsumara*, however, gratuitously suggests it was the female crocodile's greed, arising from the sight of the Bodhisatta's great size; the *Pancatantra* imagines the sweetness of the monkey's heart, resulting from his diet of rose-apples. The *Markata*, on the other hand, makes the desire for the monkey's heart only a pretext of the female crocodile to have the monkey killed on account of her jealousy of the crocodile's close friendship with him. (At first she suspected he was consorting with another mistress - which, in the *Pancatantra*, brings the two ideas together and suggests that that mistress was the monkey, who was a female.) Not surprisingly, in the *Markata* it is the mate who prompts the crocodile the ruse with which to get the monkey, a land creature, into the water, making the *Markata* narrator, with the characteristic denigration of women, exclaim:

"Nobles have a hundred wives, the brahmins two hundred.  
 The wives of kings are a thousand; those of women without number".

The *Markata* goes on to a description of how the monkey was to ride the crocodile, which quite destroys the fine image that naturally comes to the mind, of an upright monkey squatting upon or seated astraddle the swimming water beast;<sup>5</sup> it has monkey lying prone and gripping the crocodile's head. But when in the water, the crocodile, for all that grip, shakes the monkey off into the water, whereas both versions of the *Jatakathavannana* suggest a slow submerging of the crocodile,<sup>6</sup> with time enough

<sup>4</sup>. See for instance the *Godha Jataka*, where a hermit craves for lizzard flesh. In the *Pancatantra* ch. 'Mithralabha', we come across a not unlike craving on the part of a fox's mate for the succulent-looking testicles of a bull, which sends the fox after him near fifteen years in the expectation that they would at any moment fall off.

<sup>5</sup>. See Plates IA and B.Cpm. also Plate II.

<sup>6</sup>. Cp. *Markata*: *So'doni susumaro tam vanarum grhitva samudram pratirno natiduram samudrasya tam vanaram udake caleti. So tam vanaro sha "vayasya kim dani me udake calesi"....* with *Vanara*: *Sumsumaro thokam gantva nimujjitum*



for the monkey's puzzlement and alarm, time enough for him to question the crocodile as to his behaviour, and without the need for the crocodile to get him on his back again.

In the *Vanara Jataka* the monkey points to something hanging on the fig-tree, which the crocodile also claims to see and take to be the monkey's heart. The *Sumsumara Jataka* actually identifies the clusters of figs hanging from a fig-tree as the hearts of this monkey and his fellows. The *Markata Jataka* has nothing to show - in any event the crocodile could not have been fooled by figs, since it was by feeding him with figs from that very fig-tree that the monkey had struck up that near-fatal friendship with the crocodiles so that the crocodile takes him at his word, with no demonstration of anything like a heart. The *Pancatantra*, which makes the tree and fruit rose-apple instead of fig, varies this detail also by speaking of the sought-after heart as lying in a hole in that tree, and thus quite out of sight.

Most important for the monkey's lie is why he came to leave his heart behind. The *Vanara* implies that it is something anyone should have known, that monkey's habitually did not carry their hearts with them; he calls the crocodile "foolish fellow", naturally, and the crocodile on his part accepts it. For the *Sumsumara* even such a stupid creature as the crocodile needs a reason to accept this peculiar phenomenon of monkeys (as against other animals) and so has our monkey adding:

"Why, if our heart were inside us when we go jumping among the tree tops, it would be all knocked to pieces!"

If reason there needs be, this is good elaboration and bases itself on a characteristic of monkeys as against all other creatures. Plausibly the crocodile would accept it. The *Markata*, on the other hand, wants to be innovative, yet clever at the same time, and comes up with an explanation on the part of the monkey that could have surprised the crocodile and even raised his suspicion, since it looked, not as something either characteristic or habitual of monkeys in general, but done by our monkey alone, and for this particular occasion. For, the *jataka* has the monkey telling the crocodile that he left his coveted heart on the fig-tree so that he could lighten himself for the crocodile's benefit. In the *Pancatantra* the monkey does not deny he brought his heart along - no, only that he has another heart, the one sweetened by the eating of rose-apples, and it was not this that he was carrying around, unfortunately, at the moment!

So much for the significant differences which the original story encountered in the *Vanara Jataka* developed in India once its anonymous author had formulated it out of a motif which, as I suspect, owed itself to a fable attributed to Aesop. This Greek fable, popularly known as 'The Monkey and the Dolphin', may have come through to us from a compilation of Aesopic fables said to have been made by Demetrius of Phaleron (born

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arabhi. Atha nam vanaro "kim bho mam udake nimujjapesiti" aha and Sumsumara: Sumsumaro thokam ntva udake osidapesi Bodhisatto samma udake mam osidapesi".



c.350 B.C.), a pupil of Theophrastus, who succeeded Aristotle as the head of his school.<sup>7</sup> The fables themselves are preserved in a terse and succinct form, leaving it to the user to dress them up to the extent of his liking.

I give here my own translation of the Greek fable of our interest:

It was a practice among sailors to take on board ship Maltese lap-dogs and monkeys to while away their time during a voyage. So a certain sailor took with him a monkey. When they were off Cape Sunion on the coast of Attica, there arose a violent storm. The ship capsized and everyone had to jump overboard and swim, including the monkey. However, a dolphin, seeing him and thinking him to be a man, took him on his back and carried him towards land. On reaching Piraeus, the port of the Athenians, the dolphin asked the monkey whether he was by birth an Athenian. When the monkey said he was, adding that his parents happened to be well known in the city, the dolphin asked him if he knew Piraeus too. The monkey, thinking that the dolphin was inquiring about a man, replied that he was a good friend and comrade of his. This big bluff so irked the dolphin that he toppled the monkey into the water and drowned him.

Like the fable of 'The Foxes (at the River Maeander)'<sup>8</sup>, this fable comes to us set in an identified geographical setting - the stretch of the coast of Attica between Cape Sunion and the port of Athens - though, of course, such localization is only incidental and could be, within limits, exchanged without affecting the fable. Another such variable factor would be the character of the participants. For instance, a crocodile, though possible in the sea - some have been met a mile out - is however not likely in the sea off the coast of Attica (- though, remarkably, as we shall see, dolphins were not unknown in the river Ganges!). The same would indeed be true of our monkey off the coast of Attica - which is why the fable is at pains to explain the circumstances by which the monkey came to be there. On the other hand, it is the very unfamiliarity of dolphins with monkeys in Greek waters that is the *raison d'être* of our dolphin's misunderstanding - and even when he casts the monkey off into the sea, it is not because of his discovery of his mistake, but because the rescuee's patent lie disgusted him.

Corresponding to this, we find in the jataka effort being taken to explain the circumstances of how a monkey came to be riding a crocodile - a land animal to find himself in the middle of water. The fact is that, like the monkey in the Greek fable, the Bodhisatta as monkey too was being transported through water to land upon the back of the water-creature - that further island where luscious fruits were aplenty.

<sup>7</sup>. Diogenes Laertius (v. 80) credits him with "collections of Aesopic fables". They were presumably in prose and constituted a single roll.

<sup>8</sup>. *Alopekes (epi to Maiandro)* (C.29; H.30).



The chief factor which links the monkey of the Indian jataka to the Greek fable is of course the monkey. Nor is this any casual monkey, but (a) one who takes a ride on a water-beast. Not only so, but (b) one who, in the course of that ride, whacks a thumping lie. Nor is it a lie of a casual nature either, but (c) one which, in the case of the fable's monkey, loses him his life, and in the case of the jataka monkey - and here is our inversion - wins him his. (d) There is, however, an etymological link that I shall show between jataka crocodile and Greek dolphin that should clinch the stories to each other beyond doubt.

Monkeys in Aesopic fable are generally tailless apes rather than the long-tailed monkeys proper. This fact is illustrated by one fable in which a monkey asks for a piece of tail from a fox to cover his naked buttocks.<sup>9</sup> These monkeys probably came from the Near East and, if not from North Africa or Egypt/Abyssinia, were reared in Greece and Rome as pets, neither land having monkeys as indigenous creatures even in that antiquity. Nor is the monkey in Aesop a creature known for intelligence or cunning; he is ugly, imitative, clumsy and indeed stupid - so that he is, in one fable, made a fool of by the creature who is instead reputed for the former qualities - the fox.<sup>10</sup> It is not out of character, then, that the Aesopic monkey, who went along with the dolphin's mistake, was caught out in his bluff. On the other hand, the monkey was perhaps the most favoured of animals in Buddhist India, so much so that it is as a monkey that the Bodhisatta had taken the most number of births in the Jatakas, (11, as against 10 as a lion, 9 as a parrot and 7 as an elephant) and among the animal's virtues intelligence counted for one, as for example, in the well known *Nalapana Jataka* (No. 20), and again, in the companion to our *Sumsumara* and *Vanara*, the *Vanarinda Jataka* (No. 57), in which the Bodhisatta as a monkey once again outwits a crocodile - a creature as which, even when he had taken rebirth as a dog, a pig and a rat, the Bodhisatta never cared to be born. Thus, the retention of the monkey of the Aesopic fable by our jataka writer is happily consistent with the creature's fortunes in the respective stories.

To turn to the water - creature - our Greek fable is about a dolphin from choice, not from the incompatibility of a crocodile in the Aegean Sea. Crocodiles were not found in Greece in historic times, and though Herodotus takes it upon himself to describe the creature for the benefit of those who may not have been clear about its appearance and

<sup>9</sup>. *Simius et Vulpes*: 'The Monkey and the Fox'. Phaedrus: Perotti's Appendix I. The common Greek word for monkey is *pithekos*, derived from *pithano* and thus reflecting the animal's imitative nature, like the Latin *simus* from *simulo*, while the long-tailed monkey, who never occurs in the Aesopica is either *kebos* (Aristot. *H.A.* ii. 18.1, and Galen) or *kepos* (Strabo 775,812, with v.i *keipos*; Diodorus (iii.35), Aelian (*N.A.* xvii 8) and Pliny (vii.28) s.v. *kebos* in Liddell and Scott, *Greek - English Lexicon*.

<sup>10</sup>. *Alopex kai Pithekos* 'The Fox and the Monkey' (C. 38; H. 44; P. 81; Hs. 83). The animals, impressed by the monkey's dancing, make him their king. The fox is jealous. So when he sees a piece of meat in a trap, he leads the monkey to it, saying he reserved it for him, in as much as he was their king. The monkey goes for the meat carelessly and is caught in the trap. When he accuses the fox of treachery, the fox replies, "Fancy a fool like you, friend monkey, being king of the animals!"



nature,<sup>11</sup> it must have been well known to all those who had visited Egypt following the establishment of the trade-post, Naucratis, by the Milesians in the Delta.<sup>12</sup> Two of the three or four Aesopic fables which involve a crocodile, 'The Dogs and the Crocodiles' and 'The Murderer' have as their setting Egypt and the Nile.<sup>13</sup> India too appears to have recognized in the crocodile the two qualities of mercilessness and greed, mixed with a degree of stupidity. But, whoever our jatakist was, like the rest of them, he displays a good knowledge of animals and animal behaviour when he discloses how the crocodile intended to kill the monkey - for crocodiles do so by dragging their victims underwater and drowning them.<sup>14</sup>

This same intimate awareness of animal behaviour provides the basis of the Greek fable of 'The Monkey and the Dolphin'. For the Greeks, a sea-faring people who must have run across dolphins in all their voyages, registered the friendship these fish showed towards human beings. The best story of this is of course that which is related by Herodotus of the dithyrambic poet, Arion, to the effect that, when forced to leap overboard from his ship by the crew, he was carried ashore by a dolphin to Taenarum.<sup>15</sup> The coins of Tarentum, the city from which Arion had then put out to sea, also shows its founder, Taras, astride a dolphin.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup>. *Histories* ii. 68.

<sup>12</sup>. On the east bank of the Canopic branch of the Nile, founded about 550 B.C. It was the only place in Egypt where Greeks were permitted to settle and trade.

<sup>13</sup>. *Canes et Crocodilli*: Phaedrus 1.25 and Augustana Recension fable 32 respectively.

<sup>14</sup>. There are of course some instances, both in the jatakas and the Aesopia, where the assertions are not in accordance with the facts of natural history. One such that is pointed out is in the *Vanarinula Jataka* (No. 57), companion to the *Vanara* and *Sumsumara*, in which crocodiles are believed to close their eyes when they open their mouths - a misconception arising surely from the sight of crocodiles basking open-mouthed in the sun.

<sup>15</sup>. Herodotus i. 22.

<sup>16</sup>. See Plate III B.; see also B.V. Head *A Guide to the Principal Coins of the Greeks*, London (1959) Plate 6 nos. 3,4,5; Plate 13 nos. 6,7; Plate 25 nos. 9,10; Plate 32 nos. 4,5; Plate 37 nos. 7,8. Taras, son of Poseidon by the nymph Satyra, is said to have travelled by sea upon a dolphin from the promontory of Taenarum to South Italy, where he founded the city of Tarentum and was worshipped as a hero. The Younger Pliny (i.33) records "a true story which sounds very like a fable", of how a dolphin befriended a boy in the sea off the Roman town Hippo Diarrhytus (now Bizerta), north-west of Carthage. The dolphin would play with him, taking him on his back, then putting him off, then



Dolphin becomes crocodile when we move from sea in Greek story to river (Ganges) in Indian - though, as we see in the *Markata*, which reverts back to sea, the converse need not be true, since, as observed before, crocodiles of a variety are found in sea water. [The *Markata* does not make this change back wishing to get close to the Greek fable - indeed its author may have known nothing at all of a Greek story as the original inspiration of the *Vanara* or *Sumsumara* - but out of a wish to be different.]

The third common feature, the lie the riding animal tells his carrier, which results in the latter changing his immediate intention, is the one that clinches the motifs of the Greek and Indian stories, one with the other. *But it is just here that the inversion of plot is effected.* The dolphin was for saving his monkey but because of the lie, he did not bring him ashore but tipped him into the water and let him drown; the crocodile was for drowning his monkey, but because of the lie, he did not immerse him in the water and let him drown, but brought him ashore. Both water-beasts put their monkeys back to where they picked them up from - thanks [or no thanks, as the case may be] to their respective lies. The dolphin was disillusioned, the crocodile deceived.

Here then in this jataka we have an instance of one of the modes in which a story is recast to create a fresh story - the inversion of a detail of its plot. There may be several jatakas in which this has been done to motifs borrowed from other sources, indigenous and alien. One of the best examples, however, comes to us from yet another Greek fable - the most well known of the Aesopia, 'The Crow and the Fox'.<sup>17</sup> A Corinthian vase is evidence that this fable was already popular in Greece as far back as the 6th century B.C. We find it directly reflected, with only two small changes - the first, in what the crow was eating (i.e. rose-apple (jambu) instead of a piece of meat) and secondly, in his getting a share with the crow's compliance than involuntarily - in the *Jambu Khadaka Jataka* (No. 294). But in the jataka which follows, the *Anta Jataka* (No. 295), the motif is turned upside down, with crow flattering jackal and being offered a share of the carcass of a dead ox the jackal was eating at the foot of the tree on which the crow was perched. In the *Sigala Jataka* (No. 148) likewise, which is the Indian counterpart of 'The Fox with the Distended Stomach'<sup>18</sup>, the jackal (Indian cousin of the Greek fox) finds he is unable to get out of the elephant's carcass into which he had crept through its rear, not because, like the Greek fox in the tree trunk, the creature had got distended, but because the aperture had shrunk. In the *Vaka Jataka* (No. 300), which is the jataka version of 'The Fox and the Grapes', the grapes, which were not mobile, are replaced by a goat who keeps jumping about so that the wolf (who substitutes for fox in the Greek fable) cannot get at

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taking him on again, carried him off to sea, then brought him back again, and so on. "The boy believed it knew and loved him, and he loved it". Several instances are known today of such friendliness shown by dolphins towards men, upon which the story of Arion is based.

<sup>17</sup>. *Korax kai Alopex* (C. 165; H. 204; P. 124; Hs. 24).

<sup>18</sup>. *Alopex exo(n)gkothēisa ten gastera* (C.30; H. 31; P. 24; Hs. 24).



him. Since however the wolf too keeps jumping at the goat, as the fox did at the bunch of grapes, I would consider this more an instance of intensification than of inversion.

It will be seen of the jatakas, that where none of the participants in them, be they men or animals, can be identified with the Bodhisatta on account of some unbecoming character trait, thought or action of theirs, the Buddha claims to be a casual observer of that happening, either as a tree-deity, water-sprite or even human being. This sort of thing happens usually when the story has been coopted into the jatakas for its sheer story value or carries a lesson which is only Buddhist in the negative or by straining. Another such quality is something in the story which could reflect some particular other excellence of the Bodhisatta. Our *Vanara* is clearly of this latter sort; it can only reflect, as the summing up says, the Bodhisatta's capability in worldly affairs, for he obviously does so with lie that, condonable in worldly life, cannot find acceptance in the categories of the Buddhist precepts - the sort of lie, that, while it won the monkey of the jataka safety from drowning by the crocodile, deservedly lost him that with the dolphin of the Aesop. So the *Vanara*, with its companion, the *Sumsumara*, belong to a category of 'risque jatakas', using motifs brought in by their authors out of love of the story, but necessitating a rather broad treatment of the excellence of the Bodhisatta to involve some of that sort of political wisdom which is more at home with fables like those of Aesop and the *Pancatantra* than the character desired of the Buddha. After all, the *Vanara* was explaining how the Buddha saved himself from the machinations of an enemy - and here he does so, not by the use of any quality that is in accordance with the dhamma, but by sheer deception. If we are to condone it, it is because the Bodhisatta's life was at stake; if we are to appreciate it, it is for the cleverness of the trick with which the Bodhisatta outwitted Devadatta.

As the *Vanara* concludes:

"Thus did the Bodhisatta in these four stanzas tell how to succeed in worldly affairs, and forthwith disappeared in the thicket of trees".

So, in the Markata we have the lesson from the crocodile's angle:

"One should not disclose one's secret purpose before one's task is done. Clever people get to know of it, like the monkey on the sea".

Correspondingly, the condition in which the Bodhisatta leaves the enemy who thought to kill him falls short of that in which the Buddha usually left those who came to do him harm. The *Sumsumara* tells us the reactions of the crocodile:

"The crocodile, feeling as miserable as if he had lost a thousand pieces of money, went back sorrowing to the place where he lives."

Undoubtedly some of those who relayed this sort of stories concerning the Buddha were not all too comfortable with this sort of characterization of the Bodhisatta. We find evidence of this in the *Cariya Pitaka*'s summary of a comparable jataka, in which the Bodhisatta, again as a monkey, outwits Devadatta, again a crocodile, this time too with



a lie, which makes the crocodile open his mouth but then close his eyes - thus helping the monkey, who, instead of leaping into his mouth as promised, vault off his head to safety. This is the *Vanarinda*, mentioned earlier too.<sup>19</sup> But for all the discomfiture of the *Cariya Pitaka* writer, I cannot for the love of me see how he can have the Buddha say afterwards:

"I did not tell him a lie. I did as I said. For me there is nothing equal to truth; this is my perfection of truth".<sup>20</sup>

Strangely, again, when a monkey, tormented with cold and chattering and rattling his teeth, tries to gain some comfort from the fire the Bodhisatta as an ascetic had lit, by disguising himself as an anchorite, the Bodhisatta is angered and drives him off with a fire-brand - then, blithely goes on to cultivate the Four Excellences until he comes to the Brahma's heaven!<sup>21</sup>

Contradictory and contrary as the Jataka Bodhisatta's character may be, resulting from some of the jatakas in which the authors or adapters have dared to identify him as an active participant rather than a mere observer, this study must be left to someone else if we are to get on with our own limited concern here. Suffice that the monkey's lie of our concern, even while it saves the Bodhisatta from death, is both blatant evidence of borrowing and a finger pointing to Greece and our Aesopic fable as the direction of such borrowing.

## II

If Theodor Benfey had suspected a Buddhist source for some of the stories of the *Pancatantra*<sup>22</sup> he would undoubtedly be right in this case. That source, as we have seen,

<sup>19</sup>. *Cariya Pitaka* iii. 7.

<sup>20</sup>. *Na tassa alikam bhanitam yatha vacam akas'aham  
saccena me samo n'athi esa me saccaparamuli.*

<sup>21</sup>. *Makkata Jataka* (No. 173).

<sup>22</sup>. *Pantschatantra* Leipzig (1859); reprint Hildeshiem (1966) Vol. I. Introduction, p. xi - xii. He says

"Although we are unable at present to give any certain information either as to the author or as to the date of the work, we receive as it seems to me, no unimportant compensation in the fact that it turned out with a certainty beyond doubt, to have been originally a Buddhist book. This followed especially from the chapter discussed in 225. But it was already indicated by the considerable number of the fables and tales contained in the work, which would also be traced in





Window screen of the Mukteswara temple, Eastern Gaṅga, Bhubaneswar, showing two scenes from our story. 9th Century A.D.







is the *Jatakatthavannana*. In its turn the *Pancatantra* passed the story, along with the others, to Somadeva's *Kathasaritsagara*, the *Kathasaritsagara* also diffusing it to western lands via the *Kalila wa-Dimna*.<sup>23</sup> Apart from the *Markata Jataka*, these later versions are free of the story's Buddhist context - however weak that too may have been in the original jatakas. The *Pancatantra* tries to re enlist it as a moral story - but again, like the jatakas themselves, has been lured more by its dramatic quality than any moralistic possibility that it held out. So, together with the *Markata* and the *Pancatantra* versions, these latter versions set out to develop the romantic dimensions of the narrative - the friendship that takes place between the monkey and the water-creature, the suspicion and jealousy of the latter's wife, the desire for the monkey's heart as really a ruse to end her mate's dalliance with the monkey, the nature of the enticement used to get the monkey on the water-creature's back, the ride itself and the confession which alerted the monkey to the danger, the lie itself that won monkey his safety.<sup>24</sup>

The two original jataka versions - the *Vanara* and even the somewhat expanded *Sumsumara* - are of course innocent of these elaborations; there was no friendly relationship between monkey and crocodile before the latter offered to take the monkey upon the water - be it to pastures new or to treat him at his home. Nor was the crocodile's wife wanting the monkey's heart merely as a ruse to encompass the monkey's death out of jealousy or chagrin - she simply greedied for it, if anything (and going by the *Sumsumara*) because our monkey was strong, sturdy and big.

Of course the female crocodile's desire for the heart of the monkey could easily be rendered as a pregnancy desire (*dohada*, as in the *Vanarinula* of the original jatakas themselves, where also is a crocodile who wants a monkey's heart to give his wife. Prof.

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Buddhist writings. Their number, and also the relation between the form in which they are told in our work, and that in which they appear in the Buddhist writings, incline us - nay, drive us - to the conclusion that the latter were the source from which our work, within the circle of Buddhist literature, proceeded .... (Transl. T.W. Rhys Davids *Buddhist Birth-Stories* London (1880) revised ed. p. lxii - lxiii.

<sup>23</sup>. For a comparison of the *Kalila wa-Dimna* version with the *Pancatantra* version, see Franklin Edgerton *The Pancatantra Reconstructed*, Connecticut (1924) vol. I, p. 371 f. footnotes to the 4th book (*Labdanasam* or "Loss of Gains") frame-story, "Ape and the Crocodile".

<sup>24</sup>. The *Pancatantra* goes on to expand this as a frame-story for the purposes of bringing in other moral stories with the news that when the monkey and crocodile were involved in conversation, the crocodile was informed by a water-beast that his house and home had been occupied by another crocodile - a big fellow. The monkey thereupon advises him, with example in story, to evict him by *force d'main*. Which our crocodile does, and brings to a close the frame-story.



Bloomfield<sup>25</sup> will be found to have brought the *Vanara* and *Sumsumara* under this category, with N.M. Penzer<sup>26</sup> observing that the best of these *dohada* stories can be treated under the first of the six types recognized by Bloomfield as it deals with the *intended* harm to a third party caused by the *dohada* of the female, which the husband, usually reluctantly, attempts to satisfy.

The fact remains, however, that despite this proximity to such, the author(s) of the *Vanara* and *Sumsumara* have not rendered the female crocodile's desire as a *dohada* - and, if anything, the narrators of the story following these also avoid the temptation to make it such, and develop consistently the element of sheer greed, or, coupling it with her worry and pining, as a medicament - variants which we should appreciate.

The more notable feature that the later renditions is fond of playing upon is the manner in which there arose the friendship (as mentioned before, there was none in the original jataka stories) between water-creature and monkey - notable, because it suddenly reverts us to an etymological consideration which clinches this Indian story of the *Monkey and the Crocodile* even more conclusively to what we hypothesised so far as its Greek inspiration - the Aesopic fable of *The Monkey and the Dolphin*.

In the *Pancatantra* the monkey had deliberately dropped rose-apples to the crocodile, bidding him be his guest and eat the nectar-sweet fruit. This led the monkey's wife to desire, not just the fruit for herself, but the heart of the monkey brought up on such fruit, thinking how sweet his heart should be, if rose-apples were as sweet as her spouse found them. In the *Kalila wa-Dimna*, however, the fruit concerned (we are told) fell accidentally from the monkey's hand into the water, the 'plop' of which so pleased the monkey that he continued dropping others into the water, while the tortoise (here the sea-creature is now a tortoise (*ghailam*)) mistook the monkey's doing as a solicitation to friendship - and friends they became.

This is palpably a variation for the sake of variation, both with respect to the sound as well as the creature concerned, of the source of the *Kalila wa-Dimna* i.e. the *Kathasaritsagara*. For in the *Kathasaritsagara*, though the first fruit (*udumbara* here) fell accidentally, as in the *Kalila wa-Dimna* version, it was rather the sweetness of the fruit that was pleasant, not the 'plop' of the falling; and the creature whom it pleased was, not the monkey but the water-creature. What in turn pleased the monkey in this latter work into dropping more fruit thereafter was the melodious sound uttered by the water-creature upon tasting it.

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<sup>25</sup>. "The Dohada or Craving of Pregnant Women" *J.A.O.S.* vol. LX. pt. 1 (1920) p. 1 - 24.

<sup>26</sup>. *The Ocean of Stories* transl. C.H. Tawney, ed. N.M. Penzer London (1924) vol. I, appendix III "On the Dohada, or Craving of the Pregnant Woman as a Motif in Hindu Fiction" p. 224.



As mentioned earlier, it is true crocodiles can be found in the sea - but it is equally true that they are incapable of uttering a melodious sound as would please anybody, let alone a monkey. So Tawney of necessity renders the water-creature a porpoise. The Sanskrit *sisumara*, like the Pali *sumsumara* is indiscriminately a water-monster, meaning originally "one who kills his child", and is capable of rendition as both a crocodile as well as a fish of the nature of shark, porpoise or dolphin.<sup>27</sup> And remarkably, if crocodiles can be met in the sea, a species of dolphins (*Delphinus Gangeticus*) was known in the Ganges.<sup>28</sup> If the jataka author of this story derived from the Aesopic compendium inclined to crocodile in the meaning of *sumsumara*, it was well in accordance with the element of cruelty with which he had invested the motif, which was not quite present in the Greek fable - unless, that is, it was not the other way round, i.e. that the choice of interpreting *sisumara* to mean crocodile, in order both for better localization of the elements of the story as well as in the wish to be innovative inspired the author to the cruelty of the water-creature's wish, wherefore he wanted to drown and kill the monkey.

Despite the fact that cruelty is not in character with a porpoise or dolphin - it might have been somewhat better with a shark - Somadeva's undoubted return to the conception of a dolphin in the ambiguity of the word *sisumara* makes both the main participants of the story (monkey as well as water-creature) the very same as in the original Greek fable of *The Monkey and the Dolphin*. Considering the lie as well as the drowning (or attempt at drowning) of the monkey, we also have the main elements of the motif as well preserved. What the jatakist in India made of these and the rest belongs to his individual genius - which, as with other such adaptations of motifs from Greece and elsewhere for the jatakas, to say the least, has been consistently brilliant.

But must this return to dolphin necessarily lead us to suppose that the Aesopic fable, in its original form with dolphin, still floated about in India when the *Kathasaritsagara* was written, or are we simply to point to it as evidence of the easy transition from dolphin to crocodile that had taken place in the original localization of the Aesopic fable as an Indian one, and was still innate in the ambiguity of the Pali/Sanskrit for the water-creature involved, which Somadeva had, unwittingly, and in a desire himself to be novel in detail, returned to? I am inclined to the latter, considering the lateness of the *Kathasaritsagara* version and this substitution of porpoise/dolphin for crocodile, which

<sup>27</sup>. T.W. Rhys Davids and W. Stede *P.T.S. Pali-English Dictionary* London (1959) p. 715, col. 2 restricts the Pali *sumsumara* to 'crocodile', obviously reading the sense back from the Pali jataka stories (in the *Vanarinda* it is unambiguously a *kumbhila*). But see associated Skt. *sisumara* in M. Monier Williams *A Sanskrit - English Dictionary*, Oxford (1899) p. 1076 col. 2 - "a child-killer, the Gangetic porpoise or dolphin. *Delphinus Gangeticus* ..... an alligator." Synonym for these would be *makara* (Pali) - though it is perhaps less specific, more mythical, a Leviathan of sorts.

<sup>28</sup>. See n. 27 above.



it certainly is not emulating from its otherwise obvious source - the *Pancatantra*. For, the *Pancatantra* intends a crocodile, looking back to the jatakas - and crocodile it is.

Going by Benfey's suspicion that, where comparable Greek and Indian stories were concerned, India was the borrower, he would have surmised this to be the case with our monkey tale as well. This too, without the advantage of familiarity with the *Jatakatthavannana*. He appears to think so in the case of the *Pancatantra* story of the wedge-pulling monkey, of which he rightly takes the Aesopic fable of the monkey who tried to fish with a net like the fishermen he had observed, and nearly got drowned.<sup>29</sup>

But this example, had Benfey known the *Jatakatthavannana*, would have confirmed him in the priority of the Greek fable. For, the Indian counterpart of the story of the meddling monkey, unlike the story of the monkey and the crocodile, appears in the *Pancatantra* without the benefit of having first appeared in any form in the jatakas. So that, if we presume that the Greek version of this was one in a compilation supposed to have been made by Demetrius of Phaleron about the end of the fourth century B.C. (and which could have made its way to India following Alexander's invasion, and so account for the host of Graecizing fable motifs in the jatakas) the Indian story is palpably later by centuries and could not have inspired the Greek, but vice-versa. (The theory that these were Indian folk tales that had existed orally and thus influenced the Greek Aesopia and also found their way later into the jatakas is not established, if establishable, and so is neither here nor there; the onus of doing so still remains with the advocates of this belief.)

The story of our concern here is subsequently encountered in several other lands, in the East from the *Pancatantra* or *Kathasaritsagara*, and in the West chiefly through the latter via the Arabic *Kalila wa-Dimna*, but even if with changes in the water-creature and some minor detail or other, always retaining the monkey and the distinctive elements of the motif, which make it immediately identifiable. Penzer mentions a Swahili version in which the water-beast is a shark (perhaps in recognition of the dolphin, and also the malevolence needed for the story) who wants the monkey's heart to cure his sultan, and a Japanese, in which it is a jelly-fish after the monkey's liver for the Queen of the Sea.<sup>30</sup>

There is, however, one version, a Russian, which is worth recounting for the fact that in it for the first time, it is the monkey who is replaced. W.H.D. Rouse, translator of the *Sumsumara Jataka* for the Cowell edition had heard it from a Nestor Schnurman, who had heard it from his nurse (about 1860), and gives it as a footnote to this particular

<sup>29</sup>. *op.cit.* vol. 1, p. 105 f. and vol. II. p.9. In the original Aesopic version, the monkey is only caught in the toils of the net and nearly drowned (*Pithekaï Halieis* (C 301; H. 362). With the Indian monkey having a tail, the *Pancatantra* is able to go for a more dramatic situation - which the *Hitopadesa* raises to hilarity, when it is his testicles, not his tail, that get crushed in the log.

<sup>30</sup>. *op.cit.* vol. V, p. 133, n. I.



jataka.<sup>31</sup>

Once upon a time the King of the Fishes was wanting in wisdom. His advisers told him that once he could get the heart of a fox, he would become wise. So he sent a deputation, consisting of the great magnates of the sea, whales and others. "Our king wants your advice on some state affairs." The fox, flattered, consented. A whale took him on his back. On the way the waves beat upon him; at last he asked what they really wanted. They said what their king really wanted was to eat his heart, by which he hoped to become cleverer. He said, "Why didn't you tell me that before?" I would gladly sacrifice my life for such a worthy object. But we foxes always leave our hearts at home. Take me back and I'll fetch it. Otherwise I'm sure your king will be angry." So they took him back. As soon as he got near the shore, he leaped on land and cried, "Ah you fools! Have you heard of an animal not carrying his heart with him?" and ran off. The fish had to return empty.

Even if the story here follows the Indian rather than Greek version of it, there is the interesting point in it that the substitution of fox for monkey is influenced by the European notions of the two animals. While India is appreciative of the monkey, it does not rate the counterpart of Reynard the Fox, i.e. the jackal, a wise or shrewd creature. So much so that Weber supposes the Indians borrowed all their fables which credit the jackal with intelligence<sup>32</sup> (and not just gluttony and rapacity as in the Buddhist jatakas, and afterwards as "vain and ineffectually ambitious" in the *Pancatantra*).<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, while the West considered the fox the epitome of craftiness, (as mentioned before) the monkey's rating in this was low.

Thus, in this version from Russia, where it is for obtaining wisdom that the land-creature's heart is being sought after, monkey is replaced by fox. As we saw in the Aesopic fable of *The Fox and the Monkey*, the monkey was proved to be too stupid to be king - and by no less a creature than the fox himself. In the other fables of Aesop involving both monkey and fox - the one, in which the monkey asks the fox for part of his long busly tail to cover his own nakedness (remember - we are dealing with the tailless

<sup>31</sup>. *op.cit.* bk. II, p. 110, n. i.

<sup>32</sup>. *Indische Studien* vol. III, p. 335.

<sup>33</sup>. Greta Van Damme *De jakhals in de Oudindulische Pancatantra*, Verhandlungen van der Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België, Kl. der Letteren, Jg. 53 1991, Nr. 141, Brussels (1991). Reviewed by J.C. Wright in *Bulletin of the S.O.A.S.* vol. LVI. 3, p. 645.



monkey)<sup>34</sup> and the other, also called *The Fox and the Monkey*, in which a fox snubs a monkey who boasts of his ancestry, it is the fox who comes out superior, and the monkey who is worsted.<sup>35</sup>

In exchanging fox for monkey, however, what this Russian version of our fable has done is spoilt altogether the quaintly dramatic image of the original Indian version, of our unsuspecting human-like monkey riding the placid waters of the Ganges upon the back of a cruising crocodile, an image which seems to have been dear to contemporary art as well, to judge from the several representations from Gandhara of women coursing the waves of the ocean upon the backs of various sea monsters.<sup>36</sup>

The imagery of these latter may owe something to a fantasy upon the Andromeda theme. But again, I cannot help thinking that both these conceptions - of women riding sea-monsters in Indian art, and our monkey riding crocodile in Indian literature, owe their fundamental inspiration, via our Aesopic fable, to such Greek stories involving dolphins as that of Taras and Arion, both linked with Tarentum, and the motif of a man riding a dolphin, which appeared as a popular type in the coins of that city. Herodotus tells us there was in the temple at Taenarum in his day a small bronze figure of a man on a dolphin dedicated by Arion.<sup>37</sup>

The most exciting of such depictions is, however, one of the monkey himself upon his crocodile brought up by recent archaeology at Mantai, the ancient entrepot of Sri Lanka,<sup>38</sup> and was brought to my notice by Dr. Osmund Bopearachchi of the Archaeologies

<sup>34</sup>. *Simus et Vulpes* Perotti's Appendix (to Phaedrus) 1.

<sup>35</sup>. *Alopex kai Pithecos* (C.39; H. 43, P. 14; Hs. 14).

<sup>36</sup>. H. Buchthal *The Western Aspects of Gandhara Sculpture* London 1945, Figs 5 and 7 (our Plate IIIA) with corresponding western parallels figs. 6 and 9. See p. 5 - 6: "The fish-tailed monster on which rides a Nereid or some other mythological figure was a most popular subject of Hellenistic and Roman silver plates and dishes, as well as on floor mosaics, far into late Roman and Byzantine times. Quite a number of similar disks have been found in Gandhara, with female figures riding a great variety of sea monsters, with lions', horses', wolves' and griffons' heads." One of the group figures from the West depicts not only the sea-monster, a crocodile-faced dragon, which the woman rides side-saddle but beneath them, a dolphin - though, I confess, the dolphin could be here merely symbolic of the sea.

<sup>37</sup>. *loc.cit.*

<sup>38</sup>. See Plate IB. John Carswell ("The Port of Mantai" in *Rome and India : the Ancient Sea Trade*, ed. V. Begley and R.D. De Puma, Wisconsin (1991) p. 202) takes the red polished sprinkler to which the sherd belonged to have been an



PLATE III.

A



Half-draped female figure with baby rides a sea-monster. Grey schist toilet-tray from Sirkap. Taxila Museum.

B



Obverse of two coins from Tarentum, showing Taras riding upon the back of a dolphin.







d'Orient et l'Occident, Paris well after I had completed the above discussion. It is upon a potsherd dated to the second-fourth century A.D. and shows our monkey crouched upon the back of a crocodile, whose upturned snout might suggest he is talking over his back to the monkey riding upon him. The several round knobs that stud the empty space above them along with three Brahmi characters may suggest the fruit involved in the story - unless they are merely decorative filling. The frame of this scene together with its extent suggest that there may have been eleven other scenes round the shoulder of the red clay sprinkler to which it belongs - though no one can tell whether they were scenes from the same jataka (which is unlikely) or depict other stories.

If then we are right about the origin of the motif of this story of the monkey and the water-beast as being in the Aesopic fable of the *Monkey and the Dolphin*, the presence of this scene upon the potsherd from Mantai is endearing artistic evidence of the course of the motif from Greece to Sri Lanka independent of its passage here through literature and also reflects the mobility of such story motifs from the Classical world of the West to our own part of the world.

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Indian import. He refers (p. 203, n. 18) to a preliminary report on the implications of this sherd to the Indian origin of the *Kalila wa-Dimna* fables by J. Raby in "Between Sogdia and the Mamluks : A Note on the Earliest Illustrations to *Kalila wa Dimna*" *Oriental Arts* vol. XXX. 4 (1987 - 1988) p. 393 - 394, fig. 21.



## R.S. PETERS' TRANSCENDENTAL JUSTIFICATION OF EDUCATION

The purpose of this brief article is to explain and evaluate R.S. Peters' transcendental justification of education. In *Ethics and Education* Peters first attempts to justify his concept of 'education'. Subsequently, in his paper "The Justification of Education", he still works with a narrower conception of 'education' developed in *Ethics and Education*. This is the view that I will be considering here. I am aware that Peters has been receptive to criticism, and in his later writings somewhat modified his concept of education, widening its scope, and shifting its earlier emphases. But on the whole, his views remain with his original thesis on education, so that discussion of the points made in my article remain open.

In the first part of the essay I will deal with Peters' concept of education and his "transcendental argument." In the next I will attempt a critical evaluation of the transcendental justification of education.

### I

The two notions of 'initiation' and 'worthwhileness' are crucial to R.S. Peters' concept of education. A person is initiated into a 'a family of processes' which, if successfully engaged upon, leads to the accomplishment of 'being educated'. The 'educated man' is the outcome of the educational process.

Peters gives three criteria to distinguish education from other processes. 'Education' implies the intentional transmission of worthwhile activities to those who become committed to it. To 'be educated', implies that not only should one care about what is 'worth-while', but one must also possess relevant knowledge and understanding. Such knowledge must not be narrowly specialized, but must involve a depth and breadth of knowledge and understanding. Again, 'education' indicates that a person's outlook is transformed by what he/she knows. To 'be educated' therefore, is to develop a 'broad cognitive perspective'.<sup>1</sup> This is precisely why Peters says that "to be educated is not to have arrived at a destination; it is to travel with a different view".<sup>2</sup>

Peters' transcendental justification of education is a non-instrumental one. To show that 'education' is intrinsically worthwhile an instrumental justification seems inadequate. Therefore, a transcendental argument must be mounted to justify the 'initiation' into 'worthwhile' activities. Here Peters utilizes a Kantian-type of transcendental argument. A transcendental argument is one which is derived from pre-

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<sup>1</sup>. R.S. Peters, *Ethics and Education*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. (1966) p. 45.

<sup>2</sup>. R.S. Peters, *The Philosophy of Education*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973, p. 20.



suppositions.<sup>3</sup> Peters refers to this non-instrumental justification of 'worthwhile activities' as the "motivational linch-pin.... of the ethical system here defended."<sup>4</sup> "A worthwhile activity" is an activity worth pursuing for its own sake i.e., it is intrinsically worthwhile in a way that games and simple pleasures are not. The curriculum of a school or university may be operated with a principle of options which encourage the individual to choose according to his/her ability, aptitude, or interest. The choice is between a range of activities which are considered worth passing on. This is why theoretical activities, such as science, mathematics, history, literature, philosophy, and the like, are on a curriculum, and not bingo, billiards or bridge.<sup>5</sup>

Peters' concern here is to establish two main points. First, though curriculum activities may be valued for what is instrumental in them, they are essentially valued for their intrinsic worth. Second, on account of their intrinsic worth people ought to be 'initiated' into them.<sup>6</sup>

At first, Peters tries to justify theoretical activities by enumerating certain naturalistic arguments in terms of 'wants' and 'pleasures'. However, he contends that such arguments could also relate to games such as chess, billiards and bridge. As science, mathematics, history and literature are "manifestly different" from such games, these relevant differences call for further arguments to justify their pursuit. Peters further contends, that theoretical activities such as science, mathematics, history, literature are 'serious' pursuits. First, they have a wide-ranging cognitive content which distinguishes them from games. Second, they illuminate other areas of life, and contribute much to the quality of life. Third, they are concerned with one way or other with truth.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, it is important to note that Peters' views have undergone a noticeable change in later writings. In "Ambiguities in Liberal Education and the Problem of its Content," he accepts the value of certain kinds of knowledge and understanding in the ends to which they are directed.<sup>8</sup> In "Democratic Values and Educational Aims", Peters identifies the role of practical knowledge in education that is not a part of training for a particular job.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>. J.P. White, *Towards a Compulsory Curriculum*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul (1973) p. 10.

<sup>4</sup>. R.S. Peters, *Ethics and Education*, p. 165.

<sup>5</sup>. *op.cit.*, p. 144.

<sup>6</sup>. *op.cit.*, p. 144-145.

<sup>7</sup>. R.S. Peters, *The Philosophy of Education*, p. 257-258.

<sup>8</sup>. R.S. Peters, *Education and the Education of Teachers*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul (1977) p. 51.

<sup>9</sup>. R.S. Peters, *Essays on Educators*, London: George Allen & Unwin (1981) p. 44.



## II

Peters' transcendental argument comes in when a person inquires why theoretical activities are more valuable than games. Peters claims that a person who asks the question "Why do this rather than that?" "must already have a serious concern for truth built into his consciousness". To ask the question "Why do this rather than that?" seriously is therefore... to be committed to those inquiries which are defined by their serious concern with those aspects of reality which give context to the question which he is asking."<sup>10</sup>

Peters contends that some sort of commitment to theoretical activities is presupposed to a serious asking of the question, "Why do this rather than that?" He argues that presupposed to asking this question, the person will come to see that he/she must value the pursuits of science, literature, history rather than others, "as there are characteristics intrinsic to activities themselves which constitute reasons for pursuing them."<sup>11</sup> But, Griffiths has pointed out to Peters that this is an instrumental argument, and consequently did not show the intrinsic value of theoretical activities. Peters tries to meet this objection by arguing, that asking the question truthfully, and answering it truthfully, presupposes a value in theoretical activities.<sup>12</sup>

It is noteworthy that Peters' transcendental argument is put forward to give sufficient reasons for a person once educated, to continue to devote himself/herself to activities constitutive of education. Hence, Peters attempts to show that an understanding, and commitment to an activity are endorsed by giving a truthful answer to the transcendental question.

Now, if a justification is sought for doing science or philosophy rather than games, it is necessary to give good reasons for doing one instead of the other. One may accept Peters' claim that understanding an activity entails some sort of commitment to it. It is true, that one cannot pursue scientific research if one fails to understand the concepts and principles in science, and their inter-relatedness. A person's interest in scientific research will open up new avenues for experimentation. Every experiment in some sequential order may bring the person closer to some scientific truth. The possession of such a disposition, and the involvement in scientific activities will no doubt entail a commitment to it.

However, it does not necessarily follow from this, that understanding an activity, and a commitment to such an activity, will always necessarily entail the pursuit of this activity. For instance, X is committed to Y, and X understands Y, but it does not

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<sup>10</sup>. R.S. Peters, *Ethics and Education*, p. 164.

<sup>11</sup>. *op.cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>12</sup>. A.N. Beck, "Does Ethics and Education Rest on a Mistake," *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, Vol. III, p. 3.



necessarily follow from this, that X will always pursue Y. Perhaps a person who understands science and mathematics may even give them up to do photography. But, I would not include the dedicated scientist, a university don or a doctor in this category. J.P. White argues, that it is not altogether impossible to understand what science is, and give it up for big-game hunting or anything else. White is correct when he states that even if it is true that understanding brings with it some commitment to certain activities, it is only true as a matter of fact, and not necessarily so.<sup>13</sup> Clearly, understanding an activity, and a commitment to such an activity will evoke a life-long interest only in some individuals. It does not necessarily apply to every person who has studied theoretical subjects at the school or college level. For most people vocational pursuits may figure more prominently than intellectual pursuits at a later stage.

Again, in order to justify the worthwhileness of curriculum activities, Peters spells out the connection between knowledge and truth. He argues, that the concern for truth is relevant to justify the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. The pursuit of truth involves virtues such as truthfulness, clarity, non-arbitrariness, impartiality, a sense of relevance, consistency, and a respect for evidence.<sup>14</sup>

In this sense, Peters' claim can be considered to be true in relation to the serious inquirer, who asks the question "Why do this rather than that?" A person who has a serious concern for truth, and who takes the question of theoretical activities seriously, will be committed to the rational pursuit of truth. Peters may say that one must give reasons for pursuing science, mathematics or history rather than bingo or billiards. It is true, that a person who is perceiving and reasoning is not imagining. Asking a question seriously, and giving a reason-governed answer presupposes its value. If one asks the question "why do science or history rather than bingo or billiards?" one has to give reasons. Obviously, Peters would say that both science and history have an intrinsic value that is not shared by bingo or billiards. On the other hand, if one asks the question "Why do bingo rather than billiards?" one cannot give a reasoned-governed answer, as both activities according to Peters, do not have 'inbuilt standards of excellence.'<sup>15</sup> Therefore, I think the transcendental argument seems to bring in a justification of theoretical activities only to the serious inquirer.

Furthermore, one must explore the possibility whether asking the question "Why do science or history rather than bingo?" seriously, and answering it truthfully, would sound like an instrumental argument even for the serious inquirer. It can be argued, that a person intends to study science for an extrinsic or vocational purpose. Probably Peters would question, whether any individual would pursue astronomy, astro-physics or botany for purely instrumental reasons. Presumably, the answer would be in the negative sense.

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<sup>13</sup>. J.P. White, *op.cit.*, p. 13 - 14.

<sup>14</sup>. R.S. Peters, *The Philosophy of Education*, p. 252.

<sup>15</sup>. R.S. Peters, *Ethics and Education*, p. 155.



Therefore, one could conclude that the transcendental justification of education is restricted only to the serious inquirer who will pursue knowledge for its own sake.

Barrow argues that the person who seriously asks the question "Why do this rather than that?" takes the question of curriculum content seriously, and is committed to the truth. This will not show, says Barrow, that we have a right to be committed or we ought to value them. Still less would it show that others who do not feel inclined to pursue the truth, and respect rational justification ought to share our values.<sup>16</sup> I think Barrow is correct when he says that Peters argument contains some truth only in relation to those who are committed to the pursuit of truth, but such values need not necessarily entail universal application. The concept of education is not a determinate concept as Peters envisages it to be, as in his earlier writings. The transcendental argument brings in a justification for a particular form of human life. The answer we derive from the justificatory question may even be different according to the nature of the social set up, and the time within which the question is posed. The conception of a desirable life will necessarily undergo revision from time to time. For instance, in a developing country the primary consideration would be the development of literacy and the expansion of primary education. 'Knowing how' will count more important than 'knowing that' at a particular stage of development. As such, Peters transcendental justification has only a limited use. P.S. Wilson has also accused Peters of trying to impose his ethical valuations on others, where it is not necessary to do so.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, Downie, Loudfoot and Telfer contend that one problem which concerns the transcendental argument is its *ad hominem* nature. They quite rightly think that the transcendental argument applies only to those who already ask the question, "Why do this rather than that?" Peters is aware of this limitation, but as argued by Downie et al, Peters fails to see how serious a limitation it is. The seriousness of the limitation is brought into focus, when one considers that it is easy and common for people to avoid raising the question at all.<sup>18</sup>

I think this is a serious flaw in Peters' transcendental argument. I doubt whether Peters could provide a satisfactory counter argument to this. According to Peters, one could presuppose values implicit in any activity, only if the question is asked. No justification could be sought for an unasked question. Peters however, may say in the

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<sup>16</sup>. Robin Barrow, *Commonsense and the Curriculum*, Connecticut: Linnet Books, 1976, p. 41.

<sup>17</sup>. P.S. Wilson, "In Defence of Bingo," *The British Journal of Educational Studies* Vol. XV. I, February (1967) p. 27.

<sup>18</sup>. R.S. Downie, E.M. Loudfoot, E. Telfer, *Education and Personal Relationships*, London: Methuen and Co. Ltd. (1974) p. 46.



Socratic tradition that "an unexamined life is not worth living".<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Peters himself admits that "it is not surprising.....how many people are strangers to this attitude (a non-instrumental and a disinterested one). Most people do things because of their station in life and its duties. Their considerations are largely the outcome of habit, social pressure, sympathy and attraction towards what is immediately pleasurable".<sup>20</sup> Thus, it is evident, that the transcendental justification of education does not apply to those who do not ask the justificatory question. This I believe, is a serious flaw in Peters' argument, as one could even ignore the question. I doubt whether Peters even considered this possibility.

The possibility that a sceptic who may ask the question "Why pursue science? Why not bingo?" must also be considered. Peters may say that he is an unreflective person, and not committed to the pursuit of truth. One cannot conclude that the sceptic is giving an untruthful answer when he/she opts to pursue bingo, rather than science or history or the like. White thinks that the commitment to truth here would be in a 'weaker' sense than expected.<sup>21</sup> Peters too states, that "no reason has yet been provided to show that the pursuit of science or art is any more worthwhile than playing golf or bingo". However, he concludes that "it is the former rather than the latter type of activities which feature on the curriculum of schools and universities"<sup>22</sup> Even though the sceptic gives a sort of true answer in his/her own way, it would not be acceptable to Peters. He would say that the sceptic has not acquainted himself/herself with the distinguishing features of the different activities in question. Moreover, I think that Peters is not concerned with the unreflective sceptic.

In "The Justification of Education" Peters refers to 'the value of justification' which calls for the importance of rationality in human life. This is connected to the transcendental justification of education, as the justificatory answer must be based on truth and rationality. Kleinig thinks that the transcendental argument does not tell us why education is justified except in the sense that it is necessary to answer justificatory questions. The argument in itself says Kleinig is hollow, unless it displays the importance of rationality in human life.<sup>23</sup> Peters' arguments for the value of justification is to meet certain objections which may be raised about ascribing value to this concern for what is true.

According to Peters, man is a rational being, and the demand for justification is

<sup>19</sup>. R.S. Peters, *The Philosophy of Education*, p. 255.

<sup>20</sup>. R.S. Peters, *Ethics and Education*, p. 154.

<sup>21</sup>. J.P. White, *op.cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup>. R.S. Peters, *Ethics and Education*, p. 157.

<sup>23</sup>. J. Kleinig, *Philosophical Issues in Education*, London: Croom Helm (1982) p. 87.



immanent in human life.<sup>24</sup> Justification is the rational assessment of one's beliefs and actions. Peters is not making a justification for simply any kind of knowledge. His concern is with certain forms of knowledge and understanding which he thinks are relevant to the rational assessment of beliefs, feelings and conduct.

Elliott contends that the demand to seek truth is not written into human life, as human life is intelligible without reference to it, and we do not expect everyone to seek truth without limit or consider him in the least irrational if he does not.<sup>25</sup> I agree with Elliott that we do not expect everyone to seek truth without limit. But I have my reservations when he says that human life is intelligible without reference to it, as rationality is one factor which distinguishes human beings from animals. It is plausible to infer that some people live according to the 'demands of reason', and they raise questions about their activities, and what is good for them. Most people do have a concern for what is true or false. But, it does not logically follow from this, that all individuals on all occasions, 'assess, revise, and follow rules dictated by reason'. I doubt whether reason is *wholly* dominant in either education or social life, as feelings and emotions also influence human behaviour. Peters however, has made a point to counter claims which polarize reason and feeling, and says that one can be passionate about reason.<sup>26</sup> Brand Blanshard has also referred to what is known as the "rational temper".<sup>27</sup>

As stated earlier, Peters' transcendental justification is based on the values of reason. Elliott makes an interesting point, when he says there are certain vital values, which are fundamental as values of reason and pleasure. The vital value which Elliott identifies is intellectual vitality, especially enquiry. According to Elliott, "this demand is felt by a human being, for as full and vigorous as an exercise of its powers as possible. The vital demand is not only to live keenly and powerfully in the life of the senses, but also in the life of personal activity, and the life of practical concern".<sup>28</sup> In his reply to Elliott, Peters say that the aspect of power can be ascribed to anything one does, and it is not specifically connected with learning.<sup>29</sup> Even if vital values are connected to

<sup>24</sup>. R.S. Peters, *Philosophy of Education*. p. 253 - 254.

<sup>25</sup>. R.K. Elliott, "Education and Justification," *Proceedings of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain*, Vol. XI, July (1977) p. 18.

<sup>26</sup>. C. Bailey, *Beyond the Present and the Particular*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul (1984) p. 154.

<sup>27</sup>. *op.cit.*, p. 155.

<sup>28</sup>. R.K. Elliott, *op.cit.*, p. 12 - 13.

<sup>29</sup>. R.S. Peters, "Education and Justification," - A reply to R.K. Elliott, *Proceedings of Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain*, Vol. XI, July, 1977, p. 30.



learning in some general way, Peters could be found fault with for ignoring such values.

Since the transcendental justification of education mainly shows the value of some kind of knowledge, it also implies that Peters is defending a specific concept of education. (The case for breadth of knowledge has not been included here) Both O'Hear<sup>30</sup> and Adelstein<sup>31</sup> maintains that Peters is defending a specific concept of education. Bailey too argues that it is not education that needs justification, but only a specific concept of education.<sup>32</sup> However, in *Educational Theory and its Foundation Disciplines*, Peters admits that his concept of education is a specific one. He accepts the fact, that he was trying to extract too much from a concept of education which is indeterminate than he used to think.<sup>33</sup>

The arguments presented so far indicate that Peters has not succeeded in providing a satisfactory transcendental justification of education, as conceived by him. The most he has accomplished is to show that reasonable people, who have a serious desire to acquire knowledge, will be committed to theoretical activities. This limited justification brought about by the transcendental argument does not seem to cover his concept of the 'educated person'. This conclusion could be justified by Peters' own statement made more recently in *Educational Theory and its Foundation Disciplines*. Here, Peters admits that he "tried but failed to give a convincing transcendental justification of 'worthwhile activities', such as science and agriculture as distinct from bingo." In spite of these shortcomings, he thinks that the basic thesis that a democratic way of life based on discussion and the use of practical reason, which presupposes the principles of impartiality, respect for a person's freedom and consideration of interests, are still defensible.<sup>34</sup> I do not have any reservations on the latter point made by Peters.

LEELA KOBBEKADUWA

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<sup>30</sup>. A.O'Hear, *Education, Society and Human Nature*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul (1981) p. 38.

<sup>31</sup>. M. Smith, *The Underground and Education*, London: Methuen and Co. Ltd. (1977) p. 30.

<sup>32</sup>. C. Bailey, *op.cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>33</sup>. R.S. Peters, "Philosophy of Education," ed., P.H. Hirst, *Educational Theory and its Foundation Disciplines*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul (1983) p. 37.

<sup>34</sup>. *op.cit.*, p. 37.



# THE EVOLUTION OF THE HINDU CONCEPTION OF GODHEAD

Hinduism is unlike many other religions in that it boasts of no founder: it speaks of no beginnings. It is the *sanātana dharma* 'the eternal truth'. The existence of God and the facets of His nature are eternal facts. All that the *ṛṣis*, the seers, do is to discover, to unveil these truths. The word *ṛṣi* itself means a 'seer', one who is gifted with a *darsana*, an insight, a vision of the truth. These seers do not imagine, think or make up their ideas of Godhead. They 'see' the truth, sight being the most dependable of all criteria for knowledge. Like a sculptor chiselling at a block of granite or marble, Hindu seers, through the centuries, have been defining their conception of Godhead till there emerges a definition of God that is comparable to any other.

The earliest literature of Hinduism, the *Rgveda*,<sup>1</sup> presents us with many gods, deified powers of nature. The primitive Aryan had to explain to himself the different aspects in which Nature presented herself and he imagined that each was a god or had a god animating it. These gods were no more than super men, brilliant, powerful and benevolent, with few distinguishing characteristics. Soon, however, even before the hymns of the *Rgveda* were collected into a *saṃhitā* 'a collection', the idea of oneness, of one power underlying the different departments of nature, emerges. Epithets such as *Viśvakarman* 'all-creator', or *Prajāpati* 'lord of the people' are treated as a sort of universal god in a few of the later hymns of the *Rgveda*.<sup>2</sup> The much-quoted words from the *Rgveda*, *Ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti* 'the one existing thing wise men speak of differently'.<sup>3</sup> reveal likewise a dim awareness of the oneness underlying all the gods.

One hymn of the *Rgveda* in particular, called the *Nāsadīya sūkta*, the creation hymn, contains insights which are of tremendous significance in the growth of the Hindu conception of Godhead.

The hymn opens thus:

There was not the non-existent nor the existent then; There was not the air nor the heaven which is beyond. What did it contain? Where? In whose protection? Was there water, unfathomable profound?

There was not death nor immortality then. There was not the beacon of night, nor of day. That one breathed, windless, by its own power.

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<sup>1</sup>. Circa B.C. 1500.

<sup>2</sup>. A.A. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology* Strassburg (1887) p. 118-9.

<sup>3</sup>. *Rgv.* I. 164. 46.



Other than that there was not anything beyond.<sup>4</sup>

The poet here tries to imagine what the source, the origin of all existing things, would be like. It had to be one that was beyond differentiation, beyond polarities, because differentiation, as we shall see, is a later state, a *kārya avastha*.<sup>5</sup> But the primal source of everything that is, had to be beyond differentiation, had to comprehend differentiation as it were.

That one power, moreover, is referred to as *tad ekam* 'that one being' in the neuter. To refer to it as 'He' or 'She' would be an unnecessary limitation; it would exclude the other. The early Upanisads, likewise, refer to *Brahman*, the one power, as *tad* 'it' in the neuter.<sup>6</sup> The many attempts in the Upanisads to define this power, *Brahman*, end with the words *neti neti* 'not so, not this'.<sup>7</sup> The Upanisadic thinkers realize how inadequate any definition of *Brahman* would be. How could mortal man, man who is himself a part of the created world, describe the source of his being?

This line of thought leads in the Upanisads to the *nirguṇa*, *nirviśeṣa* 'without characteristics', *niskala* 'without parts' aspect of *Brahman*, *Brahman* beyond differentiation, the aspect that defies characterization.<sup>8</sup> Complementary to this the Upanisads present us with a *sagūṇa* aspect of *Brahman* 'or *Brahman* 'with characteristics'.<sup>9</sup> The Upanisads refer to the *Brahman* that is 'beyond time' *akāla*, 'beyond sound' *aśabda* 'beyond form' *amūrta* and also *Brahman* that manifests itself in time, sound and form.<sup>10</sup> Sankara's Advaita philosophy and the Saiva Siddhanta school see God in these two aspects, the *svarūpa* and the *taṭastha*, the essential and the

<sup>4</sup>. *Ibid.* I. 129. 1-2.

<sup>5</sup>. *Sāṅkhyakārikā* of Isvarakrishna, trans. H.T. Colebrooke, and Commentary of Gaudapada, trans. H.H. Wilson. Bombay (1924) sutra 10.

<sup>6</sup>. *Vedānta Sūtras*, Sankara's Commentary, Sacred Books of the East vol. 34, p. 76. *Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (*Brh. Up.*) III. 8.8.; *Chāṇlogya Up.* VI., in *The Thirteen Principal Upanisads* trans. R.E. Hume (1954).

<sup>7</sup>. *Brh Up.* II. iii. 6; III, ix. 26; IV. ii. 4; IV, iv. 2; V.v. 15.

<sup>8</sup>. *Brh Up.* III. viii. 8; *Śvetāśvatara Up.* VI. 11; 19; *Mundaka Up.* II. i. 2; ii. 10; III. i. 8; *Maitrāyaṇīya Up* VI. 15; *Kaṭha Up* I. iii. 15.

<sup>9</sup>. *Brh Up.* IV. iv. 5; *Chāṇd. Up.* III. xiv. 2; *Mund. Up.* I. i. 6; II. ii. 2; *Śvet Up.* vi 16; *Īsa up.* 4; 5; See also Paul Deussen *The System of the Vedānta*, Chicago (1912). p. 102-9.

<sup>10</sup>. *Mait. Up.* VI. 3; 15; 22.



conditioned aspects respectively.<sup>11</sup> This latter aspect of Godhead, the *tatastha*, proves a very convenient way of accomodating the worship of God in a variety of forms and under different names. As the religion of the Aryan immigrants merged with the beliefs of the Pre-Aryan people of India, a number of regional and village deities were accepted as forms of one of three high Gods, Śiva, Viṣṇu, or Śakti.<sup>12</sup> Pre-Aryan god Murukan merges with the Aryan god Skanda. Village deities called variously, Jagadammā, Ankammā and Renukā are treated as forms of the mother goddess Śakti. The theory of *avatāra* 'incarnations' helps the acceptance of noble and virtuous human beings as incarnations of god Viṣṇu. Thus the Lord Buddha is treated as the ninth of the ten important incarnations of Viṣṇu. Vithoba, the regional god of Maharashtra, is worshipped as a form of Viṣṇu. Hinduism has been compared to a giant banyan tree that drops prop roots all round it, which support and are a part of the parent tree.<sup>13</sup> The different forms in which God is worshipped in Hinduism are like these prop roots, integral parts of the complex that is Hinduism. They are all *tatastha* aspects of the one, undifferentiated reality that is God. Thus Hinduism though a monotheistic religion has the appearance of a polytheism.<sup>14</sup>

The *Nāsadiya sūkta* presents us with another insight. It goes on to say that desire came upon that One Being. This again is a profound statement, for it says that the One Being was capable of thought. These two, 'unchanging existence' *sat* and 'knowing' *cit*, are the two, inalienable characteristics of Godhead in the Upanisads, the Vedānta and all of later Hinduism.<sup>15</sup> Hindu thought could not conceive of Godhead as 'changing'. God had to be beyond change. What changes is unstable. The very adjectives that describe

<sup>11</sup>. Sankara, the chief exponent of the Advaita Vedānta philosophy, lived between A.D. 788 - 820.

The Saiva Siddhanta philosophical system was formulated between the 11th and 14th centuries A.D.

See S. Radhakrishnan, *The Brahma Sutra*, London. (1960) p. 237.

<sup>12</sup>. Romila Thapar, *A History of India*, Penguin Books (1966) p. 133, 160 161, 166, 214; D.S. Sharma, *Hinduism Through the Ages*, Bombay (1961), p. 6, 29, 54; Charles Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism*, vol. I, London, (1921)p. xv.

<sup>13</sup>. Heard in conversation with a colleague. Source unknown.

<sup>14</sup>. Eliot, *op.cit.* p. xvii-xviii; Nirad Chaudhuri, *Hinduism*, Oxford (1974) p. 88. He calls it 'Polymorphous Monotheism'.

<sup>15</sup>. *Kātha. Up.* vi. 12, 13; *Mund. Up.* iv. 1; *Taittirīya Up.* ii.1; *Vedānta Sūtras*, SBE vol. 34, p. xxv; Radhakrishnan, *op.cit.* p. 358-9; *Civāṇānacittiyār* (SS) in *Maikāṇṭha Saatiram Pattinaangu*, vol. I. The South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Company Ltd., Tinnevely (1969), i. 1; vi. 2; vi 5.



God in Hinduism, *akṣara*, *akṣaya*, *acala*, *śāśvata*, *sthānu*, all reflect this one insight, that He is undecaying, unwasting, immovable, eternal, stable. The Upanisads which generally fight shy of defining *Brahman*, in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* characterize *Brahman* as *satyam*, *jñānam*, *anantam*, 'existent', 'knowing' and 'boundless'.<sup>16</sup>

Having thus defined Godhead as an unchanging essence, Hindu thought had to account for the world of matter. Early creation myths in the Vedic literature seem to imply that this power created the world out of itself.<sup>17</sup> But this was unacceptable to more developed thought. To grant that God undergoes change and creates the world out of Himself would be derogatory to Him. It would, moreover, mean a reduction of his perfection, *pūrṇatva*. Nor could Hindu thought conceive of a God who could create out of nothing, *ex nihilo*. Creation had to be out of an original stuff, *prakṛti*, like pots out of clay.<sup>18</sup>

The word *sat*, we said earlier, literally means that which is 'existent'. *Asat* would then mean 'non-existent'. Very early in Indian philosophy, in the Upanisads themselves, the question is raised: 'How could the existent come out of the non-existent?' What is 'non-existent' is what never was and never would be. The classic examples cited by the philosophers are the horns of a hare and the barren woman's son. They never existed and never would exist.<sup>19</sup> *Sat* thereafter came to be interpreted as that which exists in manifest or subtle, invisible form like the oil in the sesame. The appearance of the world in visible form is taken as the manifestation of what existed in subtle form prior to creation. This theory, called the *Satkāryavāda*, implies that the effect is contained in the cause.<sup>20</sup> We will see that some of the Hindu philosophers accepted that creation evolved from a material source called *prakṛti* or *māyā*. Sankara in his famous Advaita philosophy rejects this explanation. For him insentient matter could not come out of the spirit that is *Brahman*. Nor could he accept the ultimate duality of mind and matter that this theory implied. To grant the existence of an ultimate principle other than *Brahman* and independent of *Brahman* would be derogatory to it. He took his stand therefore on the Upanisadic statement that *Brahman* was one only without a second. The *Vivartavāda*

<sup>16</sup>. *Tait. Up.* ii. 1; P. Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*, New York (1960). p. 126-7.

<sup>17</sup>. *Chānd. Up.* VI, ii. 3; III. xiv; *Mund. Up.* I.i.7: II.i.1.

<sup>18</sup>. *Vedānta Sūtras*, Ramanuja's Commentary, SBE vol. 48, p. 418-9; SS. i. 38; Betty Heimann, *Facets of Indian Thought*, London, (1964). p. 140.

<sup>19</sup>. *Ved. Sūtras*, SBE vol. 34, p. 338, 416-7; Radhakrishnan, *op.cit.* p. 352; SS i. 6, 7;.

<sup>20</sup>. *Ved. Sūtras*, SBE vol. 48, p. 465-6; Deussen *op.cit.* (1912) p. 255-60; *SāṅkhyaKārikā*, *op.cit.* verse 9.



theory that he put forward implies that *Brahman* does not, in truth, change into the world; it merely seems to change and that the material world is an illusion projected by and on the basis of the reality that is *Brahman*. A rope seen in dim light creates the illusion that it is a snake. To the soul saddled with beginningless ignorance, *avidyā*, the diversity of the world seems real. When true knowledge, *pāramārthika jñāna*, dawns, the soul sees the unity beyond the diversity.<sup>21</sup> Sankara, in the eighth century, lived at a time when Buddhism had spread to the south of the Indian sub-continent and was threatening the very existence of Hinduism. Buddhism denied the existence of a supreme God or soul. Sankara was concerned, therefore, to affirm the existence of an unchangeable Reality that is *Brahman*. The soul too in this philosophy is not ultimately other than *Brahman*.

Ramanuja, the philosopher of the Viśiṣṭādvaita system, who lived a few centuries after Sankara, comes in the wake of the *bhakti* movement in south India. *Bhakti* implies a distinction of God and soul, the worshipped and the worshipper. He, therefore, acknowledges the existence of God, *Īśvara*, souls *jīva*, and matter *prakṛti*. He tries, however, to reconcile this with the monism of the Upanisads. According to him, soul and matter are dependent on *Īśvara* as the body is dependent on the soul. They are inseparably related to God as parts of a body are related to the whole. The world evolves from *prakṛti*. God himself is unaffected by the change undergone by *prakṛti* nor is He affected by the joys and sorrows suffered by the individual souls.<sup>22</sup> The Saiva Siddhanta too grants the existence of God, souls and matter, *māyā*. The world evolves out of this *māyā* matter. The Saiva Siddhanta hastens to add, however, that God is all-pervasive and that matter does not appear in His presence as darkness before light.<sup>23</sup> *Prakṛti* or *māyā* matter in these two latter theistic philosophies is not the independent *prakṛti* of the Sāṅkhya school, that evolves into the world of matter on its own momentum. It is instead brought under the aegis of God. God it is who sets in motion the evolution of the world out of *prakṛti* or *māyā*.<sup>24</sup> Thus these two schools of philosophy affirm the primacy and immutability of God while granting the reality of souls and matter.

Explaining the emergence of the world of matter, Hindu thought runs into another problem. Why does God create? What need is there? Is it out of a felt need on His part? If that were so, that again would be derogatory to Godhead, for God according to Hindu definition, is self-sufficient, eternally content, *nityatṛpta*. Why then does he create? An early explanation was that it was His *līlā*, 'His sport'. Creation for God was fun, an

<sup>21</sup>. *Ved. Sūtras*, SBE vol. 34, p. xxx; Radhakrishnan, *op.cit.* p. 236-7.

<sup>22</sup>. *Ved. Sūtras*, SBE vol. 48, p. 406, 610; Radhakrishnan, *op.cit.* p. 341, 453.

<sup>23</sup>. *Civāṇāṇāpōtam* (SJB) in *Maikkāṇṭa Saattiram Patināṇṭu*, vol. I, ii. 1; Gordon Matthews, *Sivāṇāṇabodham*, Oxford (1948) p. 19, 53.

<sup>24</sup>. SS i. 17; Matthews, *op.cit.* 31-32.



expression of His exuberant spirit. It was effortlessness too; it cost Him no effort to create.<sup>25</sup> Later Hinduism, the Saiva and the Vaisnava schools, explained creation as God's act of grace. In order to help souls caught in the endless round of birth and death get rid of their *karma* and their egoism, the gracious Lord, Śiva or Viṣṇu, makes them take birth in the world of matter. Life in the world makes the soul realize its total dependence on God and thus liberates it from its egoism and its sense of agency.<sup>26</sup> The gracious God of Hinduism, needing nothing, wanting nothing, is yet gracious to undeserving souls. Immense grace is yet another of God's characteristics.

Not only is God eternally content, He is self-dependent. He needs neither the soul nor the world; He rests in Himself. In the Saiva Siddhanta and Vaisnava systems the soul too like God is *sat* 'unchangeable', 'existent' and *cit* 'knowing'.<sup>27</sup> Yet the soul is dependent. It needs to cling like a creeper to someone or something else. It cannot stand by itself. The soul depends on its body and its senses for a knowledge of the world and it turns to God for a knowledge of Him.<sup>28</sup> In Vaisnava theology the relationship of God and soul is referred to as the *śeṣa śeṣi bhāva*. God the *śeṣin* is 'the primary one', 'the independent one'; the soul the *śeṣa* is the 'secondary', 'dependent' one.<sup>29</sup>

Knowledge or the capacity to know, we said before, is one of the fundamental characteristics of Godhead in Hinduism. The *Nāṣadīya sūkta* of the *Ṛgveda*, which says that that one Being desired implies that all creation presupposes a mind, that that One Being had the capacity to know. Here again the Hindu philosophers differ in their definition of *cit*. For Sankara, *Brahman* is knowledge, a luminosity that does not imply an object of such knowledge. Ramanuja takes knowledge as an attribute of God. According to the Saiva Siddhanta, God has independent knowledge. He does not, like the soul, depend on the senses or the world for knowledge.<sup>30</sup> It is clear then that *cit* is God's essential nature.

<sup>25</sup>. *Ved. Sūtras*, SBE vol. 34, p. 356-7; vol. 48, p. 405-6; S.N. Das Gupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 3, (1940) p. 158; Radhakrishnan, *op.cit.* p. 362-3; Betty Heimann, 'Lila: The Divine Play', *University of Ceylon Review*, No. 2 (1945) p. 29-34; John Piet, *A Logical Presentation of Saiva Siddhanta Philosophy*, Madras, (1952). p. 117.

<sup>26</sup>. *SS* i. 17, 35.

<sup>27</sup>. *Ibid.* i. 17; vii. 4.

<sup>28</sup>. *SJB* iii. 6; *SS* viii. 28; Matthews, *op.cit.* p. 55.

<sup>29</sup>. *Ved. Sūtras*, SBE vol. 48, p. 153.

<sup>30</sup>. *SS* i. 1; vi. 1; vii. 3; viii. 17.



Yet another aspect of Godhead, its immanence and transcendence, could be traced to the *R̥gveda*. The *Puruṣa sūkta*,<sup>31</sup> describes the creation of the world and all there is from the body of a primeval giant that is called *puruṣa*. The hymn says that only a fourth of this *puruṣa* is visible in creation; three-fourths are immortal in the heavens. This stanza implies that that which is the source of all things existent is not manifest in this world in its totality. The greater part is beyond man's sight and imagination. The Upanisads pursue this line of thought and describe *Brahman* as *niṣprapañca* 'transcendent', 'beyond creation' and *saprapañca* 'immanent', 'in creation'. *Brahman* is manifest in the many powers of nature. He is the inner-controller who upholds all nature.<sup>32</sup> The simile of the fig-tree in the Upanisads illustrates these two aspects of *Brahman*. *Brahman* here is compared to an upturned fig tree, which has its roots in the sky and its branches spreading down below toward the earth.<sup>33</sup> Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavadgītā* speaks of his two natures. Earth, water, fire, wind, sky and man's mind, intellect and self-sense (*ahaṁkāra*) comprise God's lower nature. His higher nature is other than this, but it is that which upholds the world. He goes on to say that all creation is strung on Him like a row of gems on a string.<sup>34</sup> Saivism speaks of the *aṣṭamūrti*, the eight forms of Śiva, which again include the five gross elements and the two luminaries, the sun and the moon.<sup>35</sup>

The Saiva Siddhanta is specially careful to emphasize God's transcendence. If He were to be directly involved in the creation, preservation and destruction of the world of matter, He would be bound by *karma*, the law of action and reaction. So the Saiva Siddhanta speaks of lesser gods, *Brahmā*, *Viṣṇu* and others as the agents of creation, preservation etc., while God Śiva, the supreme God, remains uninvolved.<sup>36</sup> He is described as the *prayojaka karṭṛ*, 'the directing agent', while the lesser gods act at his behest.<sup>37</sup> God in His transcendence is compared to Time. 'Although Time is by us differentiated into past, present and future and in it all things happen, yet it is itself not subject to change'. God likewise is unchanging. God is also like one who on waking

<sup>31</sup>. X. 90.

<sup>32</sup>. *Brh. Up.* III. vii; *Māṇḍūkya Up.* 6.

<sup>33</sup>. *Katha. Up.* vi. 1; *Mait. Up.* vi. 4; Also *Gita* xv. 1 - 3.

<sup>34</sup>. *Gītā* vii. 4; 7.

<sup>35</sup>. Jan Gonla, *Medieval Religious Literature in Sanskrit, A History of Indian Literature*, vol. II, fasc. i, Wiesbaden (1977) p. 158.

<sup>36</sup>. *SS* i 34; 35.

<sup>37</sup>. Devasenapathi. V.A., *Saiva Siddhanta*, Madras, (1974). p. 72.



remembers a dream but is not involved in it.<sup>38</sup> Transcendence and immanence then are two characteristics of Godhead in Hindu thought.

The epithets *niṣkala* and *niraṁśa* 'without parts' and *asamghāta* 'not composite' point to yet another aspect of Godhead.<sup>39</sup> According to Hindu thought, what can be analysed into parts or is made up of parts is an evolute, a *kārya*; it is not an integer, not a whole thing. The human body and all material creation are subject to decay. They are resolved into their component elements and ultimately into *prakṛti*. God is unlike these; he is 'without parts'.

Hindu texts describe God as 'beyond mind and speech'. 'Words and thought turn away from Him touching Him not'. 'He cannot be known by discursive reason', say the Upanisads.<sup>40</sup> Yet if God were unknowable, He would be as useless as the flowers in the sky or a rope made of the hair of a tortoise says the Saiva Siddhanta.<sup>41</sup> Hindu thought concludes therefore that God can be known. Knowledge is said to be of two levels. Ordinary worldly knowledge, knowledge at the lower level, regards the object of knowledge as 'that', as other than oneself. The Saiva Siddhanta says that that which can be pointed to as 'he', 'she' or 'it', is subject to origin, existence and decay. It is *asat* 'changeable'.<sup>42</sup> If God were to be regarded as the 'Other', as apart from oneself, He too would be *asat*. But God is *sat* 'unchangeable' and is therefore not accessible to objective knowledge. The knowledge of God is the higher knowledge. It is *anubhūti* 'participatory or experiential knowledge'.<sup>43</sup> Man knows God by experiencing 'oneness' with Him. God therefore is knowable, but only through the experience of 'oneness'.

One aspect of the conception of Godhead that is relatively unimportant is that of God as moral governor and judge of the universe. Such a concept was there in the early Vedic religion in the person of god Varuna. He was the supreme guardian of the *ṛta*, the physical and moral order of the universe. He observed the deeds of men and punished

<sup>38</sup>. Matthews, *op.cit.* p. 32-3; *SS* i. 33.

<sup>39</sup>. *Ved. Sūtras*, SBE vol. 34. p. 185, 327, 395; *The Bhāmatī Catuṣṣūtrī* (Commentary on Sankara's Commentary on the *Vedānta Sūtra*) ed. S.S. Suryanarayana Sastri and C. Kunhan Raja, Madras (1933) p. 11-13 *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā*. Sankara's Commentary in *Readings from Sankara*, ed. T.M.P. Mahadevan, Part II, Madras (1961) iii. 2-3; 5; 19.

<sup>40</sup>. *Katha. Up.* vi. 12; *Taittirīya. Up.* II. iv. 9.

<sup>41</sup>. *SS*. vi. 4.

<sup>42</sup>. *Ibid.* vi. 1; 4.

<sup>43</sup>. *SS* viii. 34 ; 36; xi. 36; *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* of Sankara, ed. Swami Madhavananda, Calcutta (1944) 2; 64; 121, 277.



wrong-doers. Prayers for forgiveness were made to God Varuna.<sup>44</sup> In later Vedic religion this position of Varuna changes. He loses importance and this aspect of Him as moral governor of the universe fades away. But the idea of *ṛta* continues to hold sway. *Dharma* in Hinduism incorporates this notion of *ṛta*. *Dharma* is occasionally personified.<sup>45</sup> Yama, the god of death, is referred to as *Dharma*. But in most of later Hinduism, *dharma*, like *karma*, functions as an autonomous moral force; there is no governor of *dharma*. It would, in fact, seem that the working of the laws of *dharma* and *karma* go together, rewarding him who does good and punishing the evil-doer. In later theistic Hinduism, however, the functioning of the law of *karma* is regulated by God. He chooses the right experiences for each soul in each birth.<sup>46</sup> It is only at the end of one's journey through *saṁsāra*, when one is about to enter final liberation, that there is any cancelling of, 'forgiveness' of one's accumulated (*sañcita*) *karma*. Thus the concepts of morality and justice are not among the most important attributes of Godhead in Hinduism.<sup>47</sup>

The Upanisadic concept of the undifferentiated, transcendent *Brahman* soon gives way in the later Upanisads to a personal aspect of *Brahman*. *Brahman* here is spoken of as 'He' in the masculine. It is the supreme God identified with Siva, Visnu and later with Sakti and endowed with all the attributes, immutability, omniscience, transcendence, immanence, grace etc. earlier associated with the neuter *Brahman*. The Upanisadic *Brahman* was comprehensible only to a few lofty souls endowed with *jñāna*. The ordinary mortal yearned for a God that he could worship. Thus *jñāna* gives way to *bhakti*. Even *bhakti* at its deepest levels does not invalidate *jñāna*; it comprehends it, for in *jñāna* as in *bhakti* the soul knows God only in the experience of 'oneness'.<sup>48</sup>

Thus Hinduism through the centuries has defined ever more clearly its vision of the nature of Godhead.

MAHESWARI ARULCHELVAM

<sup>44</sup>. *Rgveda* vii. 83; 86,87,88,89. See also A.B. Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and the Upanisads*, Harvard Oriental Series (HOS) vol. 31, p. 96-7.

<sup>45</sup>. K.M. Balasubramaniam, *Tirukkural of Tiruvalluvar*, text and English trans., Madras (1962). 130; 204; 1018. See also *Laws of Manu SBE* vol. 25, viii.12; 14-17. For *Dharma* as deity, see J. Gonda, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1971/72) p. 120-33.

<sup>46</sup>. *SS* ii. 13-15; 21-22; 31-33.

<sup>47</sup>. Eliot, *op.cit.* vol. I. p. xvi; lxxii; Keith, *op.cit.* HOS, vol. 31, p. 249.

<sup>48</sup>. *Bhakti Sūtras* of Narada, *The Philosophy of Love*, ed. Poddar Hanumanprasad, (1968). sūtra 66.



## GREEK AND ROMAN NOTICES OF SRI LANKA AND THEIR HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the study of the ancient history of Sri Lanka, foreign notices are considered a valuable supplement to indigenous literature, inscriptions, coins and other archaeological finds. The Pali chronicles and Sinhala literature provide copious information concerning the political and religious history of the land; but they have very little to say on its economic history and foreign relations. Accordingly, European writers, especially during the last century, made use of foreign notices together with indigenous literature to reconstruct the ancient history of the island.<sup>1</sup> The Indians, Greeks, Romans, Persians, Arabs, Chinese, Venetians and Genoese were all called upon to bear testimony to the flourishing trade and economic prosperity enjoyed by ancient Sri Lanka as the great entrepot between east and west.

More recently, a large number of Sinhala inscriptions have been published in the volumes of the *Epigraphia Zeylanica* as well as in various other publications. These are, for the most part, inscriptions on stone recording royal proclamations and donations, by members of the royal family as well as other wealthy citizens, to the clergy and other religious establishments. From these inscriptions some information can be gleaned concerning economic organization; but even here references to foreign trade and diplomatic relations are very scanty. Hence the foreign notices still continue of necessity to be utilized as source material for the study of the island's history.

Sri Lanka's outstanding significance for international trade has been recognized through the ages, and has been attributed to its central position in relation to the countries of the East and the West. Cosmas Indicopleustes, who realized this fact as early as the sixth century A.D., called the island the "mediatrix" between the countries of eastern and western Asia<sup>2</sup>. His observations, however, are only the climax of the long series of notices of the island by Greek and Roman authors, most of whom show some awareness of the commercial significance of Sri Lanka's natural resources.

Greek and Roman notices of Sri Lanka are spread over a period of more than eight hundred years, ranging in date from the end of the fourth century B.C. to the middle of the sixth century A.D. Though often scrappy, derivative and lacking in precision, they are among the earliest foreign reports of the island and constitute an important witness to the prominence of the island with regard to the international maritime trade of those days. As historical sources, these notices supplement other writings, both local and foreign, as well as archaeological, epigraphical and numismatic evidence. They thus constitute without doubt a valuable complement to our picture of

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<sup>1</sup>. E. G. J. E. Tennent, C. Lassen, J. B. Paquier.

<sup>2</sup>. Cosmas Indicopleustes: *Topographia Christiana* xi. 16 [ed. W. Wolska-Conus, Paris (1973)].



the island during the early Anuradhapura period.

The period covered by these sources is perhaps the most important in the political, cultural and social history of ancient Sri Lanka. It saw the introduction of Buddhism from India and its establishment as the religion of the land, the evolution of urban centres, the formation and consolidation of a centralized state, the domestication and optimization of technology (in particular of irrigation and monumental architecture) and the development of doctrinal, exegetical, narrative and historical literature.

The passages cited as Greek and Roman notices of Sri Lanka are usually those which refer to an island in the Erythraean or Indian sea designated by the name Taprobane. In addition, the Greek writers mention other names which were also applied in antiquity to the island, such as Palaisimoundou or Simoundou, Salike, and Sielediba<sup>3</sup>, and derivations for these names have also been proposed. However, references to certain other names denoting places in the east have been taken by various modern writers to refer to this same island, and ancient descriptions under such names have been quoted as evidence for conditions in ancient Sri Lanka. I have dealt with these *falsa et dubia* elsewhere<sup>4</sup>, in our studies of the passages in Greek and Latin authors which explicitly mention the island of Taprobane. We shall attempt to find out how far these notices reflect conditions contemporary with their authors and to what extent one is justified in using such descriptions as source material for the study of ancient history.

In view of the copiousness of some of these notices, it might be asked how much direct contact there was between Sri Lanka and the Graeco-Roman world. On this point our sources have little to say. In the time of Onesicritus (late fourth century B.C.) as well as of Strabo (late first century B.C.) Greek knowledge of the island was the indirect result of Indian communication with it and western communication with India. Even in later times, when the Romans or their Graeco-Egyptian subjects attempted to reach the island, the success of their ventures appears to have depended to some extent on the amount of latitude allowed them by monopolizing intermediaries. The journey of the Theban lawyer is a case in point<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, "None of the archaeological materials specially indicates Red Sea contact rather than a more northerly route from the Mediterranean through the Sasanian Persian ports in the pre-A.D. 600 period. The Mediterranean (Roman) ceramics, coins and glass may have come either along the Red

<sup>3</sup>. Cf. Ptolemy: *Geogr.* vii. 4. 1; *Periplus Maris Erythraei*: 61; Cosmas Indicopleustes: *Topographia Christiana*, xi. 13. 445 B.

<sup>4</sup>. D.P.M. Weerakkody: "Falsa et Dubia: on some Alleged References to Sri Lanka in Greek and Latin Texts." *J.R.A.S. (S.L.B.) n.s.* XXXV (1990/1991) pp. 73-90.

<sup>5</sup>. Palladius: *De Gentibus Indiae et Bragmanibus* I. 1-10 [ed. W. Berghoff].



Sea or through the Persian Gulf trade networks"<sup>6</sup>

Surprise has sometimes been expressed that the Romans, who had dared to endure the rigours and perils of a long voyage to South India, should not have continued their voyages to Sri Lanka. The usual explanation has been that the South Indian kingdoms effectively prevented and prohibited western merchants from trading directly with the island<sup>7</sup>. In support of this it has been pointed out that Sri Lanka's contacts with North India stopped abruptly after the reign of Devanampiya Tissa, and that this interruption corresponds to the earliest period of South Indian invasions. These invasions may have been undertaken with a view to controlling the ports of Sri Lanka in order to prevent the island from trading with the Romans and Persians. The preponderant Hindu influence at the main ports of the island, and such late evidence as the problems encountered by the Theban lawyer, to which reference has already been made, lend some support to this view.

It must however be remembered that the above mentioned interruption of relations between Sri Lanka and North India may equally be due to the decline of the Maurya empire which was the main inspiration for these contacts. In fact, when in the fourth century A.D. a new empire did come into prominence in North India under the powerful Guptas, Sri Lanka's relations with North India resumed; and this time too, as before, the emphasis appears to have been on religious matters.

The real explanation may be that the Romans, and their Greek subjects, did not feel the need to go all the way to Sri Lanka as long as its products could be obtained easily and abundantly at Indian ports. That such was in fact the case is evident from Strabo who tells us that "there are brought from thence (i.e. from Taprobane) to the Indian markets ivory, tortoise-shell and other wares in large quantities"<sup>8</sup>. However, this situation must have changed during the latter part of the first century A.D. when increasing demand for eastern luxuries would have forced the Romans to explore fresh supplies. Thus, like many other coincidences of history, the rediscovery of Sri Lanka by the western world appears to have come about at the right moment.

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<sup>6</sup>. Martha Prickett: "Sri Lanka's Foreign Trade Before A.D. 600: Archaeological Evidence" *Asian Panorama: Essays in Asian History, Past and Present* edited by K.M. de Silva, Sirima Kiribamune, C.R. de Silva. Delhi (1990) pp. 151-180; cf. P. 171.

<sup>7</sup>. B.J. Perera: 'The Foreign Trade and Commerce of Ancient Ceylon' *The Ceylon Historical Journal* I (1951) p. 301.

<sup>8</sup>. Strabo: ii.1.14; E.H. Warmington: *The Commerce Between the Roman Empire and India* Cambridge (1928) p. 10.



The opening-up of Sri Lanka to the Romans was an outcome of the general economic expansion made possible by the establishment of the Roman Principate under Augustus, and the peace it gave to the strife-torn ancient world. The commercial supremacy of Rome and Italy and the Impetus given to free trade had far-reaching consequences. The period of the Julio-Claudian emperors saw an unprecedented growth in commerce with the East, for which Hippalus' revelation of the use of monsoons for periodic navigation and the destruction of Aden (whoever was responsible for it) were essential prerequisites<sup>9</sup>. But the first recorded Roman encounter with Sri Lanka appears to have been the result of a happy accident, the arrival of a freedman of Annianus Plocamus, which occurred during the reign of the emperor Claudius (A.D. 41-54).

As for actual visits of Roman citizens to the island, our sources record only two instances, that of this freedman of Annianus Plocamus in the first century A.D., and of Sopatros, the acquaintance of Cosmas, probably during the fifth century A.D. The first of these visits resulted in the sending of a delegation from Sri Lanka to Rome, which appears to have opened a new era in Rome's relations with the island: witness the comprehensive information available to Ptolemy almost a century later. Little was added to this knowledge until the vivid account of Cosmas Indicopleustes who, writing in the sixth century, probably relied on Sopatros and others who had travelled to the island from Adoulis.

The central position of Sri Lanka and its economic advantages constitute one of the main interests of Cosmas' eleventh book. There, the countries beyond the island are referred to as the "inner countries" while those west of it are called "outer countries"<sup>10</sup>. Commenting on this passage, Wolska-Conus has observed that whereas Cosmas applies the term "inner India" to Asiatic India, the practice of other Greek and Syrian writers was to apply it to the inhabitants on the shores of the Red Sea - a practice probably going back to the days when that region furnished an exchange for merchandise between Rome and India, and was therefore inhabited by many immigrant Indians. According to Wolska-Conus, the way Cosmas arranges the countries in relation to Taprobane shows that his informants came from that island, perhaps Nestorian sailors and merchants of Syrian origin. We cannot however rule out the above-mentioned possibility that much of his information came from other Egyptian Greeks such as his friend Sopatros and his party, whose encounter with the king of Taprobane is vividly narrated in the same book<sup>11</sup>.

The comprehensive foreign contacts which Cosmas attributes to the island are supported with regard to the Far East by the numerous reports of diplomatic and

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<sup>9</sup>. *Periplus Maris Erythraei*: 57; *ibid.* 26.

<sup>10</sup>. Cosmas: xi. 15.

<sup>11</sup>. Cosmas: xi. 17-19.



religious missions exchanged between Sri Lanka and China during the fifth and succeeding centuries, and with regard to the West by the prolific discoveries of Roman coins of the period. According to Cosmas, the importance of the island lay in its favourable geographical situation. But there can be no doubt that religious factors were also involved. By this time Sri Lanka was well known as the stronghold of orthodox Buddhism and it may not be irrelevant to point out that in the fifth century Buddhaghosa and others began the translation into Pali of Sinhala commentaries on Buddhist canonical texts in order to make them useful to Buddhists abroad. Thus the learning of Sri Lanka became available to the rest of the world. It is important to realize that this internationalization of learning coincided with the rise of Sri Lanka as the centrepot of eastern trade.

This intermediary role, however important it may have been at certain periods, was not the only reason why Sri Lanka was important in the eastern trade of the hellenistic and Roman world. There can be no doubt that the island itself provided some of the luxury commodities that reached the west. According to Cosmas<sup>12</sup>, not only did foreign ships and products pass through the ports of the island, but it also sent out its own ships and products. What these products were, Cosmas does not tell us other than what he calls the hyacinth stone. Other Greek and Roman writers mention precious stones and metals, pearls, muslins, ivory and tortoise-shell<sup>13</sup>. Ptolemy adds rice, ginger and honey<sup>14</sup>; but none of these writers specifically says that they were exported. A Chinese work mentions cinnabar, mercury, something called "sun-lu", turmeric, storax, costus and such perfumes<sup>15</sup>. More than a millennium later, in the 13th century, King Buvanekabahu I (1272-84) in his letter to the Sultan of Egypt says: "I possess a prodigious quantity of pearls and precious stones of every kind. I have vessels, elephants, muslin and other stuffs, brazil wood, cinnamon and other objects of commerce which are brought to you by the Banian merchants. My kingdom produces trees, the wood of which is fit for making ships.<sup>16</sup> As these lists may include items that formed part of the transit trade, it is difficult to determine what was locally produced other than ginger, turmeric, ivory, pearls and precious stones for which we have supporting evidence from other indigenous sources.

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<sup>12</sup>. Cosmas: xi. 15-16.

<sup>13</sup>. Cf. for instance, Strabo: ii. 1. 14; Periplus M.E.: 61; Pliny: *N.H.* vi. 81, 89.

<sup>14</sup>. Ptolemy: vii. 4. 1.

<sup>15</sup>. *Tai-Ping-Yu-Lan* 982, 4347 B, quoted by Wolters: *op. cit.* p. 80.

<sup>16</sup>. H.W. Codrington: "A Sinhalese Embassy to Egypt" *J.R.A.S. C.B.* XXVIII no. 72 pp. 82-85.



There is hardly any mention of cinnamon in the Greek and Roman notices of Sri Lanka, and the suggestion has been made that the cinnamon of Sri Lanka was a well kept secret jealously guarded from the west by the Indian or Arabian intermediaries. However, in as much as none of the better informed Chinese authors, nor even the earliest indigenous sources, make any mention of cinnamon, it is more likely that it was not produced on the island at the time to an extent significant enough to attract attention. This plant grows best in the south-west of the island, which was not densely populated prior to the 12th century, and it may not have received sufficient attention as a "cash crop". Its first mention in Sinhala literature is thought to be in the *Sikhavalanda*, a work of the 10th century, where it is mentioned as a cosmetic used in bathing. The *Aja Ib Al Hind* or "the Wonders of India" is perhaps the earliest foreign reference to Sri Lanka's cinnamon. It is also mentioned among letters of 12th century Jewish merchants found in Cairo Jeniza. It is subsequently noticed by such foreign writers as John of Montecorvino (13th century), Ibn Batuta (14th century) and Nicola de Conti<sup>17</sup>.

What the island received in return for its exports is also not clear. Coral and textiles are mentioned in connection with specific occasions, while Cosmas mentions Persian horses who were, according to him, exempted from duty<sup>18</sup>; but otherwise our sources are almost silent. Foreign coins and artifacts, the discovery of which have so far been intermittently announced, present only a very incomplete picture.

Recent studies of ancient cultures have stressed the need to widen the meaning of "commerce" to encompass more than its modern denotation of a supply and demand market system, to include various other forms of transactions. In particular, the bearing of ritual, religious and social considerations on the production and distribution of property has been stressed by economic anthropologists<sup>19</sup>. Regarding the physical evidence for Sri Lanka's foreign contacts, Martha Prickett has observed:

"The specific nature of these contacts remains to be clarified - be they individual merchants, formalized trade networks, state-supported diplomatic missions, souvenir-collecting travellers, gift-bearing pilgrims, returning students and sailors, or other formal or informal modes of exchange (including even the dowries of international

<sup>17</sup>. B.J. Perera: "The Foreign Trade and Commerce of Ancient Ceylon" pt. 4 *The Ceylon Historical Journal* II (1953) p. 17. W.I. Siriweera: "Pre-colonial Sri Lanka's Maritime Commerce with Special Reference to its Ports" in S. Bandaranayake et al. ed.: *Sri Lanka and the Silk Road of the Sea* Colombo (1990) p. 128.

<sup>18</sup>. Cosmas XI. 22; cf. B.J. Perera: *op. cit.* p. 14.

<sup>19</sup>. Cf. Xinru Liu: *Ancient India and Ancient China: Trade and Religious Exchanges A.D. 1-600* Delhi (1988) pp. 1-2.



modes of exchange (including even the dowries of international marriages, more generalized immigration or military expeditions). There are historical records documenting instances of most of these possible formal and informal modes of exchange. Determining which was happening in situations where only a few trade items have been recovered is extremely difficult. More accurate information concerning the volume and the variety of materials 'traded', as well as on the archaeological contexts of their find localities, is necessary before the exchange mechanism can be more than speculatively determined<sup>20</sup>."

In this connection it should be pointed out that both indigenous and foreign sources contain reports of commodities exchanged as gifts by embassies between Sri Lanka and Buddhist powers in India and China. For instance, the 11th chapter of the *Mahavamsa* refers to gifts exchanged between king Devanampiya Tissa and emperor Asoka Maurya in mid third century B.C. Assuming that these represent the pattern also of commercial exchanges, it could be argued that Sri Lanka in general must have exported its natural wealth of raw material of high value in exchange for manufactured objects priced not so much for their intrinsic material value as for their skillful execution or cultural significance. It should however be pointed out that the *Periplus* mentions muslins among the products of Taprobane, and that the export of textiles from Sri Lanka is also documented in late Sanskrit works such as the *Rajatarangani* and the *Tirthakalpa*, as well as in the geographical work of Idrisi<sup>21</sup>.

Our sources are equally reticent regarding cultural exchanges. Greek doxographers such as Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 160-215) show some knowledge of Buddhism<sup>22</sup>; but this knowledge came to them through the activities of rulers such as Asoka Maurya, Milinda and Kanishka. Sri Lanka's contributions in this regard appear to have been directed mainly towards south-eastern Asia and China. It may also be pointed out that whereas over forty Greek and Latin authors mention Taprobane in their writings, the ancient literature of Sri Lanka is practically silent regarding contacts with the West. With the possible but doubtful exception of *mahavamsa* x. 90, the Yonas known to them are the Greek subjects of Asoka and Milinda, and the monks from "Alasanda the city of the Yonas" who, in the time of Dutthagamani, attended the

<sup>20</sup>. M. Prickett: "Sri Lanka's Foreign Trade before A.D. 600" p. 169.

<sup>21</sup>. B.J. Perera: *op. cit.* p. 21.

<sup>22</sup>. Clement of Alexandria: *Stromateis* iii. 194 [Dindorff]; Cf. W. Halbfass: "Early Indian References to the Greeks and the First Western References to Buddhism" in Heinz Bechert (ed): *The Dating of the Historical Buddha* Gottingen (1991) pp. 197-208.



foundation of the Mahathupa<sup>23</sup>.

Regarding certain details of the Vijaya legend, Merlin Peris, who has carried out comparative studies of Greek and eastern legends, has observed that, while these motifs closely reflect details in the Circe adventure of Odysseus in Homer's epic, they are yet in excess of anything that one could point to as present in Indian history, and must thus argue for Sri Lanka as being to some degree an independent beneficiary of stories originating in Greece. Peris even suspects that a considerable amount of Greek motifs and motif details even common with Indian literature and so far used to argue a second-hand derivation of these for Sri Lanka, may themselves have been part of a shared heritage which made its way to Sri Lanka *via* Greek influence in north-western India:

"Must we not presume that there must have been Greeks among the Buddhist clergy of India that, within less than a century of the Greek advent to India, mass-produced Jatakas with even distinctly Greek story motifs? There would have been at least a few who had found their way to this distant outpost of Aryan Buddhist occupation - Lanka with which northern India maintained continuous intercourse from racial, cultural and religious affinities spanning the first century B.C. when the legend of Vijaya in the most conservative calculation of Mendis had its birth. In the alternative must we not assume the existence of an elite and significant community of scholars among the indigenous monks themselves who, through translation or by their own linguistic achievements, knew fairly intimately classical works from the western civilization permeating the island *via* Greek influence in north-western India in the way that our hero himself got to the island?<sup>24</sup>".

M. Peris' second alternative is the one that has actually been adopted already by the late S. Paranavitana who, in its support, has produced some strange documentary evidence supposed to have been engraved on already existing inscriptions. In the essay entitled "Classical References in the Interlinear Inscriptions from Sri Lanka" I have given my reasons for not placing credence in them and for not utilizing their evidence in my research. Moreover, many biblical story motifs are also found in the *Mahavamsa*, so that one cannot altogether rule out the possibility of borrowing from a common Middle-Eastern source.

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<sup>23</sup>. *Mahavamsa*: xxix. 39.

<sup>24</sup>. M. Peris: "Greek Elements in the Vijaya legend" *J.R.A.S. S.L.B.* n.s. XXVI (1982) pp. 43-66; cf. p. 55.



Occasional attempts have been made to trace Greek, Egyptian or Assyrian influence in the architectural and sculptural remains of the island<sup>25</sup>. However, as far as Greek (or, for that matter, Roman) influence is concerned, such influences, if they are really evident, can only vouch for the impact of Indian art traditions such as that of Gandhara.

## II

One problem that needs further investigation is the commercial context of the Graeco-Roman objects found at various sites in northern Sri Lanka<sup>26</sup>. Three sites appear to have been of primary importance: Mantai the ancient port and site of the famous temple of Tiruketisvaram, Kantarodai the ancient settlement in the Jaffna peninsula and Anuradhapura which served as the capital of the island for more than a millennium<sup>27</sup>. The occurrence of imported pottery at these sites may reflect the island's contact with southern India whereby it participated in the international trade of the ancient world. Of special significance in this respect are the sherds of Roman amphorae, Arretine ware and the rouletted ware of the Arikamedu type, probably of Indian origin<sup>28</sup>. Their occurrence in northern Sri Lanka serve to date these contacts to the

<sup>25</sup>. e.g. C.M. Enriquez: *Ceylon Past and Present* London (n.d.) p. 103.

<sup>26</sup>. W. Begley: 'Archaeological Exploration in Northern Ceylon' *Expedition: Bulletin of the University Museum of Pennsylvania* IX.4 (Summer 1976) pp. 21-29; W. Wijayapala and M.E. Prickett: *Sri Lanka and the International Trade: an Exhibition of Ancient Imported Ceramics Found in Sri Lanka's Archaeological Sites* (1986) nos. 2 and 3; H. Ratnayake: "The Jetavana Treasure" in S. Bandaranayake et al: *op. cit.* pp. 45-61; M. Prickett-Fernando: "Durable goods: The Archaeological Evidence of Sri Lanka's Role in the Indian Ocean Trade" *ibid.* pp. 61-85, esp. pp. 81-82; R. Silva and J. Bouzek: "Mantai - A Second Arikamedu: A Note on Roman finds" *ibid.* pp. 123-124.

<sup>27</sup>. Other explored sites bearing on the period are Sigiriya, Kucchaveli and Tissamaharama. For a discussion of all these sites and objects recovered from them, cf. Martha Prickett: "Sri Lanka's Foreign Trade before A.D. 600: Archaeological Evidence" *Asian Panorama: Essays in Asian History, Past and Present* (1990) pp. 151-180.

<sup>28</sup>. The observations of Vijayapala and Prickett (*op. cit.* introduction) regarding storage jars of foreign origin found in Sri Lanka may appropriately be applied to the sherds of Roman amphorae as well: "These larger vessels were undoubtedly shipped as the containers for more precious materials that have not survived, or served as water-storage containers on the ships during their long journeys. Thus these large jars show the international trade in perishable products that we will never find archaeologically. In this way these large jars inform us of the scale



early centuries of the Christian era, or even a couple of centuries earlier, when Arikamedu was flourishing as a trading station on the eastern coast of India.

The presence of amphorae and arretine sherds points to the conclusion that foreign articles were already arriving on the island during the early part of the first century A.D. On the other hand S.U. Deraniyagala has recently published four radio-carbon dates from Anuradhapura which point to a commencement date for rouletted ware during the second century B.C.; while Wimala Begley, in a reanalysis of the Arikamedu excavations of Wheeler and Casal has proposed seven phases for that site, the second of which, when rouletted ware (which Begley assigns to a Hellenistic origin) first appears, is dated to the late second century B.C.<sup>29</sup> All this is by no means inconsistent with the evidence of the local chronicles which represent the island under South Indian influence, and sometimes under South Indian rule, during the first centuries B.C. and A.D., nor with the testimony of Strabo who asserts that much cargo is brought from Taprobane to the Indian markets<sup>30</sup>.

However, as Martha Prickett has pointed out, "Most of the identified 'Hellenistic' pottery appears to be from the Greek East - from somewhere in the greater northwestern India to Bactria. Only three sherds have been identified as being of more western origin, either Pergamene or Selucid of c. 250 to 150 B.C. Such long-distance western contacts probably moved through links with the Persian Gulf, along commercial routes that were still uniting the former empire of Alexander<sup>31</sup>."

It is worth observing that these sites in northern Sri Lanka where foreign articles are found, are those with religious as well as commercial significance, being associated with shrines, Hindu or Buddhist. In this connection we may also note that what is perhaps the only known instance of the arrival of western commodities reported in the Pali literature of Sri Lanka is connected with the homage paid to a Buddhist shrine by a king of the land: Bhatikabhaya's offering of a coral net to the Mahathupa<sup>32</sup>. Religion

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of the international commodity trade far more accurately than do the more lovely fine vessels that were traded for their own beauty."

<sup>29</sup>. S.U. Deraniyagala: "Excavations in the Citadel of Anuradhapura Gedige 1984: a Preliminary Report" *Ancient Ceylon* no. 6 (1986) pp. 39-47; W. Begley: "Arikamedu reconsidered" *American Journal of Archaeology* LXXXVII (1983) pp. 461-481; cf. I.W. Aridika and Peter Belwood: "Sembiran: the Beginnings of Indian Contact with Bali" *Antiquity* LXV. 247 (1991) pp. 221-232; cf. p. 228.

<sup>30</sup>. Cf. Strabo: II. i. 14.

<sup>31</sup>. M. Prickett: *op. cit.* p. 170.

<sup>32</sup>. *Vamsatthappakasini* vol. 2 p. 60 l. 30 [ed. Malalasekera].



seems to have played an important part in determining the demand for foreign articles. Archaeology is thus in agreement with the chronicles which constantly stress the importance of religion in the political and cultural life of the people of Sri Lanka.

R.E.M. Wheeler has suggested that the purpose of the settlements of Arikamedu was to consolidate the trade with Sri Lanka and South-east Asia<sup>33</sup>. At Arikamedu, apart from glass and clay, the substances most used for the manufacture of beads are chalcedonic crystal and crystalline quartz in their many varieties. They are found in many districts throughout India, but they also occur in Sri Lanka whose gems and pearls are of ancient renown. Some of the gem producing regions of the Deccan have also yielded Graeco-Roman artifacts. Many of the Roman coins found in South India come from the Beryl producing Coimbatore district, while Arikamedu type rouletted ware has turned up at Chandravalli and Brahmagiri in the Chitaldrug district of northern Mysore, at Amaravati and in the Nellor district of South India: all these lie close to regions producing precious stones. Roman artifacts in northern Sri Lanka may likewise indicate the early exploitation of the island's natural wealth.

On the other hand, Roman red ware, rouletted ware, beads and other articles of Graeco-Roman origin have turned up at many ports on the West Indian coast as well as in the interior<sup>34</sup>. Red polished ware and Graeco-Roman antiquities are reported from a number of places in and around Kathiawar and the Gujarat province in general. This was one of the areas producing semi-precious stones. Rouletted ware from Nasik and Godavari are said to be similar to those from Arikamedu. Among the finds at Broach (Bharukaccha, the Barygaza of the Greek writers) were beads in large quantities in all stages of manufacture indicating a local industry, and similar observations have been made regarding Mantai in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, Indian rouletted ware has been reported from illicit diggings around Kobal, Mendal, and Kibutal in North-western Java, as well as from excavations at Sembiran in Bali<sup>35</sup>; and early Indian contact with Thailand is indicated by beads and bronze objects from the cemetery of Ban Don Ta-phet

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<sup>33</sup>. R.E.M. Wheeler: "Arikamedu: An Indo-Roman Trading Station on the East Coast of India" *Ancient India* no. 2 (1946) p. 121.

<sup>34</sup>. C. Margabandhu: "Trade Contacts Between Western India and the Graeco-Roman World in the Early Centuries of the Christian Era - an Archaeological Restatement" *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* VIII (1965) pp. 316-322.

<sup>35</sup>. M.I.S. Walker and S. Santoso: "Romano-Indian Rouletted Pottery in Indonesia" *Mankind* XI (1977) pp. 39-47 and *Asian Perspectives* XX (1977) pp. 228-235; Aridika and Bellwood: *loc. cit.*



in Central Thailand<sup>36</sup>. The Roman lamp from P'ong-tuk in Southern Thailand and the Antonian bracelet from Oc-Eo in Vietnam are already well known. X-ray diffraction analysis of rouletted sherds from Sembiran, Anuradhapura and Arikamedu conclusively support an Indian origin, while neutron activity analysis of sherds from these and other sites indicate that all the rouletted ware is so close in composition as to suggest the definite possibility of a single manufacturing source for all the samples<sup>37</sup>.

The occurrence of Graeco-Roman objects and a bead industry in western and central Deccan as well as on the east coast of India and South-east Asia may indicate the existence of overland caravan traffic and sea trade during the early centuries of the Christian era. The provenance of similar material at several sites in northern Sri Lanka suggests that the island was somehow drawn into the network of Indo-Roman trade. But whether the role of mediatrix between East and West, which Cosmas in the sixth century A.D. assigned to Sri Lanka, was already being taken at this early date cannot be asserted confidently in the present state of our knowledge.

From the archaeological material at Arikamedu, Wheeler has concluded that within the first two decades of the first century A.D., Roman factories were already being established in certain major east Indian ports for the dual purpose of exploiting local traffic with Sri Lanka and of prospecting the east Indian coast towards the Ganges and Indonesia<sup>38</sup>. However, Wheeler believes that until the third quarter of the first century A.D. there was no regular direct communication between Rome and Sri Lanka: hence the importance of the overland route from west to east through the Coimbatore gap in the early years of the principate; hence too the absence in Sri Lanka of Roman coins from the first half of the first century A.D. Wheeler refers to the remark of Strabo that only stray individuals had in his day sailed round India towards the Ganges, and that no useful information was forthcoming from them<sup>39</sup>. He also points out that with the author of the *Periplus*, first-hand knowledge stops at Nelcynda on the Malabar coast. Wheeler, however, does not appear to have considered Pliny's account of the sailing

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<sup>36</sup>. I.C. Glover: *Early Trade Between India and Southeast Asia* Hull (1989) [2nd edition 1990] pp. 12ff.

<sup>37</sup>. Aridika and Bellwood: *op. cit.* p. 224. These writers also allude to rouletted black ware in contexts of the first and second centuries A.D. from Beikghano in Burma, and to a sherd of apparent Arikamedu type 18 C from Bukit Tengku Lembu in Northern Malaya. *ibid.* p. 229.

<sup>38</sup>. R.E.M. Wheeler: "Roman Trade with India and Pakistan" *Aspects of Archaeology in Britain and Beyond* ed. W.F. Grimes, pp. 370 ff.

<sup>39</sup>. Cf. Strabo: xv. 1. 4.



time from Sri Lanka to the Ganges<sup>40</sup>; and although Pliny claims that some of the information he got from the delegates from Sri Lanka was confirmed by reports of Roman prospectors<sup>41</sup>, Wheeler thinks that they had not yet visited the island but must have received some account of it through trade channels; "otherwise the Roman castaway would not have been such a novelty to the local king."

A similar view is also expressed by Charlesworth who thinks that the Arretine ware could not have been brought to Arikamedu in western ships which may not have rounded Cape Comorin until the end of the first century. He too points to the lack of knowledge in the *Periplus* beyond Cape Comorin and says that the pottery was brought by Indian and not Roman ships, or else, perhaps, conveyed overland through the Coimbatore gap. In other words, not more than an occasional Graeco-Roman ship got through to the eastern side of the Indian Peninsula until after the end of the first century A.D. Charlesworth questions the capacity of the average Graeco-Roman ship to surmount the formidable barrier of Adam's Bridge between India and Sri Lanka, and suggests that the rarity of Roman coins of the first three centuries A.D. in Sri Lanka shows that the alternative, i.e. the circumnavigation of the island, was not yet in use.

However, it now appears that these views need to be modified in view of the earlier dating of the rouletted ware from Arikamedu. The occurrence of Arretine ware in northern Sri Lanka in association with other pottery types also found at Arikamedu makes it very likely that the Palk Strait was in use, no doubt concurrently with the overland route, for transporting merchandise between the eastern and western ports of India and further afield. The fact that so many coin hoards were lost in the Coimbatore gap may be an indication that it was not the safest route for Roman wares. The sea route on the other hand would have been safer, particularly once the Romans, with their archers on board and garrison at Cape Comorin<sup>42</sup> and other similar measures, were able to keep in check the menaces of the pirate coast. Moreover, it would have been the cheaper route by far. It is therefore possible that the sea route was also in use from a very early time and that it may even have come to be preferred, leading eventually to the abandonment of the overland route as deduced by Wheeler from the cessation of Roman coins in the second century.

However, as Martha Prickett, field director of the Mantai excavations, has pointed out, any ship sailing between the east and the west coasts of India, or points beyond either, must pass through one of the channels across Adam's Bridge, where shoals and tricky currents produce serious risks, or must entirely circumnavigate Sri Lanka. "The only other possibility open to the larger ships was to off-load their cargo

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<sup>40</sup>. Pliny: vi. 82-83.

<sup>41</sup>. *ibid.* vi. 88.

<sup>42</sup>. *Periplus* 59.



on to lighters or to land-transport for the journey across Adam's Bridge.<sup>43</sup>

It has been observed that one cannot sail in a vessel of any size between India and Sri Lanka: "The channel is blocked about sixty miles south of Jaffna by the island of Ramesvaram on the Indian side and by the island of Mannar on the Sinhalese side; and between them is a chain of sand banks [Adam's Bridge] affording only three to four foot draft. ... The Palk Strait, which lies to the north and east of Adam's Bridge, is therefore virtually enclosed, constituting a huge bay which must have been attractive to ships which did not wish to make the journey round the south of the island to reach India or the Maldives. They could unload their cargo there in calm waters, to be transported either overland or in lighters to the other side of the island of Mannar, there to be reloaded on other ships for the next stage of the voyage."<sup>44</sup>

On the other hand, it has been pointed out that, while the Mannar Straits retained the hazards of shallowness which ultimately caused its abandonment, the alternative route to the south of Sri Lanka was uninviting due to the hidden crops of rock that still lay to the south-east of the island. The risks of this alternative route are attested by the many wrecks under the sea, and the "lodestone legend" which is "clear evidence that the sailors shunned the southern route round Sri Lanka specially during the south-west monsoon when the sails were raised in a north-easterly navigation"<sup>45</sup>.

C.W. Nicholas has argued that in and prior to the 12th century, and very probably also prior to 1549, there was no navigable Pamban passage, and that the isthmus now called "the Great Dam" was continuous from Pamban island to the mainland. The only navigable seaway between the gulf of Mannar and the Palk Strait was the Mannar passage which, Nicholas argues, must have been much deeper in antiquity than it has been in recent times. "Mantai stood at the northern end of this single, sheltered and vital sea route, and it was this commanding position which conferred on it its importance as a seaport"<sup>46</sup>; in addition, it was close to the rich pearl

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<sup>43</sup>. Mantha Prickett: *Excavations at Mantai 1980: Preliminary Report of the Field Director* Cambridge. <ass/. (10,17,1980) ms. p. 1.

<sup>44</sup>. John de Silva: "Ceylon and Chinese Porcelain Before 1500" *Asian Affairs* October 1979, pp. 260-271; cf. pp. 268-9.

<sup>45</sup>. Roland Silva: "Mantai - the Great Emporium of Cosmas Indicopleustes" (paper delivered to participants of the Maritime International Silk-route Seminar, Colombo, 12th-14th Dec. 1990) p. 3.

<sup>46</sup>. As Nicholas points out, this is in spite of the fact that there is no natural harbour at Mantai.



bank to south of Mannar island<sup>47</sup>."

Mantai was thus situated in an advantageous position which determined its preeminence in the ancient trade of South Asia.

"It lies athward the maritime trade route between the Near and Far East. It is also strategically placed on a north-south axis, at the point of any incursions from mainland India. This importance is further reinforced by the fact that it is situated at the southern extremity of Adam's Bridge, the string of under-water passage of shipping of any size between India and Sri Lanka. This means that it became a point of contact and interchange for ships both from the Near and Far enough in design to sail the notoriously dangerous waters of the south coast of Sri Lanka"<sup>48</sup>

Martha Prickett, speaking before the First National Archaeological Congress in 1986, explained the significance of this port thus:

"Mantai was superbly positioned for control of resourcs and maritime trade routes. In serving as the principal port of Anuradhapura, Mantai was a pivotal centre in the long-distance trade between the Middle East, South Asia and the orient until the 11th century A.D. The extent of this trade, which was largely in perishable goods, such as spices, textiles and precious woods, is demonstrated archaeologically by more prosaic items such as ceramic and stones - although these clearly support the historical reports of Mantai's far-flung trade networks."

According to Prickett, "the near equal quantities of Near-Eastern and Far-Eastern ceramics clearly confirms that during its heyday Mantai served as a pivotal entrepot and trans-shipment centre in the maritime commercial networks of the early medieval period.<sup>49</sup> Prickett is however careful to point out that, "although the sample of Early Historic Period is still minuscule, there is, as yet, no ceramic evidence from our excavations of direct Roman contact, although there are several pieces of Arretine ceramics reputedly found during the 1952 excavations and as surface finds. Despite this paucity, the provenance of rouletted ware, with a coastal distribution from Central India

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<sup>47</sup>. C.W. Nicholas: "The North-west Passage between Ceylon and India" in: S. Bandaranayake et. al. (edd.): *Sri Lanka and the Silk Road of the Sea* pp. 271-276.

<sup>48</sup>. John Carswell: "The Excavation of Mantai" *Ancient Ceylon* no. 7 (1990) pp. 17-28; cf. p. 20.

<sup>49</sup>. Prickett: *Excavations at Mantai 1980* p. 28.



to Sri Lanka, eastward to Indonesia, shows participation in at least some of the international trading routes of the period.<sup>50</sup> As Prickett points out, "there seems little question that Mantai was already playing its later role as a major port during the development of Roman commerce in the Indian Ocean in the first and second centuries A.D. Precisely how early this role began is yet to be discovered."<sup>51</sup>

The significance of Mantai, however, was not confined to its role as an entrepot. As Carswell has observed, "the sheer number of half-sawn conches and other workshop debris is evidence for Mantai being a major manufacturing site. The industrial character of the site is further amplified by significant remains of glass cullet of various colours and glass beads in different shades of manufacture. There are also masses of iron and other slag. Over two thousand beads have been recovered of a wide variety, with imports from as far afield as India, Afghanistan and the Mediterranean. ... Mantai was also a major stone bead manufacturing site, and many drilled and polished specimens never completed or fractured in manufacture have been found."<sup>52</sup>

The early use of the route through the Palk strait is confirmed not only by Pliny's excellent description of navigation along the east Indian coast<sup>53</sup>, (which does, by the way, include a note on the shallowness of the sea in-between), but also from the statements of the *Periplus* regarding the marts and anchorages on the east Indian coast, among which Kamara, Podouka and Sopatma are mentioned by name<sup>54</sup>. The *Periplus* says that the merchants from Limurike and the north arrive in these ports, that the local coasting vessels from there proceed as far as Limurike, that there are other vessels called *sangara* and *kolandiophonta*, the latter employed for voyages to Chryse<sup>55</sup> and the Ganges, and that these marts import all the commodities which reach Limurike, absorbing likewise nearly every species of goods brought from Egypt and most exports

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<sup>50</sup>. Prickett: "Mantai-Mahatittha: the Great Port and Entrepot in Indian Trade" in: S. Bandaranayake et. al. (edd): *Sri Lanka and the Silk Road of the Sea* pp. 115-122; cf. also Roland Silva and Jan Bouzek: "Mantai - a Second Arikamedu: a Note on Roman Finds" *ibid* pp. 123-124.

<sup>51</sup>. Prickett: *Excavations at Mantai 1980* pp. 29-30.

<sup>52</sup>. Carswell: *op. cit.* p. 27.

<sup>53</sup>. Pliny: vi. 82-83.

<sup>54</sup>. *Periplus* 60.

<sup>55</sup>. Chryse [Chersonesos] i.e. the Golden Chersonese, somewhere in South-east Asia; compare *Suvannabhumi* of the Pali texts.



from Limurike<sup>56</sup>. Significantly enough, the author then goes out of his way to mention the products of Taprobane before resuming the description of the east coast of India, showing thereby that the island had been drawn into this brisk commerce. The mid-first century date now accepted for the *Periplus* would make this information more or less contemporary with the evidence from Arretine pottery. The cumulative evidence therefore suggests some form of navigation through the Palk Strait at least as early as the mid first century A.D.

Charlesworth's suggestion that the goods were conveyed in local ships is supported by the express testimony of the *Periplus*, and by Pliny's description of the special reversible craft peculiar to this area, with their tonnage of about 3,000 amphorae. But it does not follow from this that the trade was entirely in the hands of local people, as Filliozat appears to believe<sup>57</sup>. According to Filliozat, the Romans took no active part in organizing the Indian trade. He points out that since according to Pliny's timetable the Roman ships stayed in India only for a couple of months, the merchandise was collected beforehand at those designated ports described in the *Periplus*. While some Yavanas may have penetrated into Indian towns and even dwelt there as just one more caste, the actual organization of the commerce was, he says, in the hands of the Indians who had much to gain from it. Filliozat refers to Pliny's remark that pepper was brought to Bacare in local monoxulae and points out that the Indian merchandise was brought to the Mediterranean world by various intermediaries across a number of routes, well before the establishment of Roman power. In other words, the Romans could obtain eastern merchandise without having to go and look for it.

This hypothesis completely ignores our evidence: the hoards of Roman coins in India, the increasing references to Indian goods and other exotic products in Roman literature from the time of Augustus onwards, and the references to western commerce in early Tamil literature leave no doubt that, once the use of the monsoons for navigation was discovered and peace was restored under Augustus and Aden, the entrepot of the middlemen was subdued, direct commerce between east and west grew more and more intense. The sending of embassies to the Roman emperors, the sophisticated customs organization in Egypt and the very existence of works like the *Periplus*, all lead us to believe that the role of the Roman merchants in eastern trade was not simply that of passive clients. They may not have gathered the products personally, but one cannot think of them as leaving the whole concern in the hands of local people. There were Roman factories on the east coast of India, and it is very probable that there were resident Romans in those regions. It is in this context that we should read the accounts of the Tamil poets concerning the dwellings of the Yavanas at Puhar on the Kaveri river.

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<sup>56</sup>. Limurike may be the same as the Damirike of Ptolemy or the Dimirike of later Latin writers, i.e. "the Tamil Country".

<sup>57</sup>. J. Filliozat: "Les echanges entre L'Empire Romain et L'inde aux premiers siecles de L'Ere Chretienne" *Revue Historique* CCL (1949) p. 10.



Although their presence in Sri Lanka is not positively documented. The people of this island must have been aware of Roman enterprise on the Indian mainland. King Bhatikabhaya, in any case, knew enough about the Romans to send to them for coral, rather than buy it in Indian markets, when he needed this commodity for a special religious occasion.

Two ancient references referring to widely different dates are often cited as attesting the existence of a foreign quarter at Anuradhapura; but their value is not unquestioned. The first is the statement in the *Mahavamsa* according to which, as early as the fourth century B.C. king Pandukabhaya laid out a quarter for the Yonas near the Western gate of the city<sup>58</sup>. Apart from the historical difficulties concerning the presence of Yonas (be they Greeks or Persians) on the island before the time of Alexander the Great, it has been pointed out that the reading *Yonasabhagavatthu* is not supported by the best manuscripts in Sri Lanka which read "*So Tam sabhagavattham*" referring to the laying of the "common ground"<sup>59</sup>. The other is a supposed reference to the dwellings of the Sabaeans in Fa-hsien's description of the island written in the early fifth century A.D. But Fa-hsien's term "*Sap-pho*" is now generally interpreted as referring to the *sarthavahas* or chiefs of the trading class who figure prominently in Buddhist literature. Moreover, it has been shown that Arabians could not have been known to Fa-hsien as Sabaeans, since the ruling dynasty at the time was Himyarite<sup>60</sup>. However, we know from Cosmas that the Persians had settled on the island by his time, and that they had their own Christian community consisting of clergy, faithful and a presbyter and deacon ordained from Persia, with complete ecclesiastical ritual<sup>61</sup>.

### III

We maintain that the Taprobane of the Graeco-Roman writers is Sri Lanka not only because of its resemblance to the ancient name Tambapanni, but also because the particulars of the Greek and Roman notices agree on the whole with what is revealed in indigenous sources. This is specially true of the accounts of Pliny, Ptolemy, and Cosmas, all of whom were able to obtain reliable accounts from people who had firsthand experience of the island. Where they differ from local records, the explanation

<sup>58</sup>. *Mahavamsa* x. 90 [Geiger].

<sup>59</sup>. A.M. Gunasekara: "Sabaeans and Yavanas" *JRASC* N & Q pt. 4 (July 1914) n. 26.

<sup>60</sup>. G.R. Tibbetts: "Pre-Islamic Arabia and South-east Asia" *J.M.B.R.A.S* XXIX (3) (1956) pp. 182-208; cf. p. 203.

<sup>61</sup>. Cosmas iii. 65 and xi. 14.



is not that they describe different parts of the island, as A. Herrmann believes<sup>62</sup>, but that their reports represent different points of view. The chronicles are primarily interested in the religious development of the island, and for them a good government was one that patronized Buddhism. Agricultural achievements of rulers are, of course, duly noted and praised, inasmuch as it was the irrigation works that largely provided the revenue for the maintenance and well-being of the Buddhist clergy. The foreign sources, on the other hand, reflect Graeco-Roman achievements in navigation, exploration, and commerce, and the resulting growth of descriptive and mathematical geography that was characteristic of the period in which the best of them were written. Hence, their observations represent a necessarily secular point of view, although some writers did not ignore altogether the religious life of Taprobane.

It is strange that foreign writers, who must have derived most of their knowledge of the island from merchant mariners, have little to say about its ports. Pliny mentions the port of Hippuros (generally identified with Kudiramalai) where the freedman of Annius Plocamus landed, and a harbour adjoining the city of Palaesimundu<sup>63</sup>. Cosmas also speaks of a port and emporium but fails to give its name<sup>64</sup>. Ptolemy however mentions five harbours and two emporia by name<sup>65</sup>, but the identifications proposed by modern writers have not always proved satisfactory.

However, both local and foreign sources do tell us something about the organization of ancient ports. Cosmas mentions the controllers and custom officers<sup>66</sup>. The Existence of such officials at Mantai is attested by an inscription from the site as well as by a reference in the Nandiya Vasthu of the *Saddharmalankaraya*<sup>67</sup>. Collection of revenues at several other ports is documented in inscriptions discovered in their surroundings. Godavaya is a particularly interesting example. The major ports were cosmopolitan in character with resident communities of various nationalities, so that, in addition to the collection of duties, the officers may have been entrusted with the welfare of foreign merchants at the ports. That the activities of these merchants pervaded through almost every port on the island is evident from the numerous finds of

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<sup>62</sup>. A. Herrmann: *P.W.* s.v. "Taprobane".

<sup>63</sup>. Pliny: vi. 84 and 86.

<sup>64</sup>. Cosmas: xi. 14 and 17.

<sup>65</sup>. Ptol. vii. 4. 7.

<sup>66</sup>. Cosmas: xi. 17.

<sup>67</sup>. *Epigraphia Zeylanica* vol. III pt. I London (1928-33) p. 105; *Saddharmalankaraya* p. 706 [ed. Gnanawimala Thero]; cf. B.J. Perera: *op. cit.* pt. I C.H.J. I (1952) p. 119.



late Roman bronze coins at many of them. Coins of more precious metals must have reached the island in abundance, but their very value doubtless caused their early disappearance. Both Pliny and Cosmas have recorded the impression they made on the rulers of the island<sup>68</sup>.

The extent of the influence of foreign trade on the life of the people in general is not easy to estimate. The prevalent view, until recently, has been that this trade could not have affected to any significant extent the majority of the citizens, who were content to pursue their normal means of livelihood, agricultural or otherwise. They were largely self-sufficient, and whatever they lacked or had in excess was taken care of by one aspect or other of internal trade. The exports of the island were royal monopolies, so that private individuals could not have taken interest in foreign trade on their own initiative<sup>69</sup>. But the kings, especially when they were strong enough to keep the island united, prosperous and safe from invasions, must have paid attention to foreign trade on an organized basis. But whether they followed a consistent economic policy with regard to this trade in the early period is not clear from our sources. However, this trade must have played its part in determining the nature of political decisions; and it was probably the vast revenue from foreign ships and trade, rather than any voluntary or forced labour, that enabled the construction of the monumental works of religious architecture and irrigation<sup>70</sup>.

Although written from different points of view, one is often struck by the remarkable extent to which local and foreign sources not only complement, but even corroborate each other. For instance, the chronicles concentrate their attention chiefly on the king and his officers, and have little to say regarding ordinary people. Now, in those Graeco-Roman sources derived from first-hand experience, i.e. Pliny, Ptolemy, Palladius and Cosmas, the only individuals mentioned are, again, the king and his officers. Hence, for these writers too, just as for the chroniclers, the most important man of the island was the king; although both Pliny and the chronicles reveal that his powers were not altogether unlimited. Even with regard to details considered fabulous or idealized, there is sometimes agreement between local and foreign sources. Thus the

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<sup>68</sup>. Pliny: vi. 84; Cosmas: xi. 17-19.

<sup>69</sup>. This view is the inevitable corollary to the equally long-established one which holds that the Sinhala people have shown a singular lack of interest in seafaring. Both views have been successfully contested in recent times. Cf. Somasiri Devendra et al.: "The Search for the Maritime Heritage" *Ancient Ceylon* no. 10 (1990) pp. 323-337; R.A.L.H. Gunawardena: "Seaways to Sileediba: Changing Patterns of Navigation in the Indian Ocean and their Impact on Pre-colonial Sri Lanka" in: S. Bandaranayaka et al. (edd): *Sri Lanka and the Silk Road of the Sea* pp. 25-45.

<sup>70</sup>. Cf. Roland Silva: *op. cit.* pt. 1 *C.H.J.* 1 (1952) p. 119.



long life attributed by western writers to the people of Taprobane is not only repeated by Chinese authors<sup>71</sup>, but also finds a parallel in the extreme lengths of reign which the chronicles attribute to certain kings of Sri Lanka. Again, the marvels told about the monstrous creatures that infest the waters around Taprobane are also found in eastern legends, specially in the Jataka stories.

One feature common to most foreign notices of Taprobane is that they invariably exaggerate the size of the island<sup>72</sup>. Apart from certain farfetched mathematical explanations which are on the whole inadequate, the three best known explanations are, (1) that the exaggerations are a vestige of the belief held at one time that Taprobane was the southern continent or the beginning thereof, (2) that they represent a confusion on the part of Greeks, between two local measurements of different lengths both of which bore the same name, i.e. the Indian word "yojana", and (3) that they reflect the extraordinary significance of the island for early western mariners both as one of the furthest points of navigational and economic interest, and as the home of some well-known exotic products. All these explanations have been supported in the past, but it is also possible that when distances were recorded by the number of days' sail involved, figures given in terms of local ships were calculated in stades of degrees, without making allowance for the greater speeds attained by western ships. That the ancients themselves were not totally unaware of this problem is seen from Pliny where he says that the given distance of twenty days between Taprobane and the Prasian nation was adjusted to seven in terms of the speed of Roman ships<sup>73</sup>. However, it has not been possible to find a general explanation that would cover all cases of exaggeration, although one particular case can be satisfactorily explained; the extremely great and unprecedented dimensions given by Marcian of Heraclea follow from the inclusion of the islands which Ptolemy had represented as encircling Taprobane<sup>74</sup>.

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<sup>71</sup>. Tennent: *Ceylon* I, p. 587.

<sup>72</sup>. The author of the *Dipavamsa* appears to have had a fairly good idea of the island's true size. Cf. *Dipavamsa* xvii. 1-2: "The excellent island of Lanka is thirty-two yojanas long, eighteen yojanas broad, its circuit is 100 yojanas, and is surrounded by the sea and one great mine of treasures. It possesses rivers and lakes, mountains and forests". Fa-hsien (ch. 37) however gives the dimensions as fifty yojanas from east to west and thirty yojanas from north to south. Perhaps Fa-hsien's figures are given in terms of a shorter *yojana* than those of the *Dipavamsa*.

<sup>73</sup>. Pliny: vi, 82.

<sup>74</sup>. D.P.M. Weerakkody: "Sri Lanka in the Post-Ptolemaic Greek Geographical Tradition", due to be published in the forthcoming issue of the *Ceylon Geographer*.



Tennent has observed with regard to the Chinese notices on Sri Lanka that, unlike other foreigners acquainted only with the seacoast and mercantile communities established there, the Chinese provide notices on the manners of the Sinhalese, and even minute particulars of their domestic habits, which attest to a continuous intercourse and an intimate familiarity between the people of the two countries<sup>75</sup>. "The explanation", he says, "is to be found in the identity of the national worship, attracting as it did the people of China to the sacred island, which had become the great metropolis of their common faith, and to the sympathy and hospitality with which the Sinhalese welcomed the frequent visits of their distant co-religionists".

It is true that the Greek and Latin notices in general do not reflect an intimacy of this kind. None of them can claim to a deep understanding of Sri Lanka's life and thought as revealed in a Chinese writer such as Fa-hsien. Yet these writers, in describing the island from a secular point of view, and supplying us with certain details not recorded in the indigenous tradition, provide a valuable complement which, when used critically and systematically, helps to further our knowledge concerning Sri Lanka in antiquity.

D.P.M. WEERAKKODY

<sup>75</sup>. Tennent: *Ceylon* 1. p. 593.



# THE DATE OF THE BRONZE BUDDHA FROM MEDAVACHCHIYA - ANURADHAPURA DISTRICT

The year 1961 was a significant one in the annals of the Archaeological Survey Department of Sri Lanka, in that it bequeathed to connoisseurs of art a unique bronze Buddha image found in Medavacchiya eloquent not only of the antiquity of itself as an icon of the Buddha, but also of the standards of remarkably high proficiency of the metallic handicraft industry and also of aesthetic capacities of artists of an era long gone by.<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this paper is to discuss the date of this statue, as it seems to have been tossed about with loose assignments from time to time, which in that case might eventually end in relegating it to some obscure and unimpressive era of the island's history.

Already we have a series of published sources of references to this statue parading for attention, more particularly the one by Dr. C.E. Godakumbura in *Artibus Asiae*<sup>2</sup> and among others of which it would be sufficient to review the one by a recent writer, who, as against all others, had pushed down the date of this statue to no less a time range than c. 9th century, which, as is known, was the twilight of the great Anuradhapura Period.<sup>3</sup>

The circumstances and the manner this object was dated and the fate of Godakumbura's original article on it are not on record. They were disclosed to me by the late H.M. Sirisoma, at that time Godakumbura's deputy, and also by Jayantha Uduvara, who was the Keeper of the Anuradhapura Archaeological Museum. Since these are contextually important to the subject, they certainly deserve our notice and review. But, before we get down to the theme of this paper, as a preamble it might be useful to recall the circumstances which led to the discovery of the icon. Although an archaeological item of intrinsic value itself, it does not owe, as any one may usually think, anything directly to the spade of the archaeologist; rather, it was brought to light by the casual mammy stroke of a peasant of Anuradhapura District. The vicissitudes from its discovery up to eventual possession by the Government of Sri Lanka can be briefly set down as follows:

In the year 1961, in the village of Viralmuruppuva near the Medavacchiya Railway Station in Anuradhapura District of the North Central Province, when a gang of railway workmen was digging the ground, one of them, Tikiri Appu by name, unexpectedly

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<sup>1</sup>. *Administration Report of the Archaeological Commissioner, 1960-61*; p. 25; Plate I; 1962 and Plates I & II of this article.

<sup>2</sup>. "A Bronze Buddha Image from Ceylon" *Artibus Asiae*, vol. XXVI (1963) p. 230-236.

<sup>3</sup>. Ulrich Von Schroeder, *Buddhist Sculptures of Sri Lanka*; Hong Kong, 1990, p. 175; 200.



unearthed this statue just a few inches below ground level. Although an offence under the Treasure Trove Ordinance, of which perhaps this man was totally unaware, he managed to take it home and himself secretly cleaned it, scaling off the dark green corrosion which wholly encrusted it. Since this encrustation adhered to the figure fast, Tikiri Appu had to actually scrape off the layers with much pressure, the result of which was that virtually every such stroke of the final crude scraping had left an ugly net work of criss-cross scratches all over the surface, as I was able to notice when it was brought to the Archaeological Museum in Kandy during the early days of its discovery for a special exhibition to coincide with the Annual Dalada Esala Festival.

Before long, throughout the village, the inevitable news spread around with lightening speed that Tikiri Appu had discovered a large golden statue. This story eventually reached the Village Headman of the area, W.N. Manikrala. The Headman, having then made inquiries and found it was no wild rumour, induced Tikiri Appu to hand it over to the Hon. Mr. Maitripala Senanayake, who was the Member of Parliament for Medavacchiya and also the Minister of Industries, Home and Cultural Affairs under whose purview incidentally the Archaeological Department too fell. Since from the time the statue was brought to Tikiri Appu's home, there were happenings in the house which seemed strange to its occupants and which really frightened them, Tikiri Appu readily acceded to the suggestion of the Headman and took the statue to the Minister in his company. Then, having met him, Tikiri Appu explained everything to him and delivered the statue to him. Thereupon, the Hon. Minister immediately contacted Jayantha Uduvara, Keeper of the Anuradhapura Archaeological Museum, and on his arrival, handed over the custody of the icon to the Archaeological Department. Thus, the first phase of the vicissitudes of the statue ended when the Government became its lawful and ultimate owner.

On 6th February, 1961, Uduwara made some field investigations at the site of the discovery of this image, but came across no worthwhile artifacts except the usual potsherds and brickbats which abound in this vast land area, which had been a territory of human habitation for several centuries past. In passing it may be remarked that the father of the finder, Tikiri Appu, too had previously discovered a gigantic bronze vessel around this same locality, the weight of which stood at an amazing 3 cwts.

The technique adopted for the casting of the figure is the *cire perdue* or 'lost wax' process. As a single unit, including the tenons of the soles, its weight was 30 pounds and 8 ounces, with a height of 18 inches excluding the tenons. Faint traces yet visible at certain places bore evidence that it had been originally gilt.

The image is a standing one of the conventional type and Godakumbura consciously remarks that "there is some resemblance between this statuette and the colossal stone statue at Avukana." Therefore, as usual, the right hand depicts the *Abhaya Mudra* - bestowing of protection, but showing more of the palm than that of Avukana statue, while



the left hand bends inwards, the pose of which is yet arbitrary.<sup>4</sup>

Although a photograph could give a different impression, when I examined it carefully at the time of its discovery, the statue, particularly its surface, was in perfect preservation. However, due to unsatisfactory chemical cleansing, the statue sustained a pin-pitted surface, which might give the wrong notion that it was originally so, as Schroeder too misjudged.

An altogether conspicuous fact is that the statue lacks a pedestal to stand on. However, the tenons still protruding from the soles of the feet were meant to sink it into its original plinth. I have observed in numerous specimens of antique standing Buddha images, not only bronze, but even silver, brass, wood and ivory, that the pedestal forms a separate component that is subsequently fitted to the feet and occasionally made out of a different material. In fact, there is a similar (now misdated) beautiful early Anuradhapura Period standing bronze Buddha image unearthed in the Kurunegala District on display at the Anuradhapura Archaeological Museum which has an elaborate lotus plinth of bronze, misfitting and much later in date than its present image itself, which, in my opinion, originally belonged to a different and larger statue.

Coming to the theme of our discussion, viz, the dating of the statue under discussion, the late Dr. Godakumbura, who was the Head of the Archaeological Department at the time of the discovery of the Medavaggiya Bronze, in documenting the circumstances which led to the Government's acquisition of this object, refers to it in his Administration Report for the year 1960-61, as follows:

"During the year what is perhaps the oldest bronze statue so far discovered in South East Asia was added to the museum.....".<sup>5</sup>

This, he soon corrected to read "oldest Buddha statue in bronze" in next year's Administration Report (for 1961 - 62).<sup>6</sup> In the former report he had added:

"The present writer, in whose opinion this statue may belong to about the 2nd century A.D. has submitted a paper on the subject of this statue to the journal *Artibus Asiae*".<sup>4</sup>

Unlike on previous occasions of such archaeological discoveries, some of which, in fact, were hoards of several beautiful and rare type ancient bronzes, Godakumbura, realizing the uniqueness of the find, as a preliminary step, informed Senerat Paranavitana, his renowned predecessor in office and then the Professor of Archaeology, University of

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<sup>4</sup>. *op. cit.* p. 235 - 236.

<sup>5</sup>. *Administration Report Of The Archaeological Commissioner, 1960-61*; p. 1; 25.

<sup>6</sup>. *ibid.* 1961-62; p. 60.



Ceylon, and arranged to examine the bronze together. Accordingly, both proceeded to the Anuradhapura Archaeological Museum where Jayantha Uduvara, Keeper of the Museum, produced the statue for their study.

After a thorough examination and discussion on all the available evidence, both these veteran archaeologists came to the conclusion that the Medavacciya Bronze, by all its virtues, must date to about the 2nd century A.C. at the latest. Since Paranavitana was already busy with other research work, he suggested that either Godakumbura or Uduvara should publish a special paper on it. Accordingly, Godakumbura submitted a short paper on it to the *Artibus Asiae*, in place of what should have been actually more elaborate account and exposition.

Now, here we encounter a complex problem. In Godakumbura's article, contributed to this journal, the period assigned for the image is given as the "late phase of Amaravati or Nagarjunakonda," whereas, in his official Annual Report (as we have observed at the outset) the date arrived at was *circa* 2nd century A.C. Since the early phase of the Amaravati Period is broadly reckoned as from c. 2nd cent. B.C. to c. 3rd cent. A.C., and the late phase from c. 4th cent. A.C. to c. 7th cent. A.C., it is indeed surprising to note that between the dates of Godakumbura as given in these different sources, there is a gap of as much as five centuries.

Since it was inconceivable that the same author, writing on the same subject to two different publications, would have possibly given two so divergent dates as to its manufacture, I was for a long time, looking for an explanation. On 19.6.1982, I was invited to participate in a circuit from Kandy to Kotmale to find out some information on the Silver Crown of Prince Vijayapala of Godapola in the company of the late Mr. H.M. Sirisoma, the Deputy Commissioner of Archaeology and Mr. Walter Ladduwahetty, the Secretary to the Minister of Cultural Affairs, and on our way, had the opportunity of discussing with them the matter of the date of the Medavacciya Bronze. Sirisoma stated while he himself was of opinion that both Kurunegala Bronze Buddha as well as the Medavacciya Bronze belong to about the 2nd century A.C., if not to the 1st century, Godakumbura had always held that it belonged to 2nd Century A.C. at the latest, as specifically stated in his official Administration Report, and that there was no change of date in the article he submitted to *Artibus Asiae*; thus speaking in terms of Amaravati-Nagarjunakonda Phase, the date of the Medavacciya Bronze should fall to the early and not late phase of it. But on the contrary, the published version of Godakumbura in the above journal ends saying:

"The consideration of all the available evidence leads one to date the Medavacciya Buddha Bronze in a period corresponding to the late phase of Amaravati or of Nagarjunakonda".

Mr. Sirisoma explained that he too had been surprised at this strange discrepancy and suggested that unless the original manuscript of the author had been interfered with (which was the more likely), the only other possibility was that the very vital word 'early',



which ought to have stood between the two words 'of' and 'Amaravati' in the sentence had slipped off in the type setting, causing a serious miscarriage in what the author actually intended to state. Therefore, if this word is restored to its rightful place, we get the simple information that the date of the image fell within the late phase of the early Amaravati or Nagarjunakonda - which then brings it to the c. 2nd century.

This would perfectly settle the problem of the date of the Medavacciya Bronze as far as Godakumbura's article in the *Artibus Asiae* is concerned. Yet, since the explanation given by Sirisoma is tentative and hypothetical, it would be expedient to wholly ignore the date as appearing in the *Artibus Asiae*, despite the fact that either of Sirisoma's explanations is evidently acceptable as to what would have caused the discrepancy. Godakumbura, although he refers the reader in his Administration Report to his first written article contributed to *Artibus Asiae* makes no mention of a revision of date even in his two subsequent publications, which was not only important but also necessary for him to have done by way of explanation if he diverged in his view later.

Three years afterwards, in 1964, Godakumbura published his No. 6 of the Archaeological Department Art Series entitled 'Buddha Statues' where he repeats again the date of this bronze as c. 2nd century A.C.<sup>7</sup> This is conclusive proof that there was no need for this writer for any revision of his original dating, jointly concluded with no less a reputed archaeologist than Paranavitana.

Before we return to this discussion we may also note that without comment Paranavitana stretched the time limit a little and assigned the 3rd century to this bronze in an overall survey of arts. This, however need not detain us as there is hardly a considerable gap in time between the 2nd and 3rd centuries to excite serious debate.

Among others who have dated this image, the conclusions by Jayantha Uduvara too deserves attention. Being the Keeper of the island's largest archaeological museum, and the physical custodian of the most valuable bronze statue collection, including the Medavacciya specimen, with many years of practical knowledge and experience behind him he participated in the special study of this bronze in the company of Paranavitana and Godakumbura. Broadly agreeing with these two eminent authorities, Uduvara, in preparing his booklet on the Museum of Archaeology, Anuradhapura, expressed his independent conclusion that the Medavacciya bronze Buddha belongs to the 2nd century A.C.<sup>8</sup> Thus we see here that all three who first examined this statue, and incidentally who were once in the top rung of the Archaeological Survey, did not incline to differ in their opinion on its date.

Except for the *Artibus Asiae* journal published in Switzerland, the rest of the publications mentioned previously were unfortunately not available to international

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<sup>7</sup>. C.E. Godakumbura, *Buddha Statues*; Colombo (1964) p. 26.

<sup>8</sup>. J. Uduvara, *Museum of Archaeology, Anuradhapura*; p. 18, 19. (1962).



scholars, they being mainly meant for local sale. This situation naturally led international scholars to fall back on the sole journal, the *Artibus Asiae* that was available to them for their information on the Medavacciya Bronze and for their assigning their own dates, making slight variations to emphasise their own original scholarship, mainly based on illustrations and with no knowledge of the misleading nature of the text contributed to that journal, even if by no less an authority than the Head of the Archaeological Survey of Sri Lanka at the time of the statue's discovery.

Recently, Ulrich von Schroeder, working under a substantial grant from the Swiss National Fund, published a large and technically excellent volume entitled *Buddhist Sculptures of Sri Lanka* (1990),<sup>9</sup> followed by another illustrated catalogue repeating the same material and producing the photographs of the former, entitled *The Golden Age of Sculpture in Sri Lanka*, (1992).<sup>10</sup> In these he gives the date of the Medavacciya Bronze as follows:

First publication	- 750	-	850 A.D. --- p. 174
First publication	- 800	-	850 A.D. --- p. 175
Second publication	-	c	800 A.D. --- p. 54

Von Schroeder has given his reasons for these dates as follows: (I have given them here in point form for clarity and convenience of the reader).

(1) "There would hardly have been any need for the importation of Buddha Images from South India if the cult of the image had really developed independently in Sri Lanka."

(2) "The worship of images in early Buddhism would have been contradictory to the Theravada Philosophy of the renunciation of all sensuous experiences."

(3) It is thus very hard to believe that there was any motivation for the monks of the Mahavihara to have cultivated the Buddha-image worship independently from and earlier than India."<sup>11</sup>

(4) "Therefore, one would be rather inclined to think that the cult of the Buddha Image developed in Sri Lanka under the Mayuran influence of the Abhayagirivasins, as confirmed by the discovery of the oldest known Sinhalese

<sup>9</sup>. Schroeder; *ibid*.

<sup>10</sup>. Schroeder, *Golden Age of Sculpture in Sri Lanka*, Hong Kong (1992) p. 54. This is an illustrated catalogue supposed to cover a collection of Sri Lankan cultural objects including the Medavacciya bronze Buddha image, which is, at the time of my writing, is on an international mobile exhibition in Europe.

<sup>11</sup>. *ibid*, p. 99.



Buddhas at the Asanagharas of the Abhayagiri Vihara."<sup>11</sup>

(5) "There is no archaeological evidence for any Buddha Images in Sri Lanka prior to possibly the 2nd half of the 3rd century A.D."

(6) "However, as pointed out earlier, the presence of the folded shawl (*sanghati*) placed over the left shoulder of seated images cast in the same period rule out any date of manufacture earlier than about 800 A.D."<sup>12</sup>

Having observed these strong objections, let us ourselves now in the same point form, examine whether Schroeder has processed the Buddha image fairly and set it in a proper perspective. In this investigation we may give no regard to the sacred aspect of the image, as the question at issue is not whether it was a cult image or not, but simply survey for evidence of its possible existence in the Island prior to the imported 2nd century Maha Iluppallama Buddha Image.

(1) This Buddha image is the 6 ft. standing image made of dolomite and discovered in 1946 at Maha Iluppalama Farm. It is of course in the Amaravati style, and hence Paranavitana suggests that it would have been imported to Sri Lanka from Andhra country about the 2nd century.<sup>13</sup> Schroeder argues that there would hardly have been any need for importation of Buddha images from South India if the cult had developed independently in the island. If this is the line of argument adopted by him, it is clear that Schroeder has not only not made any attempt to investigate into certain prevailing customs among Buddhist countries, but is even unaware of some common historical data directly pertaining to the subject.

We all know that there is a very ancient custom which is persistent to date to "import" and "export" - or to use a more intelligible and appropriate term - 'exchange' not only Buddha images, but also relics and Bodhi saplings, especially among South Eastern Asian countries as tokens of good-will and friendship. This age-old custom is more often continued at the present time with intensified mutual cultural ties between Sri Lanka and other countries.

There are Chinese records that King Upatissa I towards the closing years of his long reign (368-410 A.C.) despatched a Buddhist monk as royal ambassador from Anuradhapura carrying a magnificent Buddha image to the imperial court of Hiao-ou-ti of the Tsin Dynasty in China, although by that time China had Buddha images of its own.<sup>14</sup> In the same century another embassy was despatched to China bearing three Buddha

<sup>12</sup>. *ibid*, p. 54.

<sup>13</sup>. *Administration Report Of The Archaeological Commissioner, 1952*; p. 24.

<sup>14</sup>. *J.R.A.S (C.B)* vol. xxiv (1917) p. 84, 107. The monarch referred to is not in fact Upatissa II, but Upatissa I, who was succeeded by Mahanama.



images from the Court of King Mahanama (410-432 A.C.) along with a famous sculptor from Anuradhapura.<sup>15</sup>

There had been archaeological discoveries of Sri Lankan bronze Buddha images in South East Asian countries, among which one discovered from a river bed in the island of Celebes and two from Western Java are noteworthy. Pierre Dupont, who made an extensive study of them identified them as of Sri Lankan origin and dated, particularly the Celebes to c.2nd/3rd century.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, there are many historic temples in the island which have 'imported' Buddha images knowing these facts. But why Schroeder raced through underrating these without properly evaluating them is strange and is questionable indeed.

If we are reluctant to accept the reference to the Buddha image attributed to King Devanampiyatissa (250 B.C) on the ground that it is not mentioned in the account of his own reign, the Buddha image of which there is a graphic record in his own reign, that King Dutthagamani Abhaya (161-137 B.C.) placed in the relic chamber of the Maha Thupa with his own hands, provides evidence, not only of a mere concept, but also of the physical presence of an icon of a Buddha as far back as the 2nd century B.C.<sup>17</sup>

This is clearly two and a half centuries previous to the date assigned to the Maha Iluppallama Buddha Image.

(2) That the worship of images in early Buddhism in Sri Lanka would have been contradictory to Theravada Philosophy is certainly a scientific argument. But why should Schroeder single out the Buddha image only? Does he not know, before he exposed one half of a fact to suit the immediate need of his argument, that Theravada Philosophy totally rejects all forms of rituals, whether involving a Buddha image, cetiya, Bodhi Tree or any such?

If one had a fair notion of the history of Early Buddhism, it does not need much effort to understand whether what was (and is) practised in Sri Lanka in the name of Theravada as expounded in the *Abhidhamma Pitaka* was true to the fundamental teachings of the Buddha or not. It is common knowledge that Buddhism, when it reached the shores of Sri Lanka, was wrapped in a whole lot of rituals. One cannot therefore deny the existence of a Buddha image prior to the advent of the Iluppallama Statue on such a ground as this, specially when there is positive literary evidence to the contrary.

<sup>15</sup>. Sir James E. Tennent, - *Ceylon: An Account Of The Island*; vol. I, London, (1860) p. 620.

<sup>16</sup>. S. Paranavitana, *Ceylon And Malaysia* (1966) p. 191 f. and Plates I & II.

<sup>17</sup>. *Mahavamsa* (Mhv. hereafter) Eng. tr. by W. Geiger, London 1960, 30:72.



(3) The principal shrine of the Mahavihara, the seat of Theravada was the Maha Thupa of Anuradhapura. Its founder and greatest patron was none other than King Dutthagamani Abhaya. In the presence of the great assembly of monks of the Mahavihara, as we previously noted, the king ceremonially enshrined a golden image of the seated Buddha with his own hands in the relic chamber of this shrine. The relic chamber was finally closed by the Mahavihara monks themselves.<sup>18</sup>

Also an equally noteworthy piece of evidence of manufacture of Buddha images but one which has so far not drawn the attention of any scholars who have published their researches is available to us in *Sihalavattuppakarana*, a recently salvaged Burmese treatise recording historical and other episodes of the early Anuradhapura era.

When King Saddhatissa (137-119 B.C.) who was responsible for completing the construction of his brother Dutthagamani's Maha Thupa was lying on his death-bed and as was customary then, when he was requested by the monks of the Mahavihara to recount his meritorious activities, in recollecting them he also declared "I have caused many golden Buddha images etc. studded with gems and pearls to be made." This statement of the king is in the first person and is incorporated in the account of his own reign.<sup>19</sup>

The period being the 2nd century B.C., it proves that the ritual aspect of a Buddha image had not only prevailed then but had been reverentially sustained by Theravada or Orthodox Buddhists quite prior to the advent of the Heterodox Sect in the island. In the light of this evidence it is difficult to comprehend why Schroeder should reach out to 2nd century Indian workshops in order to introduce a Buddha image to Sri Lanka, when it was already existing here.

(4) The question before us is the date of the Buddha image in Sri Lanka, the cult of which Schroeder requires us to accept as having developed under the Mayuran influence of the Abhayagirivasins. He says that this is confirmed by the discovery of the oldest known Sri Lankan Buddha statues at the Asanaghara of the Abhayagiri Vihara.

This sweeping claim is hardly impressive for the Buddha images discovered at this site are certainly not the earliest. Apart from this, I must confess that though Schroeder's book is beautifully produced, many of the artefacts are incorrectly dated. Restricting myself to this single icon, in order to check how Schroeder could have possibly declared upon it as he did without any hesitation, I made inquiries from Prof. Chandra Wickramagamage, who conducted excavations at the Abhayagiri Complex under the UNESCO Cultural Triangle Project, when Schroeder met him there seeking his guidance.

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<sup>18</sup>. *ibid.* 31:118, 119.

<sup>19</sup>. *Sihalavattuppakarana*, tr. by Rev. Polvatte Buddhaddatta, Maradana (1959) p. 30.



On 9.11.93, Wickramagama informed me over the telephone that Schroeder sought his opinion on the Asanaghara Buddha of the Abhayagiri Area, and on 3.12.93 by personal communication wrote to me thus:

"When Mr. Schroeder discussed with me regarding the Asanaghara Buddha now in the Archaeological Museum, Anuradhapura, I explained that it is the oldest specimen of the Buddha image of the Andhra-Anuradhapura School found in Sri Lanka. He appears to have misunderstood my interpretation."

From this it is clear that Schroeder precipitately took up the position that the Asanaghara Buddha of Abhayagiri was the "oldest known Sinhalese Buddha", failing to grasp the explanation offered by Wickramagama, "that there are two distinctive schools of Buddha images in Sri Lanka. Of these the older one is the Mahavihara School, which seems to be a local one, and its history goes back to the 2nd century B.C. The other is the Andhra-Anuradhapura School, which goes back to the 2nd century A.C."<sup>20</sup>

In any case, besides this, under (3) above we have already seen that there is unassailable literary evidence, more acceptable than arbitrary archaeological surmise of the presence of a Buddha image in Anuradhapura in the period 161 - 119 B.C. or the 2nd century B.C. King Vatthagamani Abhaya founded the Abhayagiri Vihara itself only after he regained his throne and ascended it the second time in 89 B.C.<sup>21</sup> Thus, it is patent that Schroeder's faulty argument that it was the Abhayagirivasins who developed the Buddha image cannot stand as the former's statue predates the time of Vatthagamani Abhaya, who was perhaps not even born then.

(5) In discussing the date of the Medavacciya Buddha image, although Schroeder strived to make us believe that there is *no archaeological evidence* for any Buddha images in the island prior to the latter part of the 3rd century A.C., it is arbitrary and cannot be accepted in the urgency with which he would have us do on its face value. Nor can we for a moment accept it as the criterion for relegating the Medavacciya image to the 9th century.

In deciding the case of the presence of a Buddha image, should one so quickly and exclusively confine oneself to archaeological evidence, without the slightest consideration being given to its next parallel of already available sound literary evidence, which is self-dated and more formidable; for, the basic question before us is evidence of the Buddha image, be it archaeological or otherwise. On the other hand, well-versed and veteran art-historians and international scholars of the calibre of Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy, who have dedicated their full life time to this subject, have dated the series of large standing Buddha images discovered on the platform of the Ruvanvalisaya

<sup>20</sup>. *Ancient Ceylon*, No. 12, 1990; p. 161.

<sup>21</sup>. *Mhv.* 33:80,81.

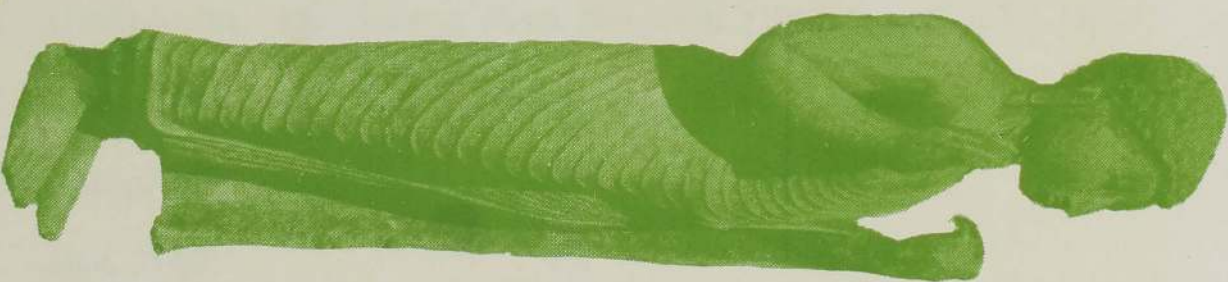


PLATE I



FRONT VIEW

PLATE II



SIDE VIEW

MEDAWACHCHIYA BRONZE BUDDHA IMAGE

(COURTESY : DEPARTMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGY)







in Anuradhapura to c. 2 century A.C.<sup>22</sup> Although it is not insisted that he can be infallible in every instance, taking into account his profound knowledge of the entire range of South Asian statuary and their iconography, Jaina, Buddhist and Hindu, his conclusions are generally accepted with respect by students of Indology and cannot be simply rejected unless impedimentary factors prevail. In fact, Prof. Siri Gunasingha, who was till late the Head of the Department of the History of Fine Arts in the University of Victoria, Canada, who is well known for his studies of the subject of the Buddha image, was constrained by his studies to state that "We may conclude that monks from Ceylon introduced the cult of the Buddha image into Southern India about the 2nd century."<sup>23</sup> He always insisted that the Buddha image was present in the island at least from the 2nd century B.C. if not earlier. He further points out that "the cult of the Buddha image was popular in Ceylon at least from the 2nd century A.D."<sup>24</sup> That this was the precise position even prior to that is proved by the *Mahavamsa*, which refers us to four Buddha images made by King Vasabha (67-111 A.C.).<sup>25</sup>

I trust this clears the picture that, by the 1st century, the cult was widespread and that the workshops of statuary were kept busy to meet the society's growing demand of images of the Teacher.

(6) The basis on which Schroeder dated the Medavacchiya Bronze seems to be the Iccakulama seated bronze Buddha, in which he finds certain affinities to his observations. He writes:

"When comparing this (Medavacchiya) standing image with other statues one notes a striking similarity with one of the seated Buddha images from Anuradhapura. (Iccakulama). The almost identical artistic rendering of the images includes, besides the similar facial expressions with the long ear lobes touching the shoulders, the design of the folded monastic robes. However, as pointed out earlier, the presence of the folded shawl (*sanghati*)<sup>26</sup> placed over the left shoulder of the seated

<sup>22</sup>. Ananda Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, New York; (1965) p. 161. *The Dance of Shiva*; New York (1962) Plate Nos. 13; 15; 16.

<sup>23</sup>. *Artibus Asiae*: vol. XIX nos. 3 & 4 (1956) p. 258.

<sup>24</sup>. *ibid.* p. 253.

<sup>25</sup>. *Mhv.* 35-89.

<sup>26</sup>. Prof. Wikramagamage informs me that this term is incorrect and that the correct term is "*nuvava*" - the hem of the single-fold robe shown in Anuradhapura Period statues. The "*Sanghati*" appears only in late Kandyan Period statues depicting the double-fold robe. No shawl is depicted in a Buddha image of any period, as is misstated by Schroeder.



image cast in the same period rule out any date of manufacture earlier than about 800 A.D. Any assumed similarity with the earliest stone sculptures of standing Buddhas dating from about the 4th century is entirely superficial when their massive appearance and broad folded garments are considered."<sup>27</sup>

In the first instance, the Iccakulama seated bronze is one among several such specimens, which to date had not been studied for its own sake. As a museum officer with over 25 years of experience and knowledge, I know that there are many specimens which, though they individually deserve special attention, have not been studied for their own sake but kept on display shelves with overall or vague dates attached to them until such time they are to be critically studied and published. Therefore, the date mentioned in every label of an artifact does not reliably indicate the actual age of that object.<sup>28</sup> In fact, once a Deputy Commissioner of Archaeology himself, in discussing the dating of Buddha images remarked that some have been ascribed dates "without specific grounds."<sup>29</sup>

Among such dates is the one that is ascribed to the Iccakulama bronze, which is labelled as belonging to c. 9 - 10 century (I have myself observed changes in the dates of this statue and I do not know how it stands now)<sup>30</sup> If the 9th century is the date assigned to it by Schroeder<sup>31</sup> on the ground that it is cast in the same period as the Medavacciya standing bronze, with due respect to him it has to be reiterated that it cannot be accepted without demur, for, as is sufficiently evident from the numerous examples catalogued by him, there exists the danger of a tendency to drastically post-date even some of the other already intensively studied specimens for which dates have been assigned by veteran scholars of international repute.

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<sup>27</sup>. Schroeder: *The Golden Age of The Sculptures in Sri Lanka*; p. 54 and Plate on p. 55.

<sup>28</sup>. In general, this is a temporary method adopted as several thousands of objects in a museum cannot possibly be studied and published simultaneously.

<sup>29</sup>. D.T. Devendra, - *The Buddha Image and Ceylon*, 1957, p. 38; 40; 41; 72.

<sup>30</sup>. This appears to be on its second round of international mobile exhibition and is not available presently in the island.

<sup>31</sup>. It is likely that this date came to be simply followed in a chain by subsequent writers after Prof. J.E. Van Lohuizen - De Leeuw assigned a broad date of 9 - 10th century A.C. to this statue which was sent to London in 1981 for the Commonwealth Institute Exhibition of the Sri Lankan cultural objects. See catalogue of Sri Lanka - Ancient Arts; Pg. & Pl. 13; London 1981. It is outside the scope of this paper to discuss this statue. Also see n.28



Schroeder sees a "striking similarity"<sup>32</sup> in the treatment of facial expression, earlobes and the robe between the Medavacciya standing and Iccakulama seated bronzes. But, if one would carefully compare the originals (perhaps even good illustrations of them) against each other, one would invariably note that the former has a more natural and smaller neck and the robe ridges are clearer and sharper than in the latter, which has a comparatively stout neck with robe ridges quite blunt and broader. Also, its shoulders are broad and much heavier and do not display the balance required for the rather low-level head.

The earlobes and facial expressions when looking straight however are not dissimilar; but a conspicuous point of difference that calls for attention and which cannot be studied from mere published photographs, is that while the head of the Iccakulama specimen is almost round, the head of the Medavacciya example is elongated and looks certainly oval if physically examined from chin to cranial rounding off in profile.<sup>33</sup>

Let us now focus our attention to the seated bronze Buddha image of Toluville<sup>34</sup> which too Schroeder dates to the same period as the Iccakulama specimen, viz. the 9th century. We have already noted that the basis of the dating of the Medavacciya bronze had been the Iccakulama statue. In that case, it is logical to argue that one should invariably find the same "striking similarity" in all these three examples, for, they are dated on grounds of style. But it is not at all difficult for any one at the first glance itself to observe that the Toluville image has no 'artistic rendering' or identical physical affinities in any aspect to its supposed Iccakulama counterpart, and as a matter of fact, more specially to the Medavacciya specimen either. Obviously, the trio belongs to three broadly divergent periods, and Schroeder, without apparently giving serious study, in a hurry disposed of these bronzes by bundling them into the same period, viz. the closing lap of the Anuradhapura Era.

The date assigned to the Toluville Bronze Buddha by Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy is 5 - 6th century.<sup>35</sup> Why Schroeder brought it down straight away to the 9th century is not known. Chandra Wickramagamage informed me that a 7th century inscription was discovered among the Toluville ruins, and it may perhaps be this that misled Schroeder to date the statue two centuries later.

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<sup>32</sup>. Schroeder - *op.cit.* p. 54.

<sup>33</sup>. See Plate 2.

<sup>34</sup>. For an illustration of Toluville Bronze Buddha, see Ananda Coomaraswamy *Bronzes from Ceylon chiefly in the Colombo Museum*, Oxford (1914) Plate XVII; fig 47.

<sup>35</sup>. *ibid.* p. 20.



We must not forget that the Tolvila monastic establishment was one of the most extensive of ancient religious complexes anywhere in the island, even considering those of the 20th century. A century ago, in 1895, H.C.P. Bell already finished systematic excavations of the ruins of nearly hundred separate buildings at this site.<sup>36</sup> In the process of excavation, Bell discovered a fragmentary lithic inscription of the 9th century here, and although unfortunately it did not disclose the name of the monastery, it provided eloquent testimony to the fact that this establishment had functioned almost up to the end of the Anuradhapura Period. Therefore, for the simple reason that an inscription of the 7th century was discovered there, it would be absurd to squeeze the entirety of centuries of its ancient past to the single 9th century totally ignoring the very long time it would have taken to develop to that astonishingly vast complex, specially in an era of that nature, when, even after the long lapse of a thousand years, to date no Buddhist monastery comprising of such a large number of buildings has been founded anywhere.

Schroeder's forthright statement, viz. "all that needs to be said here is that the archaeological evidence cannot confirm the existence of Buddha images prior to about the 2nd or the 3rd century A.D."<sup>37</sup> is as misleading as the *Artibus Asiae* version of Godakumbura's article on the date of Medavacciya bronze, which had continued to be followed by mainly foreign scholars who make their studies from it and the illustrations under the inevitable disadvantage of not examining the object itself direct - which, it need not be mentioned, is the correct method. Can anyone be satisfied that Schroeder had exhausted all available specimens in his inquiry when making the declaration that there exists no example of a Buddha image prior to the 2nd century? Is he unaware that he is making such a statement with the limitation within a recorded and more widely known range of specimens? To my knowledge, no other scholar has risked such a pronouncement upon evidence of this nature.

It must be emphatically pointed out, that almost all the smaller statuettes have been left out by scholars when research on Buddha images have been made by them. The attention had been mainly confined to the larger specimens, which have been repeatedly published down several decades, with slight variation of mainly the dates to give the hallmark of personal scholarship at times. There are small but very ancient statues still in the museum reserve collections, in some ancient temples throughout the island, in foreign countries to which they have been removed by collectors during the four centuries of rule in the island, and also in local private holdings which have never been examined for any purpose. To these must be added the very ancient archaeological series of pure golden statuettes which were stolen from the Colombo National Museum around 1964 and have never been recovered or previously photographed.

During the intermittent invasions of the island by South Indians and when they were in occupation of the territories captured by them, the focal target among Buddhist

<sup>36</sup>. *Archaeological Survey of Ceylon, Annual Report for 1895*, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup>. Schroeder; *op.cit.*, p. 27.



monuments (though by mere chance a few had escaped yet sustaining some damage) was the Buddha image.<sup>38</sup> As a result of this, the majority of the earliest images would have been destroyed or, if they were in precious metals, plundered. To cite but one example, the gigantic standing stone Buddha image of the shrine-room west of Jetavanarama in Anuradhapura, which certain scholars presume to be the one Fa Hsian, 411-413 A.C. recorded and Bell calculated to have been 28ft. 6 ins. in height from the remaining portion of its stone lotus plinth, to the bewilderment of archaeologists, had been so completely destroyed that not the slightest vestige of it is traceable. If the plight of such a colossus was such, one hardly needs surmise the fate of smaller images.<sup>39</sup>

Around 1965, the High Priest of a celebrated Raja Mahavihara in the Kandy District, the antiquity of which is ascribed to pre-Christian times by popular tradition, informed me that (if my memory serves me) some 365 antique images of the Buddha were deposited in 1935 in the relic chamber of a newly constructed stupa, reserving just only two for the library, one of which is old Siamese.<sup>40</sup>

It is also very important to bear in mind that our earliest Buddha images are specifically mentioned to be gold, and that consequently they ought to be tiny and portable, like the collection that was stolen from the Colombo Museum.

Reviewing these facts, one can just imagine what a lot of our ancient statues have remained in obscurity without drawing the attention of any research scholar. However, since this does not change the position, it will be seen that it is not at all prudent nor correct for anyone to pose himself as the ultimate authority and declare that there is no evidence to prove that Sri Lanka had no Buddha images prior to the advent of the Maha Iluppallama Buddha image.

Although Sri Lanka possesses the earliest literary testimony of the Buddha image, no physical specimen of such early times or a specific period, for example, like that of Kanishka had been noted in the island. Added to this lapse, as against in India, no inscribed local Buddha statue has been published either. As a result of this, where very early specimens are concerned and whenever facilities of such provisions are applicable,

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<sup>38</sup>. For instance *Mhv.* 50:34-36, 55:20.

<sup>39</sup>. *Archaeological Survey of Ceylon, Annual Report for 1892*, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup>. Historical chronicles have placed on record the destruction and plunder of numerous Buddhist monuments by South Indian invaders centuries ago, and also particularly by the Portuguese in more recent centuries. But, after a long period and commencing from about two years back a strange and dreadful wave of destroying selectively Buddhist monuments, temples, ancient Buddha images, killing Buddhist priests etc. for plunder of treasures and antiquities is sweeping the country. These are often reported in the press. Therefore, for obvious reasons, the name of this ancient temple is withheld here.



the Sri Lankan statues are dated on the basis of stylistic similarities with Indian schools, although it is not the case always when they bear distinct local artistic identity.

The Medavacchiya bronze Buddha image unpretentiously displays the basic characteristic features of the famous Amaravati School of Art. Although the date offered by subsequent writers for this varies from one another, none had either cogently refuted its stylistic claims nor been able to get his objections off the ground. Accordingly, the image must belong to that period and we have every justification to agree with Godakumbura's original conclusion that, by all its virtues, the Medavacchiya bronze Buddha image must date to an era not later than the 2nd century A.C. or thereabout and to reject Schroeder's date argued on misconstrued facts, improper evaluation and ignorance of historical data directly and indirectly relevant to the subject.

Again, in a recent publication cataloguing a few ancient bronze images, the contributor to its Pl. 19 - this same Medavachchiya Buddha image, mentions that many scholars such as Paranavithana, Godakumbura and Snellgrove have assigned it to an early period, viz. 2nd - 3rd century on apparently stylistic similarities of the Andhra Period. Further commenting, he states, "Nevertheless, Douglas Barrett had long produced convincing evidence of the prolongation of such stylized trends in South India and other regions in-to the 8th century at least." Merely accepting this personal view as against those of a veteran and distinguished team of archaeologists and scholars, he further asserts that "this new vision and more material discovered during recent years have made it possible to revise the chronological sequence of the Buddha image of the Sri Lanka" and brings the statue right down quickly by no less than 600 years to c. 9th century.

It has been already pointed out that the date of this statue was fixed by no less eminent authorities as mentioned there after a collective and careful study from the live object itself and therefore can be accepted as a careful assessment of high authority as no serious impedimentary factors prevail.

This figure was discovered in 1961. Barrett had made his observations in 1954, clean seven years before the very discovery of the Medavachchiya Bronze. Hence, Barrett neither saw nor ever dreamt of the possible future discovery of this iconic piece from Medavachchiya. All he did was to place before scholars evidence of a stylistic sequence he had personally observed in Buddha figures in South India and other regions running down to the 8th century. He naturally made his study from then-known material available to him photographically or otherwise. By this conclusion, whether infallible or not, of course as an accomplished scholar, he never meant that it should be accepted by the rest as the master measuring stick for all future iconic specimens that might come to light.

There appears to prevail an inadequate and somewhat unsatisfactory practice of dating, more particularly a Buddha image, on the palaeography of an inscription discovered at the site of its provenance when literary or other evidence offers no clue. However, in an instance of this nature, it is risky and not proper to give singular priority to the palaeography of the record, but has to be balanced against the style of the image to ascertain the extent of its agreement in time range.



This important aspect of the question is generally overlooked. In such a case, when once a date is suggested on palaeographic grounds unthoughtful of the fact that the inscription may be actually disclosing only one specific phase of its continued existence, that date comfortably consolidates itself further and further as subsequent writers keep on quoting it in a chain, sometimes with a little variation to give a semblance of individual scholarship. This naturally happens when original documentations are not available for perusal and one is deprived of the satisfaction of dates which have been assigned by the authorities concerned after careful evaluation of all relevant factors.

Just to cite two or three examples, the magnificent limestone Toluila seated Buddha Image of Anuradhapura (now in the Colombo National Museum) from one time 2nd century has been brought down to 7 - 8th and even the 9th century! As demonstrated by me previously, a chain of centuries of its span has been squeezed to a mere one century because a fragment of a lithic inscription palaeographically datable to the 9th century had been discovered at this vast monastic establishment. But none had patiently concentrated on the indomitable fact that there are about 100 ruined buildings in this complex; that it should have taken certainly a few centuries to attain that astonishing progress; that the statue is in the oldest known solid medium and that this huge image was the principal object of worship in the whole establishment surrounding which the complex gradually developed through the centuries. Suppose no portion of an inscription was encountered, what attitude would have been taken by the authorities in order to rescue themselves from the burden of ascribing a reasonable date to it, is itself not easy to speculate.

Likewise is the plight of the equally famous Pankuliya Limestone Seated Buddha Image of Anuradhapura, which is placed, again, in the same region of time. The sole basis of this conclusion was the presence of a one-line inscription in Grantha script on one of the present flights of steps at the Southern entrance to its image house. The authorities concerned promptly relieved themselves in bringing the image itself within the time frame of this more attractive inscription, wholly neglecting or even not being aware of the prime observation of Archaeological Commissioner Bell that the "cross trenches disclosed unmistakably that the present vihara was not the earliest erection. It stood on the site of an older and larger building 38 ft. 6 ins. square with an irregular portico on the South."<sup>41</sup>

The Pankuliya Buddha, being the principal object of worship in the shrine complex, obviously should then revert back to few more centuries to the time of its original foundation. It would have certainly taken quite a lengthy lapse of time for the original shrine to decay, which later required redesigning and rebuilding within economic limits when no more luxury could be lavished to its original scales, in the process of which the present flight of steps to suit the smaller plan bearing this one-line inscription invariably would have been constructed and the original sacred statue re-installed. It must also be noted that the present limited inner capacity of the sanctum looks wholly disproportionate to the comparatively massive image proving rebuilding the shrine on an economic basis.

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<sup>41</sup>. *Archaeological Survey of Ceylon, Annual Report for 1891*; p. 6.



The case of the celebrated Avukana Buddha too is parading against the same fated background. In discussing the date of this colossus Prof. Paranavitana writes in his *Annual Report for 1949* thus; "Consideration of the style of the stone-work and the size of the bricks, would lead one to the conclusion that the rock-cut sculpture and the shrine of Avukana belong to the same period as the construction of the great irrigation reservoir in the vicinity - the Kalaveva",<sup>42</sup> which was an engineering triumph of King Dhatusena, 459 - 477 A.C.

In 1952 a donative inscription datable to c. 8th century palaeographically bearing the name of the benefactor who donated that block was discovered on the northern wall of the shrine. Commenting on this Prof. Paranavitana yet suggested that the date of the statue could be the same and the shrine was of a later date. At any rate, the rock image must precede the shrine. When Prof. Paranavitana took up the restoration work of the shrine, it was revealed that it had been re-constructed at some unknown period. It was further evident that "these re-builders were not stone-masons and could not continue the work on the original plan."<sup>43</sup> Thus the probability cannot be wrested that it was around the 8th century that this restoration was carried out. Therefore, the conclusion Prof. Paranavitana drew on the basis of style of the stone-work and the measurement of the bricks that both the shrine and the image itself belong to the 5th century can be accepted as convincing.

Therefore it is important to bear in mind that it is very risky to seize the opportunity of falling back upon a mere inscription as the sole guidance to determine an absolute date for such a splendid product, or as a matter of fact, any such object for the singular reason that no other alternative clue is available to us.

Anuradhapura, although founded in the 6th century B.C., flourished as a Buddhist city from the 3rd century B.C. right down through the succeeding thirteen hundred years as the capital of the nation and cradle of the great civilization of the Sinhala race. During this long period it witnessed the flowering of her arts and architecture to such lavish and grand scales that in fact some of these happy achievements remain unrivalled anywhere in the world to this day. Eventually, Anuradhapura fell in the 10th century, permanently closing the most brilliant chapter of the island's history.

We know that the most distinctive and outstanding piece of art this period, or as a matter of fact, Sri Lanka ever produced and bequeathed to the art-world was the Buddha image. If the search is for a classical specimen invariably, then, it is to this period that we must look up to.

It is conspicuous that some of our recent scholars evince a preferential tendency to relegate few of the finest of our early Buddha images to the tail end of the Anuradhapura Period when assigning a date. But we must address our own minds whether in reality the

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<sup>42</sup>. *ibid.* for 1949; p. 19.

<sup>43</sup>. *ibid.* for 1952; p. 30, 33.



grandest of the Buddha images could possibly belong only to the last two centuries of this vast period, failing to produce anything better during the best period of that era when these sculptors produced such admirable and classic stone sculptures to embellish their sacred monuments in places like Mirisaveti, Abhayagiri, Jetavana and Kantaka stupas, several centuries previously.

## SENARATH PANAWATTA



## ROBERT KNOX'S *HISTORICAL RELATION* AND THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN KANDYAN SOCIETY

Robert Knox's *Historical Relation* published in 1681, was the first important historical work concerning Ceylon to be written in English. It was designed to introduce English readers to the strange ways of an exotic people and in it the author produced an ethnographic account describing the state of Sinhalese society of the 17th century Kandyan Kingdom. Interest in Knox's work was revived after the British occupation and its importance universally recognised, the book having been translated into a number of European languages. It is possible that almost all of the British writers on Ceylon read his book, some of them acknowledging their debt to his account.

Rhys Davids, assessing Knox's work in 1877, said "This most valuable work is thoroughly trustworthy. Knox and his companions were not confined in any prison, but in separate villages, where they were allowed to go in and out among the people. Most of them acquired property, and marrying Sinhalese women, became Sinhalese peasants, but Knox himself never gave up the hope of escape, and ultimately effected his purpose. His mode of life in Kandy was the best possible for gaining sure knowledge of the habits of the people; the simple straightforward style of his book must convince every reader of his truthfulness; and the more one knows of the state of society among the Sinhalese in the remote districts who are little acquainted with Europeans, the more one learns to value the accuracy of his intimate and careful observations"<sup>1</sup> Ralph Peiris, assessing the value of Knox's account, says "If Knox's perennial classic is remarkable for its almost uncanny accuracy, it also exhibits the intimacy which can only be gained by a participant observer who has spent a considerable time among the people he studies, participating in their way of life."<sup>2</sup>

The present study is based on both the editions of Knox's *Historical Relation*, namely the earlier edition (September 1681) which included Knox's *Autobiography*, and secondly, the recent second edition of J.H.O. Paulusz entitled *An Historical Relation of the Island Ceylon, Revised, Enlarged and Brought to the verge of Publication as the Second Edition*, volumes I and II., Thisara Prakasakayo, Colombo, 1993. (Together with his *Autobiography* and all the new chapters, paragraphs, marginal notes added by the author in the two interleaved copies of the original text of 1685)

In the *Historical Relation* information on women by way of direct references to their position is found in a scattered form, presented by way of incidental references in relation to numerous aspects of the Kandyan society touched upon by Knox such as the caste structure, the marriage institution, the economy, the religious practices and beliefs. The information so contained can be divided into two broad categories: material on events

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<sup>1</sup>. Rhys Davids (1877), p. 33. R. Pieris cites in p. 268

<sup>2</sup>. *Sinhalese Social Organization*, Colombo (1956) p. 267.



and conditions which Knox was quoting at second hand and descriptions and information which the author was giving from his own personal observation. The fact that direct references to women are not abundant in the *Historical Relation* does not mean that the book is not useful as a source book on this aspect. For there are other accounts and information in it that are of help to draw inferences on the position of women of Kandyan society and are therefore invaluable for understanding their true place in the history of this period. The information so found on many occasions supplements material already available from other existing records, both indigenous and foreign, particularly those pertaining to the Colonial period of Sri Lankan history.

In a sense some of the factual information which is not presented in a direct form (recorded in an indirect manner) but is incidental is helpful to draw inferences and is more useful in that such information is found in a raw form, so that the writer's biases are not so strongly reflected in them. Therefore, such information has a greater value as that which provides a true and exact picture of the situation. One example is the way information about the dowry system is included in the book by way of incidental references while discussing the frequency of marriage dissolutions in Kandyan society. Similarly, the information on the binna form of marriage has crept into the book by way of casual references to the binna pangu of land holdings i.e. shares held in the binna form of marriage. (For details see Knox, p. 21 and Paulusz ed. p. 101)

The *Historical Relation* is divided into four parts. The first three deal with the country, the King and his court and social organisation, while Knox's personal story from his capture to his escape is narrated in the final part. In the three sections describing Ceylon, Knox deals with a variety of subjects, the country's geography, agriculture and natural history, the king of the Kandyan Kingdom and the organisation of his court, the administrative and political history etc. A list of the sub-titles of the chapters would give an indication as to what is contained in the book.

In publishing the book Knox was motivated by the need to provide the European reader with interesting information. At the time of writing Knox had no idea of publishing the book. On his return to London, however, the East India Company, having heard that "he had been diligent in writing papers in his passage desired a sight of it." So he presented his papers to their view. The manuscripts were gone through by Sir Josiah Child, a Director of the East India Company, who suggested that they should be printed since "the papers (were) containing many new and strange stories". The book, as first written by Knox on his voyage home, evidently lacked proper arrangement and could not be published as it was. Knox accordingly had the assistance of his cousin, John Strype, a minister, who edited it into heads and chapters "for my papers were promiscuous and out of forme with several enlargements on such heads as I had but touched briefly and so it came to the book you see." (Knox Autobiography p. xxix)

Further encouragement to publish the book came from the Royal Society of London for improving Natural Knowledge, which had been founded in 1660, partly to cater to the interest among the educated classes in the strange and unusual peoples and the natural history of newly discovered countries. Thus, we find from the inception of the idea



of publishing the book that there was recognition and emphasis on the fact that its value rested on the "strange and unusual" type of information that it contained.

Since it has been found that Knox's religious upbringing was a factor of great significance in moulding his opinions, it is worthwhile referring to his childhood experiences in relation to religion, as recorded by him in his autobiography and in the *Historical Relation*. Recalling his childhood days, Knox says; "In the time of my childhood I was chiefly brought up under the education of my Mother ..... She was a woman of extraordinary Piety; God was in all her thoughts as appeared by her frequent discourses and Godly exhortations to us her children to teach us the knowledge of God, and to love, feare and serve him in our youths." (Knox Autobiography fol: 31/32). The three reasons which induced him to write the book, as recorded by Knox, were firstly "to record God's great mercies in so plentyfully sustaining me in the land of mine enemies despite of those who both envied and hated mee and send to mee there his most sacred word the Holy Bible in my own native language even where the name of the true God is not Known and after a detriment of nineteen years six months and fourteen days due to whose providence was escape and thence conducted me safe home to my native country". Secondly "so that his relations might Know what became of his father, and about his own fate, and thirdly to exercise his hand to write, for he had lost its practice for a long time". As we find later in his life, Knox seemed to have conformed to his childhood religious teachings to the letter, evidently from his deep devotion to the religion and his steadfast resolution not to marry "unbeilevers and heathens" and from the deep faith he had on God's providence. As inserted by him in the second edition to the *Historical Relation*. (Knox p. 125)

"I think it not unnesesary to make this remarke that obedience to parents goeth not unrewarded even in this life, for there Gods providence plentifully provided for my subsistance with earthly things and sent me particularly his holy Bible in my owne native language" (Paulusz ed. 127) - "and lastly delivered me with the first that escaped out of that Captivity, where many of my Bretheren and fellow Captives are to this day, and since hath not left me destitute of his mercies, which I insert to the praise of his free Grace and mere mercy to an unworthy sinner'. (Knox p. 339; Paulusz ed. p. 125).

### The Institution of Marriage

In his description of the social conditions of the Kandyan society of the 17th century Knox dwelt at great length with the marital customs prevalent at the time. The immediate impression one gets from this description is that society was characterised by its laxity, a situation which was repugnant to the conventional practices in many civilized societies of his day. Apart from lack of consideration for chastity, there was also a casual attitude to marriage as evident from the prevalence of concubinage and temporary liasons and the frequency of marriage dissolutions and remarriage and the system of polyandry. While commenting on the above condition, Knox made a detailed description of the situation, placing emphasis on the extra-marital and casual connections widely prevalent at the time. He devoted a substantial part to cover the adulterous and casual connections and went into great detail about the manner in which these were conducted by the parties



concerned. In fact his chapter on marriage and family life started with this discription on the casual connections and then only did he think it proper to devote time to discuss lawful marriages - which fact in itself is an indication of the manner he treated his subject. Further, it is to be noted that in the use of the term 'whore' Knox was too liberal and used the term loosely to indicate any connection as distinct from the formal marriage union. Moreover, some of the incidents which he referred to as examples of such casual connections were of a legendry type and would have been part of the current discourse of the Kandyan villager of his time.

"And tho I think they be all Whores, yet they abhor the Name *Vesou*, which is whore". "In these affairs the Women are very expert (it being their continual practice) to keep their design from the Husbands knowledge; tho by his own experience he cannot be ignorant of Women's devices. And unless he catch them in the act he doth not much trouble himself to prove himself a Cuckold; Cuckolds being so common, that it is not here regarded". "If they cannot have their opportunities at home, now they appoint their meetings, while the Husband stays at home holding the child". (Knox p. 92)

"They bear such love to their Bedfellows, that I have known this done, The Husband hath beset the House, and the Woman's Friend in it, when she hath holpen him to make a hole thro the thatch to get out at, which he hath done and made his Escape, and she remain behind to suffer all the blame her self. When other opportunities are wanting to enjoy the Company of their Paramours whole Nights together, they usually take occasion to be discontented and fall out with their Husbands, and so go home to their friends houses, to get longer enjoyments. Who to shew their Friendship will not hinder but further them in what they dilight in". (Knox p. 92)

"These women are of a very strong couragious spirit, taking nothing very much to heart, mourning more for fashion than affection, never overwhelmed neither with grief or love. And when their Husbands are dead, all their care is where to get others, which they cannot long be without." (Knox p. 115). A description of the above theme is found in the new material written by Knox for the Second Edition. "The chief farmer of a town, where I dwelt four years, died and my house was adjoining under the same roof, therefor could not but take notice that the second or third night after his death my land lady had another husband to comfort her. It was so common that none but I admired at it, which was because I had not been long in this country; afterwards I saw it was the common custom". (Paulusz ed. p. 115)

However, as Knox claims, though adultery was tolerated by the Kandyan society to a great extent, public prostitution was not allowed. Knox was very explicit about this distinction when he said, "Indeed here are no Publick whores allowed by authority. In the city some that have followed that trade have often times by the King's order been severely punished by whipping, and having their ears and hair cut off. But in private few or none can exempt themselves". "Indeed the Publick Trade would be bad, and hardly maintain them that exercised it, the private one being so great". (Knox p. 92)



### Formal Marriage Unions

While dealing with the formal marriage unions and the "honest practices which make the bed lawful" Knox commented on the ceremonial aspects and the like in considerable detail. Yet his statement to the effect that "There are not many Ceremonies used in or about the same" itself is an indication of the way Knox looked at the local marriage ceremonies and is indicative of his failure to appreciate them in their proper perspective, partly due to the absence of the religious element as in Christian marriage and partly because of their being different from his own system which he idealized. Though he stated that there were no elaborate religious and other ceremonies to ratify the marriage contract, his description provides us with information on all the important elements of a Kandyan marriage union such as (1) consideration of caste and rank and the strict adherence to such principles in the selection of suitable partners, (2) parental and family intervention in the match making, (3) strict attitude of the society regarding those who infringed caste regulations, (4) marriage preliminaries such as the tallying of horoscopes, visits to homes, (5) rituals conducted to signify the marriage bond, such as tying of thumbs, partaking of food, exchanging of gifts, and the involvement of other castes, particularly the washers, all of which give the image of a civilised and proper system of marriage as opposed to the picture we had from Knox earlier with great emphasis on the casual and promiscuous behaviour of husbands and wives rampant in society.

### Marriage Customs and Ceremonies

The involvement of parents and the extended family in the decision-making process and in the performance of ceremonies is a point Knox dwelt on. "Here is no wooing for a wife. The parents commonly make the Match, and in their choice regard more the quality and descent than the beauty. If they are agreed all is done". "The match being thus made, the man carrieth or sends to the woman her wedding Cloths..... (a practice still in vogue in some parts of the Kandyan areas) then they appoint a day when he is to come and fetch her home which is the marriage day. .... when he goes with friends to her house, .... brings provisions and sweet meats with him according to his ability, towards the charges of the wedding. Then the bride and bridegroom both eat together in one dish, which is to intimate that they are both of one rank and quality, and sometimes they tie their thumbs together". (Knox p. 93)

Apart from illustrating the involvement of the family in arranging marriages, which makes it less of an individual concern, the above details are significant in that they give a picture of the ceremonial aspects of marriage, which speaks for the solemnity of the event, thus indicating the important position attached to the institution of marriage by the society concerned, though Knox seems to have failed in appreciating the value of such customs in that light. Further, the fact that individual choice and other pragmatic considerations too had been important in the fixing of marriages was however implied by the following statement of Knox, though his real intention had been to prove the negative aspect of 'whoredom' by referring to the position stated below:

"Where there houses consist of but one room, the children that are of any years



go and sleep in other houses among their neighbours which please them better than their own. For so they come to meet with bedfellows, nor doth it displease the parents, if young men of as good quality as themselves become acquainted with their daughters, but rather like well of it, Knowing that their daughters by this means can command the young men and assist them in any work or business that they may have occasion to use them in. And they look upon it so far distant from a disgrace, that they will among their consorts brag of it, that they have the young men at their command, *so that youth are bred up to whoredom*". (emphasis mine.) While the puritan outlook of Knox on the situation already described has no doubt coloured his opinion in a negative way, the above statement is illustrative of the pragmatism of the Kandyan in marital affairs and the positive influence of cultural and economic factors in determining social behaviour in the Kandyan society of his time. (Knox p. 91).

While these descriptions generally speak for Knox's capacity for observation, Knox lacked the ability to interpret such customs and manners in an objective manner with due recognition to the cultural setting. The biases created by his religious and racial prejudices were such that he was not able to realise the significance of these marriage formalities, and hence the tendency to take little notice of the ethical and moral basis of these practices, which affected considerably in moulding his judgements and conclusions regarding the overall situation. As K.W. Goonewardene has pointed out when he analysed Knox's attitude to some political events and personalities like King Rajasinghe of Kandy, Knox's thinking was governed by his preconceived ideas based on the superiority of the European system, thereby preventing him from taking an objective view of the institution of marriage in Kandyan society.

### Marriage and the Caste Factor

However, it would be wrong to suggest that Knox's views on the superiority of the European system were solely responsible in the formulation of his attitude to the marital customs of the Kandyan society. For there are other factors peculiar to the local situation which were instrumental in shaping his opinions in this particular fashion. For instance, the stringent caste regulations concerning sexual behaviour and the variations found in the application of such regulations on the basis of a caste to which a particular person belonged, which seemed logical in the eyes of the caste-based Sinhalese society, were not seen in a similar light by Knox.

Referring to these regulations, Knox states that, although unions between males of a higher caste and females of a lower caste were not penalized, a union legally or otherwise between a female of a higher caste and a male of a lower caste was not only invalid but also severely penalized.

"It is not accounted any shame or fault for a man of the highest sort to lay with a Woman far inferior to himself, nay of the very lowest degree; provided he neither eats nor drinks with her, nor takes her home to his house, as a wife. But if he should, which I never knew done, he is punished by the Magistrate, either by fine or Imprisonment, or both, and also he is utterly excluded from his Family and accounted thenceforward of the



same rank and quality that the Woman is of, whom he hath taken." (Knox p. 66).

Elaborating on this in the addenda, he says:

"The men may and doe frequently Lay with women of any low Cast, not excepting the Ruddeahs, or begers without any disgrace or losse of reputation, but women, if known to doe the like, unpardonable."

(Paulusz ed. p. 93)

Thus, it is clear that the distinction which was made with regard to casual connections of an informal character and marriage unions of a formal kind, performed by taking a woman into one's family home as the real wife by the Kandyan, was found to be meaningless by Knox. Further, the strict regulations imposed on the sexual behaviour of high caste women would have been necessary for the Kandyans for securing the dignity of the particular caste and rank and the purity of progeny, if not also for the protection of ancestral property held by such families. This is confirmed by Hayley when he says there seems to be no case in which a woman was permitted to marry a man of even slightly lower caste than herself, or such conduct was considered a penal offence.<sup>3</sup>

The tradition regarding Maningomuwa, a village in the Matale District, is worth quoting here as an illustration of popular thinking on such conduct. "In the reign of King Rajasinha a man of the Katupulle caste took in his arms a daughter of a high caste woman; the mother, saying that the child was polluted by the touch, dashed her on a stone in the presence of the King and killed her. The King thereafter named this village Mane-gama, saying that the people are full of self respect".<sup>4</sup> In this connection it is worth referring to the rigid attitude of Nikawewa Rate Mahathmaya of the North Central Province on caste matters which he expressed in 1851 in reply to a question of Mr. Brodie who was making inquiries about the Vanni class. Asked what he would do if one of the women of his caste married a Vellala who were considered by the Vanniyars as inferior to them, he is said to have replied, "In the Kandyan times we should have killed her at once, but now, hump! well : I don't know what else we could do with her either."<sup>5</sup>

### Monogamy and the Religious Factor

Another factor which may have contributed to Knox holding a different, and a somewhat extreme opinion about the Kandyan marriage customs was the lack of religious

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<sup>3</sup>. F.A. Hayley *The Laws and Customs of the Sinhalese or Kandyan Law* (1932, reprint Navrang 1993) p. 176.

<sup>4</sup>. A.C. Lawrie *Gazetteer of the Central Province*, Colombo (1896 and 1898) vol. II, p. 531.

<sup>5</sup>. R.W. Ievers *Manual of the North Central Province*, Colombo (1899) p. 92, citing Diary of A.O. Brodie for July 1851.



involvement for sanctifying marriage, an important element of an European marriage union from Knox's standpoint. While Knox felt that Kandyan marriage customs were repugnant to the European system which upheld the monogamous principle, which he as a true Christian valued as sacred, he also believed that the secular type of marriages performed by the Kandyans without any priestly intervention did not amount to a proper marriage union. This may have been in the back of his mind when he claimed that in Kandyan society there were not very many ceremonies for marriage.

Moreover, the fact that there was no uniformity in the application of regulations concerning marital affairs, as well as the variety in the performance of ceremonies among different ranks of society contributed to further misunderstandings to make him think "whether the Sinhalese marriages were better than living in whoredom". It must be pointed out that in Kandyan society ceremonies performed in connection with marriage ranged from elaborate ones to very simple ones. Such variation depended on the social standing (i.e. the caste and rank) and the economic circumstances of the family concerned. A simple ceremony was not unusual in the case of poor and low caste people, in which case the handing over of the bride by the parents to the groom, with nominal exchanges of gifts and feasting, would have been the practice. For instance Knox, while referring to the practice of presenting a wedding cloth to the bride by the groom, says "that in the case of poor people it is the custom to borrow a cloth for that purpose" - which illustrates the circumstances of the poor who conduct such simple marriage ceremonies. Another reason for simple ceremony would have been instances of remarriage of widows and others, which were so frequent. While there was the formal sort in which the bride was given away by a relation together with a dowry, there also existed an informal kind in which the girl or widow, as the case may be, gave herself to a man of her choice without any question of property. In the latter form it is possible that mutual attraction, once acknowledged by the parties, served to establish the union without any further requirement of ceremony or such formality.

As already pointed out, the situation varied according to the social rank and position of the family concerned. As Nevill declares: "The higher ranks made marriage an occasion for elaborate celebrations." The full constituents of a traditional wedding as set forth by D'oily amply demonstrates the elaborate nature of such ceremonies.<sup>6</sup> Among the upper classes ceremonies associated with marriage were considered so important that on such occasions of feasting particular *rajakariya* services were performed by other castes. For instance the *rajakariya* services to be performed by yakdessaalage services for holding Siyambala Munwewa owned by Palle Walawwa Loku Kumarihami, the owner of three nindapangu of Maningomuwa, included among other things the supply of firewood and water at the instance of a wedding at the walawwa, (other services being to thatch the

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<sup>6</sup>. Hugh Nevill (1887) cited by Tambiah *Sinhalese Laws & Customs*. p. 114 .  
See also J. Davy *An Account of the Interior of Ceylon and its Inhabitants*, London (1821) p. 284. John D'oily *A Sketch of the Constitution of the Kandyan Kingdom Wedding Countries* p. 230.



walawwa once a year, to repair the madugeval (walls) when there is a death etc.<sup>7</sup> The Washer and the Hakuru castes had their distinctive services to perform, such as provision of white cloth for 'pawada' (footcloth) and for 'viyan' (canopies) etc., and the carrying of pingo loads of gifts and provisions to the bride's house and back. As Knox says, "The washer that washes for the family always go with the Bridegroom with a bundle of cloth at his back when he goes to fetch home the bride." (Paulusz ed. p. 93)

Ralatives accompanying the bridegroom to the bride's place and back was considered an indication of the family's approval of the marriage, thereby providing legality to such a union even though it was not considered a compulsory requirement. This was established by the decision of the Board of Commissioners in 1822 when it was decided that legitimacy of the plaintiff could not be challenged by the defendant on the ground that he was not the son of her maternal uncle, since it appeared in evidence that plaintiff's mother was conducted to the home by plaintiff's father accompanied by a male and female relation of the father. "The assessors declared that two relations of the bridegroom were enough".<sup>8</sup> (Defendant denied the plaintiff's legitimacy on the ground that he was not the son of her maternal uncle). However, strictly speaking, in Kandyan law and custom, even though the performance of marriage ritual was considered important, it was not made compulsory, as established by the following decision of the appeal court made on 16th November 1827. "The Judicial Commissioner and the Assessors are unanimously of opinion that there is no question as to the right of plaintiff to inherit from their father, Makirihamy, as man and woman being of the same rank in life, having lived together as man and wife has always been held by the Kandyan law sufficient to establish their children's right to inherit from them, although their parents may not have gone through the regular marriage rituals". (Carandeniya Gamagey Punchy Appoo etc. vs Caloohamy appeal from three Korales).<sup>9</sup>

### Divorce and Remarriage

Adding to this confusion in the mind of Knox with regard to formalities and marriage customs were the customs which allowed for easy dissolution of marriages and the frequency of remarriage, which again would have been repugnant from the Christian standpoint, lacking as it did in priestly intervention, and therefore with no sanctity attached to the bond thus created or the dissolution thus made. As Knox says, "The Elder sorts of People usually woe and conclude their Marraiges as they are in Bed together. For when they have lost their Maidenheads, they fear not much what Man comes to sleep with them, provided he be of as good quality as they, having nothing more to lose. And at the day appointed the Man gives the Women her Clothes, and so takes her home." (Knox p. 93) In the second edition a note is found following the above comment: "I have known some

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<sup>7</sup>. Lawrie *loc.cit.*

<sup>8</sup>. Hayley *op.cit.* app. II, Sawyer's notes p. 69/70 no. 75.

<sup>9</sup>. Hayley *op.cit.* app. II, Sawyer's notes p. 73 no. 84



that have bin woeing this way in bed together anight some Weeks and after breake quite of" (Paulusz ed. p. 93) "it being allowed by their laws to change their wives and take others as often as they pleased." (Knox p. 146).

"But their marriages are but of little force or validity for if they disagree and mislike one the other, they part without disgrace (Knox p. 93). As Knox elaborates, "Both women and men do commonly wed four or five times before they can settle themselves to their contention" (Knox p. 94). Knox seems to have been puzzled by the validity of divorce and remarriage so easily performed. In Kandyan society of the time break-up of a marriage was not frowned upon and remarriage was so common that it was taken for granted "but if they choose to mislike one the other and part asunder this portion (the dowry) must be returned again and then she is fit for another man, being as they account never the worse for wearing." (Knox p. 93).

Therefore when separated, a woman generally returned to her natal home, but did not remain there for long, for remarriage was possible. When a woman returned to her parental home, the custom was for the brothers or the parents, if they lived, to arrange another marriage for her, since it was the socially acceptable and pragmatic way of seeing to her future welfare. Social custom and law provided for a system of matrimonial relief which Knox was unable to comprehend in that light. Often these considerations were taken into account by the parents when decisions regarding property were initially made. In *Kobbakaduwa, lake Rate-Mahatmaya vs. Waytary late Rate-Mahatmaya* (BJC. 29-1817 (CGA 23/2) a witness stated that one Wirasingha Mudliar, at his death-bed, called his seven daughters before him and said, "I am not certain that you will all marry out, and it also may happen that some of you will return from your husbands. Should that be the case I have reserved one pala of Kohovilla deniya to be possessed by such daughters." Only three daughters survived, two of whom married and left the ancestral home. The youngest enjoyed the land, leaving it when she married. Her first husband was executed by the King's orders and she returned to her father's house to resume possession of the pala of Kohovilla deniya. She afterwards was called to wife by Valbavagedara, a man of Seven Korales, who dying, and she having no maintenance, she returned to her father's house being big with child. She brought forth a son and possessed the pala of land Kohovilla deniya."<sup>10</sup>

Widow remarriage too was common and in certain instances such marriages enabled families of the propertied class a greater accumulation of wealth within a single family, as in the case of Nikawewa Ratamahatmaya's family of the North Central Province recorded by Ievers during the second half of the nineteenth century: "By the marriage of Nikawawe Rate-Mahatmaya to the widow of Tamarawewa Rate-Mahatmaya and the union of his son with Tamarawewa Rate-Mahatmaya's daughter who was the widow of Mullegama, the large property of Tamarawewa family fell to the Nikawewa and Morakewa families." (Tamarawewa Rate-Mahatmaya was appointed in 1834 in charge of the Eastern Division of the N.C.P. and he owned seventy two Nindagam under the Kandyan Kingdom.

<sup>10</sup>. Cited by Ralph Peiris *op.cit.* p. 196.



Nikawewa succeeded him in 1849 and his son in 1878)<sup>11</sup>.

Though Knox made mention of the frequent remarriages among the Kandyans, he did not observe why such a situation existed and the comments which he made in reference to them were mostly of a negative character, implying his prejudices against such a system, and by implication it was part of the lax behaviour that society was immoral to an extent unknown in the western society of his day. However, on closer examination it appears to have been the result of various other factors of a genuine nature which would have compelled society to tolerate such practices and to allow a degree of flexibility in marital affairs, other than the negative position implied by Knox. The fact that a high premium was placed on children was one reason which may have induced remarriage in the event of infertility or barrenness. This was the opinion held by British administrators of the 19th century, who had to tackle the reformation of regulations regarding marriage customs during the second half of the 19th century. Another reason would have been the death of a spouse, which would have been more frequent in those days of poor health care. Knox's own statements which he made in reference to the absence of chastity establishes the fact that the Kandyans were themselves apologetic and were in two minds about the propriety of such lax behaviour.

In Knox's account on the 'Discourse of their Religion and Religious doctrines' he says: "They reckon the chief poynts of goodness to consists in giving to the Priests, in making Pudgiahs, sacrifices to their Gods..... It is accounted religion to be just and sober and chaste and true, and to be endowed with other virtues, as we do account it." (Knox p. 85).

The following extract of a statement of Knox when recalling the dilemma he and his fellow countrymen were confronted with, clearly illustrates his peculiar frame of mind as well as the strength of his convictions regarding the Kandyan marriage system. (Be it noted that there were nineteen Englishmen in the Kandyan Kingdom along with him).

"They reckoning themselves in for their Lives, in order to their future settlement, were generally disposed to Marry. Concerning which we have had many and sundry disputes among our selves; *as particularly concerning the lawfulness of matching with Heathens and Idolaters, and whether the Chingulays Marriages were any better than living in Whoredome: there being no Christian Priests to join them together, and it being allowed by their Laws to change their Wives and take other as often as they pleased* (Emphasis mine). But these cases we solved for our own advantage after this manner, That we were but Flesh and Blood, and that it is said, It is better to Marry than to burn, and that as far as we could see, we were cut off from all Marriages any where else, even for our Life time, and therefore that we must marry with these or with none at all. And when the People in Scripture were forbidden to take Wives of Strangers, it was then when they might inter-marry with their own People, and so no necessity lay upon them. And that when they could not, there are examples in the Old Testament upon Record, that they took Wives of

<sup>11</sup>. R.W. Ievers *Manual of the North Central Province* Colombo (1899) p. 166.



the Daughters of the Lands, wherein they dwelt. These reasons being urged, there was none among us, that could object ought against them, especially if those that were minded to marry Women here, did take them for their Wives during their lives as some of them say, they do: and most of the Women they marry are such as do profess themselves to be Christians." (Knox p. 146).

"As for mine own part, however lawful these Marriages might be, yet I judged it far more convenient for me to abstain, and that it more redounded to my good, having always a reviving hope in me, that my God had not forsaken me, but according to his gracious promise to the Jews in the Chapter of Deuteronomy, and the beginning, would turn my Captivity and bring me into the Land of my Fathers. *These and such like meditations, together with my Prayers to God, kept me from that unequal Yoke of Unbeleivers, which several of my country men and fellow prisoners put themselves under.*" (Emphasis mine: Knox p. 146) In fact certain statements made by the Sinhalese villagers who were Knox's neighbours, as Knox claims, would have further confirmed his doubts about the validity of such a marriage union from the European standpoint. Knox claimed that when he expressed his reluctance to marry a local woman, thinking that he might have to leave in the event of obtaining freedom one day, it was insisted upon him by the Sinhalese villagers, who assured him that according to the local custom he would be free to go, leaving the wife behind without any prejudice to the country's laws and customs.

However, Knox's own admissions elsewhere in the *Historical Relation* indicate that in Sinhalese society too there existed a strict attitude to adultery. For instance, there was a customary belief that a man had the right to kill the wife and the adulterer if they were caught in the act, with the implication that there was a strong social attitude against adultery, so much so that society even condoned murder committed under such circumstances as grave provocation and justifiable<sup>12</sup>. In this connection we may also observe the stringent policy of the King with regard to the court; according to Knox: "He allows not in his court Whoredom or Adultery; and many times when he hears of the misdemeanors of some of his Nobles in regard of women, He not only executes them, but severely punisheth the women, if known: and he hath so many Spyes, that there is but little done, which he knows not of. And often he gives command to expel all the women out of the city, not one to remain. But by little and little when think his wrath is appeas'd, they do creep in again. But no women of any quality dare presume, and if they would, they cannot, the watches having charge given them not to let them pass. Some have been taken concealed under mans Apparel, and what became of them all may judge, for they never went home again. Rebellion does not more displease this King, then for his nobles to have to do with women." (Knox p. 38). However, it must be noted that the King in this stringent policy regarding adultery at the court would probably have been guided more by considerations of political stability and security than by mere moral principles.

Knox's views are confirmed by the following evidence as found in the records of British administrative officers of the nineteenth century. "Of adultery with the Kings

<sup>12</sup>. H.W. Thambiah *Laws and Customs of the Sinhalese* London (1958) p. 148.



wives, which was considered a special form of treason, two instances are recorded, in both of which capital punishment was inflicted on both criminals."<sup>13</sup> "Of illicit intercourse with the King's concubines, there are several instances, in which the delinquents have been sentenced to severe corporal punishment and sometimes the additional penalty of cutting off the hair or imprisonment, but the offence has never been punished with deaths."<sup>14</sup> Thus, the situation which prevailed even during the 19th century as reported by the British administrators confirms that the position varied according to the circumstances of a person.

According to Hayley, "Adultery was, in strict law, an offence and in some cases was punished with slight corporal punishment, fine or imprisonment. If however, as usually happened, the husband took private vengeance, which he was entitled to do both upon the paramour and the unfaithful wife, the courts did not trouble themselves with the matter."<sup>15</sup> Further, a female having illicit intercourse with a low caste man was considered an act which could cause injury to the person's caste and to the family, not only to the immediate but to the larger family or the kin group as well. This was the reason for looking upon it as a serious offence. Therefore the family was originally entitled to put the offending female to death. "The worst raiery they can give a woman is to tell her, she has laid with ten sorts of inferior ranks of people, which they will rather dye than do." (Knox p. 106). In several cases the woman was confined as a slave of the crown and sent to the royal village of Gampola and her family ordered to deliver some provisions to the royal store.<sup>16</sup>

It was no slander to accuse a woman of having intercourse with a man of a higher caste than her own;<sup>17</sup> which confirms the view that adultery was seen, not in the light of moral considerations alone, but also in relation to its effect on the caste, as it resulted in degrading a particular caste or rank. Lawrie states that a Vellala woman of Conigoda declared that she was banished as king's slave to Gampola because she eloped with a painter to Sabaragamuwa.<sup>18</sup> Again, a mother committed suicide when her daughter eloped with a man "not of sufficient respectability to make a match with a daughter of their family." (Nuwandkage Kalla Nainde vs his brother BJC 20-2182 CGA 23/6).<sup>19</sup>

The observations Knox made while referring to the incestuous practices of the *Chandala* community, "the base people", give a clue to the expectations and moral values of society as they relate to the respective castes. Knox says: "These men being so low

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<sup>13</sup>. Lawrie Vol. I mss. 314.

<sup>14</sup>. Hayley *op.cit.* p. 114.

<sup>15</sup>. Hayley *loc.cit.*, D'oily *op.cit.* p. 100, Davy *op.cit.* p. 182.

<sup>16</sup>. Hayley *op.cit.* p. 115.

<sup>17</sup>. Hayley p. 115.

<sup>18</sup>. Lawrie mss. p. 290.

<sup>19</sup>. See Ralph Peiris *op.cit.* p. 202, n. 32.



that nothing they can do can make them lower, it is not unusual with them to lay with their daughters or it is not for the son to lay with his mother, as if there were no consanguinity among them. Many times when the king cuts off greater and Noble men, against whom he is highly incensed, he will deliver their daughters and wives to this sort of People, reckoning it, as they also account it, to be far worse punishment than any kind of death. This kind of punishment being accounted such terrible cruelty, the king doth usually of his clemency shew them some kind of mercy and pity their distress, commands to carry them to a river side and there to deliver unto the hands of those, who are far worse than the executioners of death from whom if these ladies please, they are permitted to leap into the river and be drowned, the which some, sometimes will choose to do rather than to consort with them." (Knox p. 71). This information on the *Chandala* community indicates certain considerations preeminent in society regarding the sexual behaviour of the low-castes. The inference to be drawn is that the lower the caste status of a person, the lower the standard expected of him regarding sexual behaviour. In this context it is possible to surmise that, among the lower ranks there could have been less stringency in the maintenance of the proper morality, which means that among them there would have been a natural tendency to disregard moral considerations. Hence the disregard of moral considerations, as long as it did not clash with the restrictions imposed by a given caste or rank, would have been possible and also tolerated by society as proper.

### Marriage and Virginity

Knox's account refers to the absence of strict ideas about virginity in Kandyan society, which seems a corollary to the general laxity. It is to be noted that among the Hindus virginity of the bride was insisted upon since, in the formal marriage, the gift of a virgin was considered essential. "The Hindu view of women is that they are imbued with more energy than men ..... This greater energy, however is "wild" and needs to be harnessed to a man to be safely controlled or directed. A married couple was viewed as a single bodily unit, so that the wife was referred to as a "half-body", but not an all-inclusive half. She was assigned the role of *Shakthi*, a kind of energy supply. The man whose wife died might be bereft, but could, and indeed should, replace the missing source of energy and vitality; the women whose husband died was an uncontrolled source of energy, and dangerous."<sup>20</sup> However, in Kandyan society, as reported by Knox, "They do not matter or regard whether their wives at the first marriage be maids or not." "And for a small reward the mother will bring her daughter being a maiden unto those that do desire her" (Knox p. 92), probably in reference to the practice of 'offering hospitality' known to have existed in Kandyan society. Offering of hospitality, or *navanthanhire*, was to entertain intimate friends or great men who chanced to lodge at a man's house. Such a practice would have been considered acceptable by the Kandyans as one which had no ritual value as comparable to a proper marriage union, and therefore would not have been considered improper. Davy, in his account of the marriage system, states that in Kandyan society the first week of marriage was considered a trial period, which further confirms the

<sup>20</sup>. Dorothea Stein 'Burning Widows, Burning Brides' *Pacific Affairs* (1988) Vol. I, No. 3, p. 468.



above assertion. As Davy states "the fortnight that they live together is a period of trial, at the end of which the marriage is either annulled or confirmed. If the latter, the pair stand on a plank of jack-wood, the husband pours water on his wife's head, and having exchanged rings and tied their little fingers together, they are firmly united for life."<sup>21</sup> That marriages were sometimes dissolved soon after consummation illustrates that no stigma was attached to such relationships and that it did not affect the prospect of future marriage either. An examination of the court records of the British period reveals numerous instances of marriage dissolutions which had taken place after a period of cohabitation. The reasons adduced were such factors as the absence of family consent due to caste considerations, cruelty of the spouse etc. In Appurala vs. his wife, a woman denied that she was married to a man with whom she had cohabited for seven years on the ground that her relations did not consent, while the man insisted that she was his wife (Apurala vs his wife, niece of Makuloluwa Vidana, BJC - 18-12-1818, CGA 23/16).<sup>22</sup> In another case the Judicial Commissioner's Court adjudged the marriage to be null on the ground "that the marriage was accomplished without the full consent of the girl's parents, and the other branches of the family" and the girl was ordered to be returned to her parents, although she had cohabited with the husband a few weeks. *The King, on the prosecution of Angammena Appuhamy v. Kempitiye Koralle and Atooroopana Nileme*- 28 January, 1828)<sup>23</sup>. There is also an instance when a wife was allowed to expel her husband after cohabitation of some months even without assigning any cause for the rupture. (This was a *binna* marriage between the parties, contracted after the death of the bride's (plaintiff's) father: after a cohabitation of some months, plaintiff and her mother expelled the *binna* husband (defendant) and this suit resulted thereon. Neither plaintiff nor her mother assigned any cause for the rupture. Decision: That the plaintiff cannot be compelled to go with the defendant as his wife, nor can he demand to be admitted against her will into her mother's house; the match must be broken off and the plaintiff ordered to restore the defendant's property (the wearing apparel, etc., which he had given her or left in her house). *Keyppitipola Menika vs. Kempitiye Banda* - 19 June, 1826).<sup>24</sup>

When examining the reliability of Knox's account, it is important to refer to an indigenous source Lak Lo Raja Sirita<sup>25</sup> which has an account of the position on marital affairs of the Kandyan kingdom. This is a document based on replies furnished by Sinhalese bhikkus to the questions of Governor Falck in 1769. The position about this document as one furnished by the Buddhist priestly class is that it cannot be said to contain

<sup>21</sup>. *op.cit.* p. 214.

<sup>22</sup>. Cited by Ralph Peiris *op.cit.* p. 197.

<sup>23</sup>. Sawyer's notes No. 82 in Hayley *appendix* p. 72.

<sup>24</sup>. Sawyer's notes No. 83 in Hayley *loc.cit.*

<sup>25</sup>. A. Bertolacci *A View of the Agricultural, Commercial and Financial Interests of Ceylon* London (1817) appendix 1, p. 577 - 590.



true Kandyan customary law in all matters as Tambiah says: "many of the answers given to the questions of Falck reveal that the priestly class who gave those answers were more concerned with the reformations of the law than with the existing principles of Kandyan customary law. One can clearly discern the influence of Buddhist scriptures and the tenets of the Buddha's teaching in some of the answers. Hence, even this work cannot be said to contain true Kandyan customary law in all matters."<sup>26</sup> Perhaps it could be argued that the replies furnished by the bhikkus would reflect the social ideal and not the norm, but still these views are important to establish the fact that adultery was not socially acceptable to the extent suggested by Knox's account and that society was mindful of certain moral principles applied in relation to marriage, and further, as indicated by the reply furnished by them regarding polyandry of the Kandyan Kingdom, they were being factual to an extent. The bhikkus, while admitting the existence of polyandry, conceded that it would not be regarded as a regular system of marriage, which in a sense was the actual situation. As confirmed by various other sources too, there would have been an element of social tolerance of violations of morality, but it does not necessarily mean that moral considerations were absent altogether in Kandyan society, as purported to be by Knox's account.<sup>27</sup> This is further confirmed by Knox's own statements.

### The Dowry System

References to the dowry system are found in Knox's account. In Sinhalese society dowry was considered a gift necessary for the maintenance of the woman, and the nature and amount of the gift depended on the economic circumstances of the family. Importantly this dowry was considered the property of the wife and not of the family. Research on traditional Sinhalese law as well as sociological studies, as Savithri Goonasekera observes, "support the view that in Sinhalese society it originated as a daughter's share in the family inheritance and dowry is thus envisaged as a woman's share and the woman was entitled to take back what was brought by her in *diga* if the marriage was dissolved."<sup>28</sup> "They do give according to their ability a portion of cattle, slaves and money with their daughters, but if they choose to dislike one the other and part asunder this portion must be returned again, and then she is fit for another man, being as they account never the worse for wearing." (Knox p. 93) Referring to artificer families who gave their daughters to men of the same caste, Knox says that "the daughters portion is such tools as one of use and do belong unto the trade." (Knox p. 68). Among the things that were given as part of dowry Knox mentions slaves, cattle, tools and money, but does not mention land, which is significant, since it proves the accuracy of Knox in this regard. For it was customary not to give land for dowry, probably to prevent ancestral property being fragmented, while the giving of slaves seemed to have been a common practice among the higher ranks.

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<sup>26</sup>. Tambiah *op.cit.* p. 139 also p. 127.

<sup>27</sup>. Refer the replies of the bhikkus to questions in p. 279 - 280.

<sup>28</sup>. Savithri Goonasekera *The Legal Status of the Female in the Sri Lanka Law on Family Relations* Colombo, (1980) p. 73.



"Kahatapitiya Nilame stated that Latti was his slave given in dowry when his sister was married."<sup>29</sup> For instance, D'oyly says that slaves were treated as personal property and hence the possibility of giving them with daughters as gifts, and as further confirmed by Lawrie "when persons married slaves went with them,"<sup>30</sup> which seemed to have been common in the Kandyan Kingdom at that time. Among the Vanni people in Dutch times the marriage gift, which was written and signed by the friends and relations, consisted generally of a cow, buffaloe, copper plate to eat out of, chopping knife to chop the jungle, with sometimes a piece of ground, which confirmed the marriage according to the account of Nagel Thomas in 1785. A marriage was confirmed or celebrated in the presence of a washerman and a barber of the village. "The bridgroom presented the bride with a piece of cloth and binds a necklace around her neck."<sup>31</sup>

Though land was not generally given as dowry it was not uncommon for land to be gifted to daughters and very often in the old age of parents in recognition of the assistance rendered to them during difficult times, old age or illness, as found in many instances. Such an instance is the grant of Palingu Panditaya to Ukku, which illustrates the woman's continual connection with her natal home and village throughout her life and the dependence of parents in the assistance so provided by the children.<sup>32</sup>

References to the dowry system in Knox's account are important in many respects. It does not seem to have been a means of oppressing women, as we find it today. Instead, it appears to have been beneficial to women, by giving them financial independence both within marriage and in the event of a breakup of a marriage. Therefore, in the case of separation the dowry was returned to the wife, illustrating that it was part of a valid union. Though the Kandyan system did not provide for ceremonies for divorce, the provision for the separation of the property when the husband or wife lived apart was made with the contemplation of re-marriage, as a matter of course. Hayley includes settlements on the first wife and children before contracting a second marriage as a type of grant which was not revocable.<sup>33</sup> According to recent studies, this tolerant attitude to divorce has been claimed as an influence of Buddhism and Hinduism and had prevailed even among other communities such as the Mukkawas and the Vannias of Sri Lanka. As Lewis states, 'a Sinhalese girl (of the Vanni) has a succession of 'husbands' from the beginning of her

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<sup>29</sup>. Lawrie *mss.* p. 300.

<sup>30</sup>. Lawrie Gazetteer p. 366.

<sup>31</sup>. *An Account of the Vanni* 1793 J.R.A.S C.B. Vol. XXXVIII pt. II (1948) p. 69 - 76.

<sup>32</sup>. Lawrie Gazetteer p. 321.

<sup>33</sup>. Hayley *op.cit.* p. 302.



married life. The Sinhalese registrar of marriages has not much to do.<sup>34</sup> Early marriage of young girls, which was the general rule in Kandyan society, would have been an inducement to re-marriage also, in which context Knox's statement that people married even four or five times does not seem to be an exaggeration at all. Early marriage was partly a result of practical necessity, arising at times out of economic considerations. There could also have been some correlation between the sons' rights of inheritance and early marriage of daughters as implicit in the following statement of the *Niti Niganduwa*: "The Brothers may marry all their unmarried sisters in *Diga* after their father's death and so take possession of all the father's land."<sup>35</sup> "Daughters must accept the husband chosen for them by their parents, and must go out with them in *Diga*,"<sup>36</sup> a requirement which again would have led the parents to initiate the marriage preliminaries for children as soon as they attained puberty, allowing for very early marriage of girls, as indicated by Knox's account.

### Marriage and Independence of Women

As recent studies have shown, easy dissolutions of marriage and frequent re-marriages are features common to many other parts of Asia too, though the case of China is an exception to this general rule. According to the recent study on this phenomenon "divorce was rare in traditional China up to the 1911 revolution and it needs to be remembered that only the husband could initiate divorce. Even a poor man could not afford the expense of a second marriage, while a wealthy man could take concubines without having to discard his wife. Moreover, public opinion regarded divorces as tragic events and frowned upon them. The stigma of divorce was so great that Chinese women felt reluctant to admit they were divorced so that in the polygamous marriage system, divorced statistics, even if they were available, would be grossly misleading as an indicator of family stability in both Imperial and Republican China."<sup>37</sup> Anthony Reid, in his study on Southeast Asia, claims the existence of a pattern of easy dissolutions of marriage during pre-colonial and colonial times and attributes it largely to "the pan South-East Asian pattern of female autonomy which meant that divorce did not markedly reduce a woman's livelihood, status or network of kin-support."<sup>38</sup> In the Sri Lankan situation too such an explanation is possible. The strong legal position in general and the property rights in particular that a woman was able to enjoy as an individual continued both within and out

<sup>34</sup>. J.P. Lewis *Manual of the North Western Province* Colombo (1890) p. 103.

<sup>35</sup>. Lawrie *mss.* p. 123.

<sup>36</sup>. Sawers *op.cit.* (1860) p. 3.

<sup>37</sup>. Erica Platte 'Divorce Trends and Patterns in China': Past and Present, *Pacific Affairs* Vol. I No. 3 (1988) p. 429.

<sup>38</sup>. Anthony Reid 'Female Roles in Pre Colonial Southeast Asia' *Modern Asian Studies* 22, 3 (1988) p. 631.



of the marriage institution, giving women a secure position in society.

The following description about the position of the Kandyan woman would illustrate this point clearly:

In Kandyan society even if a married daughter (*diga*), who in fact ceased to share in the produce of her parents, was compelled to return destitute, she was entitled to share tenure though she had lost her permanent position in the family. If she returned after her father's death, the brothers had to give her suitable maintenance.<sup>39</sup> The law also recognised the legal obligation of a father to maintain his legitimate minor children.<sup>40</sup> If any children were committed to the care of a wife, the father was expected to provide them with the necessities of life or set aside a portion of his lands to be cultivated on their account or some income from the proceeds of his manual labour. If the daughter lost her husband by death or by divorce, the father was still obliged to provide her maintenance if she possessed no property and could not support herself.<sup>41</sup> If the marriage had to be dissolved, a woman could find refuge in her parental home for her entire lifetime or until she be given in marriage for a second time. There was no community of property between husband and wife by Kandyan custom. Even in *diga* marriages, where the bride left her parental home to reside with her husband, the latter had no control over her dower, nor could he intermeddle with any property acquired by her after marriage independently of him. But the wife could make use of her husband's property for the maintenance of the family, even selling the produce or mortgaging his lands, if necessary, for subsistence, but she was precluded from selling his estate. "A wife could take nothing belonging to her husband if she left him contrary to his wish, and must leave even the wearing apparel provided by him."<sup>42</sup>

By comparison, a completely different situation with regard to women's legal position and her property rights existed in the contemporary Western world. Once a woman is married, the change in her legal position resulting from the marriage union made her completely dependent on the husband. It is noteworthy that "the husband's control over his wife's property is historically derived from the parental power transferred to him by the marriage contract."<sup>43</sup> The position taken by the extreme defenders of the marital right put so forcibly in England during the 18th century is found in the following passage and

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<sup>39</sup>. *Niti Niganduwa*, p. 38.

<sup>40</sup>. Lawrie *mss* p. 9.

<sup>41</sup>. John Armour *Grammar of Kandyan Law* ed. (J.M. Perera) 1861 p. 33; Simon Sawyer *Digest of Kandyan Law* (1860) p. 21.

<sup>42</sup>. Ralph Peiris *op.cit.* p. 201 citing D'Oyly *op.cit.* p. 128.

<sup>43</sup>. C.H. Pearson 'On Some Historical Aspects of Family Life.' p. 173 ed. J.E. Buttler *Women's Work and Woman's Culture* London 1869.



is an illustration of the rigid attitude of Western society in this regard, in contrast to the Sri Lankan situation which was far advanced in view of modern day standards of women's rights within marriage. "A wife by the marriage contract became extinct, from the nature of it, for several civil purposes, with regard to which she merges in the husband. He becomes liable to all her debts. Marriage by the law of England gives the husband the whole dominion over the property and also over the person of his wife, except as to murder, for by the old law he could not be punished for cruelty to her. The civil existence of the wife merged in that of the husband; he is the head of the family, to make another would be against the policy of the law, if the wife can by her own act, against the consent of the husband, make herself independent of him, it will destroy that subordination so necessary in families, which is analogous to that in the state."<sup>44</sup>

### Polyandry

Knox refers to the existence of a system of polyandry. "In this country even the greatest hath but one wife; but a woman often has two husbands. For it is lawful and common with them for two brothers to keep house together with one wife, and the children do acknowledge and call both fathers." Unlike his tendency to provide detailed accounts on other aspects of marriage, Knox is brief in his treatment of this feature, probably considering this situation as a normal feature in Kandyan society. Therefore it is difficult to establish the rate of incidence of polyandry during this time though it is certain that the practice existed, for it is corroborated by previous writers too, such as Queyroz, Rebeiro, Baldeus and others like Modder and levers as late as the nineteenth century. *Lak Raja Lo Siritha*, which contained the replies of the bhikkus expressed in 1769 to the questions of Governor Flack on marital affairs in the Kandyan Kingdom referred to above also confirms the fact of its existence, even though the bhikkus were careful in maintaining that it was not a regular system of marriage.

Knox makes no direct reference to the two recognised forms of Kandyan marriage, the *diga* and *binna*. However, in the interleaved notes in his book he makes reference to the *bini pangu* or shares of property held on by the wife on the *binna* form of marriage, when the husband stays in the wife's family house. "In the highlands of Kandy there are certain lands that continue to be hereditary to the female sex and not to the males; they are called *Bene-pangs*, which signifies womens shares. Younger sons of other families when grown up, the elder brothers having all the land, they marry these women that have lands. A man in this case only differs from a servant (in laying with his mistress), for she will bear rule and he no longer than willing to obey can continue but she will turn him away at her pleasure, and he can claim no more than what he brought with him. The children, if grown to any understanding, incline to live where they can be best maintain and have most." (Paulusz ed. p. 101).

It is interesting to note that, as typical of Knox's comments, though he started off

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<sup>44</sup>. Herbert N. Mozley 'The Property, Disabilities of a Married Woman, And Other Legal Effects of Marriage.' in ed. Buttler *op.cit.* London 1869.



by referring to the women's property rights, his conclusion included a description of the *binna* form of marriage, thereby giving a graphic picture of the position of women's rights as opposed to men's within the *binna* system of marriage. The omission on Knox's part to pay adequate attention to the difference between the *binna* and *diga* forms of marriage seems puzzling. Particularly in view of the highly focussed attention which he pays to the extra marital relations in Kandyan society, it is difficult to explain why he failed to notice such an important aspect. However, it is possible to point this out as a further illustration of the manner in which Knox handles the information he has at hand on his own estimation of their relative significance.

### Social Position of Women

*The Historical Relation* contains more information on the ordinary people with whom Knox seemed to have had close contact during his captivity. However, some information on the life style and activities of the upper classes is found by way of incidental references, thus portraying the women of upper classes as a privileged lot, who led a comfortable and contented life. While referring to the leisure and past-times of the villagers Knox says: "The better sort of women, as gentle women or ladies, have no other past time but to sit and chew betel, swallowing the spittle and spitting out the rest. And friends come to see and visit one the other, they have as good society thus to sit and chew Betel, as we have to drink Wine together." (Knox p. 100).

Though there may be certain inaccuracies in the details, Knox was able to furnish a list of diverse titles used in addressing women. How rank and position determined their form of address is exemplified by this description of words signifying "titles and complements" and is further illustrative of the significance of social ranking within the society, irrespective of gender distinctions. "They have no less than 12 or more titles that they use when they speak to women according to their ranks, so that it is hard to speak to a woman, without they know what she is before least they might mistake her Title." And as Knox claimed, "the women are much pleased with some of the better titles." However, it was noted that "as most of the slaves in the country are descendants of Wellalas who were originally free people, the females retained the distinguishing caste appellation of Etana or Etani, so that the mere designation does not always imply freedom from bondage."<sup>45</sup>

Though he did not go into great detail, Knox made mention of "Commodious houses" of the upper classes "with courtyards, servants and slaves living around them." (Knox p. 86). "The poorest sort have not above one room in their homes, few above two, unless they be great men. Neither doth the king allow them to build better." (Knox p. 86). Such experiences would have been part of his normal day to day life as a Kandyan villager or as a peddler journeying the countryside, which he did for a substantial part of his stay. Knox mentions that when he had to stay overnight during his peddling journeys, he was provided with food and lodging by such inhabitants as could afford to do so,

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<sup>45</sup>. Lawrie mss. p. 306.



entertaining such visitors being a normal practice of the country. "When I travelled either a peddling or on other occasion I used to look for a house that had a Mandua or hall, which many houses have, and willingly give strangers entertainment which is pots of dressed Victuals in and a mat to lay on the ground to sleep on, which did as well refresh my weary body after hard travelling with a load on my back as if I had lain on the softest bed with Curtains round about me." (Knox p. 357). "The great ones have always five or six sorts of food at one meal, and of them not above one or two at most of flesh or fish and of them more pottage than meat, after the Portugal fashion. The rest is only what groweth out of the ground." (Knox p. 87)

The detailed account which Knox provides about their dress gives the impression that among the higher classes, "the nobles", much attention was paid to dress and apparel. Of men's apparel, the items mentioned include "doublets of white or blew Callico ..... a blew or red shash about their loyns, and a knife with a carved handle wrought or inlaid with silver sticking in their bosom, ..... etc. and ornaments of Brass, copper, silver Rings on their Fingers and some of the greatest Gold." (p. 90) However, what is significant is the claims made by Knox to emphasize on the fact that the women were given the pride of place. "But the women in their Apparel do far surpass the men, neither are they so curious in clothing themselves as in making their Attendance, having men bearing Arms before and behind them." (p. 90).

### Social Values

Knox's allegation that people often destroyed their new born infants who were found to have evil planetary afflictions is one which creates a bad impression about the social values of Kandyian society.

"They have no midwives, but the neighbouring good women come in and do that office. As soon as the child is born, the Father or some friend apply themselves to an Astrologer to enquire whether the child be born in a prosperous planet, and a good hour or in an evil. If it found to be in an evil they presently destroy it, either by starving it or letting it lye and die, or by drowning it, putting its head into a vessel or water, or by burying it alive, or else by giving it to somebody of the same degree with themselves, who often will take such children, and bring them up by hand with Rice and Milk, for they say, the Child will be unhappy to the parents, but to none else. We have asked them why they will deal so with their poor infants that come out of their bowels. They will indeed have a kind of regret and trouble at it. But they will say withal, why should I bring up a devil in my house? For they believe, a child born in an ill hour, will prove a plague and vexation to his parents by his disobedience and untowardliness." "But it is very rare that a first born is served so. Him they love and make much of. But when they come to have many, then usual it is, by the pretence of the child being born under an unlucky Planet, to kill him. And this is reputed no fault, and no law of the land takes cognizance of it." (Knox p. 94)

The adoption of children considered to be unlucky for their parents or that of sending such boys to a monastery for priesthood are practices which have existed in our



society, therefore Knox's claim that children were given for adoption by others seems factual. However, it is difficult to establish whether the practice of destroying new born infants due to their being unlucky was as common as he claimed, though it would have been more likely in the case of illegitimate children. D'Oyly's Diary 13-1-1812 mentions infanticide. In *Oedogodegera Kiri Etana vs Mohotigedera Ran Hamy*, BJC 25-1-1821 (CGA 23/32) "a witness described how a mother had thrown a child into a hole from which yams had been dug, saying she had no father for it." The Judicial Commissioner sentenced a woman found guilty of burying alive her female child, to three years imprisonment with hard labour in the gabadava, and to stand in the pillory three times in the public bazaar.<sup>46</sup>

That the situation was not as bad as portrayed by Knox is clear from the views expressed by Davy in his *Account of the Interior*, when he referred to these "unjust accusations":

"Amongst few people, I believe, are family attachments more strong and sincere: there is little to divert or weaken them; and they are strengthened equally by their mode of life and their religion. A family is the focus in which the tender affections of a native are concentrated. Parents are generally treated with the greatest respect and regard; and children with extraordinary affection. During the late rebellion, very many instances occurred of fathers voluntarily delivering themselves up, after their families have been taken. I have heard an assertion made, not at all compatible with the preceding statement, that the Singalese sometimes expose their children. The result of my enquiries is, that they hold the crime in abhorrence; and that it is never committed, excepting in some of the wildest parts of the country; and never from choice, but necessity, when the parents themselves are on the brink of starving, and must either sacrifice a part of the family or die altogether."<sup>47</sup> (Davy - 217).

However, that infanticide was not an unknown practice in Kandyan society of the 19th century is established by the following instance of 1829 referred to by Lawrie:

"A slave girl at Wattedegama walawwa bore a number of children but as she had too much to do in taking care of her master's younger children, her own to the number of eight, were buried as they were born, by order of the master but after the master's children were grown up she had four children who she was allowed to bring up. These four children were divided by the master among his relations."<sup>48</sup> It is to be noted here that under the Kandyan law slaves were considered property of their master and not as free individuals in that respect.

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<sup>46</sup>. RCD, 27-11-27, in Lawrie mss. p. 326.

<sup>47</sup>. *op.cit.* p. 217.

<sup>48</sup>. Lawrie mss. p. 306. Report of the Board of Commissioners 29 July 1929.



### Women's Economic Position and Role

In his account of the women's domestic role and their economic contribution Knox makes a clear distinction between the work of men and women. The detailed manner in which he deals with the subject enables one to get a vivid picture of the respective tasks of men and women, and the corresponding status accorded to them within the domestic sphere. Something of this will be revealed by the following extracts:

"For it is accounted a disgrace for the man to meddle or make with those affairs, that properly do belong unto the woman." (Knox p. 91).

"Then when the corn is grown about a span high, the women come and weed it, pull it up where it grew thick, and transplant it where it wants." (Knox p. 11).

"When another corn called *Tanna* ripens, the way of gathering it (when ripe), is, that the women (whose office it is) go and crop off the ears with their hands, and bring them home in baskets." (Knox p. 12).

"When they are to tread their corn they choose a convenient adjoining place ..... Then certain ceremonies are used. Then the women whose proper work it is, bring each their burthen of reaped corn upon their heads, and go round in the pit three times, and then fling it down. And after this without any more ado bring in the rest of the corn as fast as they can. For this labour, and that of weeding, the women have a fee due to them, which they call *warapol*, that is as much corn, as shall cover the stone and the other conjuration instruments at the bottom of the pit." (Knox p. 11).

"*Warrapoll*, that is the Corn they leave at the bottom of the heap after they have done fanning. Which is the woman's fee for their pains in weeding the Corn and in pulling it up where it is too thick, and planting it where it is thin." (Knox p. 101)

"But it is lawful for the Creditor, missing Corn, to lay hands on any of his goods: or if the sum be somewhat considerable, on his Cattle or children, first taking out a License from the Magistrate so to do, or if he have none, on him self or his wife, if she came with him to fetch the debt, if not she is clear from this violence; but his children are not." (Knox p. 102).

"These astronomers tell them also when the old year ends to the very minute. At which time they cease from all work, except the King's ..... They acquaint them also with the good hour of the New Year, they are to begin to work. At which time every Man and Woman begins to do somewhat in their employment they intend to follow the ensuing year." (Knox p. 110)

"To fetch wood out of the woods to burn and to fetch home the cattle is the womens work ..... and they make butter." (Knox p. 97).

"But always at their feet they will have a fire burning all night which makes more



work for the women; who must fetch firewood upon her head." (Knox p. 91).

Husbandry I could not follow, not having a wife to help and assist me therein, a great part of Husbandry properly belonging to the woman to manage." (Knox p. 217).

Most of their (Englishmen's) wives spin cotton yarn, which is a great help to them for clothing, and at spare times also knit" (Knox p. 214).

The information on the agricultural practices as related by Knox seem reliable, judging from the convincing nature of the graphic details provided by him, and moreover because he seemed to have obtained first-hand experience of the agricultural activities from his personal involvement in them. While at Eladatta during the period 1670-79 he cultivated a paddy field close to his house and maintained his own garden. The elaborate details he has been able to furnish, on such aspects as the ceremonies performed, crop varieties, and the nature and extent of the community involvement at different stages of the cultivation cycle make his account all the more convincing and is therefore invaluable for understanding the women's position in Kandyan society. While he includes information on the nature and extent of women's participation to show that they had a crucial and productive role to play within the economy of a Sinhalese family, he also makes mention of the various stages of the agricultural cycle in which women performed distinct tasks.

"At reaping they are excellent good, just after the English manner. The Whole Town, ..... as they join together in Tilling, so in their Harvest also; For all fall in together in reaping one man's field, and so to the next, until every mans Corn be down. And the Custome is, that every man, during the reaping of his Corn, finds all the rest with Victuals. The womens work is to gather up the Corn after the Reapers, and carry it all together." (Knox p. 11).

In addition to the economic contribution, these activities would have contributed in some measure towards gender equality by proving women their worth in a social sense too. Further, such involvement afforded them an opportunity to mingle with the others without any inhibitions. The fact that Knox mentioned about a certain payment to women is significant. Also note that in the ceremonies and rituals connected with cultivation women too were allowed to take part.

By his statements on the extent of women's participation in various economic pursuits Knox gives the impression that there was a kind of gender division of labour, with the implication that the more laborious tasks were generally performed by men as against women's tasks of a lighter kind. But one wonders whether a distinction could be made purely on the basis of the "labour" element of a particular function. The distinction he makes seems justified in some activities but occasionally one is faced with examples which do not fit into this theory. Therefore it is possible to argue that the gender division was not based solely on the "labour" element of a given activity but would have been related more to the practicalities of such activity. For example, transplanting and carrying were considered women's tasks in the field, but within the homes women performed certain laborious tasks, the distinction here being based on "domestic" as opposed to outdoor



functions.

### Women and Religion

Knox seems to have possessed little knowledge of the intricacies of the Buddhist religious philosophy. Yet he was somewhat accurate in presenting information about the popular religion as practised by the Kandyans of the day. He spoke of their "ordinary and daily worship, and their private and occasional devotions besides their solemn and annual festivals." (Knox p. 78). "Now of these there are two sorts, some belonging to their Gods that govern the earth, and call things referring to this life and some belonging to the Buddou, whose province is to take care of the soul and future well being of men." (Knox p. 73) The observance of religious ceremonies for the purpose of maintaining and preserving family health is another area covered by Knox. But one of their great and frequent business with their Gods is for the Recovery of health! (Knox p. 76) And that God or Devil that hath made them sick, in his power only it is to restore them. (Knox p. 76). "Sometimes in their sickness they go to the house of their gods with an offering, with which they present him, intreating his favour and aid to restore them to health. Upon the recovery whereof they promise him not to fail but to give unto His Majesty (for so they entitle him) far greater gifts or rewards....." (Knox p. 83).

In the practice of religion he noted the involvement of both men and women on equal terms and sometimes in the devotional aspects women were more prominently seen, as implied by some of his statements. "Ladies and gentlewomen of good quality, will sometimes in a fit of devotion to the Buddha, go a begging for him ..... These women taking the image along with them, carry it upon the palms of their hand covered with a piece of white cloth ....." (Knox p. 81). The only occasion when women were restricted from doing so, he says was "when they have their natural infirmities upon them." (Knox p. 94) In his references to the "solemn and annual" religious festival, "a solemn feast and general meeting called the Perahera" "when the greatest solemnity is performed in the city of Cankle" he maintains that women took part in this procession. "Next after the Gods and their attendance, go some thousands of ladies and gentlewomen, such as are of the best sort of the inhabitants of the land, arrayed in the bravest manner that their ability can afford, and so go hand in hand three in a row. At which time all the beauties on Zelone in their bravery do go to attend upon their Gods in their progress about the city." (Knox p. 79) The great festival in the month of March at Adam's Peak is mentioned; "at this time they go with Wives and children, for dignity and merit one being esteemed equal with the other." (Knox p. 80). These pilgrimages, from the details he gives, were meant for all members of the family to participate in and, as he says, were performed both for "Dignity and Merit." (Knox p. 79).

The festivities connected with the Bodhi tree at Anuradhapura he specifically mentions, and during that time, "they usually build Booths or Tents." some temporary and some of a permanent nature. "These buildings which are divided into Tenements for each particular family, the whole Town joyns, and each man builds his own Apartment; so that the building goes quite round a circle." "The use of these buildings is for the entertainment of the women who take great delight to come and see these Ceremonies, clad in their best



and richest Apparat. They employ themselves in seeing the Dancers, and the Juglers do their Tricks; who afterwards by their importunity will get Money of them, or a Ring off their fingers or some such maters. Here also they spend their time in eating Betle, and in talking with their Consorts, and shewing their fine cloths. These solemnities are always in the Night, the Booths all set around with Lamps; nor are they ended in one Night, but last three of four, until the Full Moon, which always puts a period to them." (Knox p. 82)

Such details give the impression that the religious festivities were made the occasion for merry making by the women and were regarded as important social events for the community.

The graphic details which he provided regarding the festivals could be information he gathered from others, since it has been suggested that Knox never visited the city. 'Altho we knew not the way to this town, having never been there in all our life'. (Knox p. 159). However, a further proof of the reliability of the account is a report of an identical nature on festivities during the nineteenth century. Ievers refers to Mr. Leishing's report in 1870 where such little booths are mentioned and, according to him "about twenty thousand people from all parts of the country came there annually and remained there for days." He commends the "decorum and sobriety of conduct" of the pilgrims which he said was "impossible of to conceive" and admires "the absence of a single police man to conduct the people."<sup>49</sup>

### Conclusion

In conclusion it could be stated that in the presentation of facts about the Kandyan society of seventeenth century Sri Lanka Knox's *Historical Relation* is invaluable and is a fine testimony to the power of observation, memory and of reporting Knox seems to have possessed. But in the interpretation of some such facts, particularly in his estimation and analysis of the marriage customs and the relative position accorded to the institution of marriage in Kandyan society, his ideas were fashioned by his own conditioning based on the Christian value system, and more especially the Puritan mould of thinking, resulting in him taking an uncompromising and somewhat rigid attitude to the complex issues involved. In addition, Knox's failure to comprehend and appreciate certain inherent characteristics of the indigenous culture affected his account negatively by causing confusion in his mind and thus leading him towards certain misjudgements on the state of morality in the Kandyan society of 17th century Sri Lanka.

TILAKA METTHANANDA

<sup>49</sup>. Ievers *op.cit.* p. 43.



## REVIEW ARTICLE

### REPRESENTING THE BURGHERS

Carl Muller, *The Jam Fruit Tree*, New Delhi:  
Penguin Books, India, 1993

Carl Muller's *The Jam Fruit Tree* may appear somewhat singular at first sight, but generically it belongs to an important line of Sri Lankan English-language writing: narratives (fictional, semi-fictional, and factual) of life in colonial Sri Lanka. The most celebrated of these is perhaps J. Vijaya-Tunge's *Grass for My Feet* (1935), a series of vignettes of childhood experiences in southern Sri Lanka; other such accounts include C. Drieberg's *Looking Back* (1933), Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* (1983), Yasmine Gooneratne's *Relative Merits* (1986), E.F.C. Ludowyk's *Those Long Afternoons: Childhood in Colonial Ceylon* (1989), and Gamini Salgado's recently published *The True Paradise* (1993). Works of this type now constitute a substantial subclass within Sri Lankan English-language writing.

Aspects of the lives of Burghers, in (largely) colonial Sri Lanka, the theme of Muller's *The Jam Fruit Tree*, is also the theme of Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*. The focus of Ondaatje's narrative, which is ostensibly autobiographical/biographical, but contains at the same time elements of fictionality, is his own family, but his family functions at one level as a microcosm for a certain class of colonial Sri Lankan Burgher. Ondaatje's forebears belong to a native class that is Anglicized, affluent, chic, and fashionably unorthodox. His parents, one of Ondaatje's principal subjects, are from "gracious, genteel families" (p. 149): "two of the best known and wealthiest families in Ceylon" (p. 172). They lead a fast, epicurean life and belong to a social set - - in which "everyone was vaguely related and had Sinhalese, Tamil, Dutch, British and Burgher blood in them going back many centuries" (p. 41) - that is passionately (and mindlessly) committed to the pursuit of pleasure:

The Gasnawa group tried to take in all the races. In December they drove down to the Galle Gymkhana, stopping on the way to order oysters and have a swim at Ambalangoda....The men wore tweed, the women wore their best crinolines. After the races they would return to Ambalangoda, pick up the oysters "which we swallowed with wine if we lost or champagne if we won." Couples then paired off casually or with great complexity and danced in a half-hearted manner to the portable gramophone beside the cars....The men leaned their chins against the serene necks of the women, danced a waltz or two, slid oysters into their partner's mouths. The waves on the beach collected champagne corks....A woman from the village who was encountered carrying a basket of pineapples was persuaded to trade that for a watch removed from a wrist....The gramophone accompanied a seduction or an arousal, it spoke of meadows and "little Spanish towns" or "a small hotel," a "blue room."



A hand cupped the heel of a woman who wished to climb a tree to see the stars more clearly. The men laughed into their tumblers. They all went swimming again with just the modesty of the night. An arm touched a face. A foot touched a stomach....Then, everyone very drunk, the convoy of cars would race back to Gasnawa in the moonlight crashing into frangipani, almond trees, or slipping off the road to sink slowly up to the door handles in a paddy field (p. 51-52).

The Burgher society that we encounter in much of Ondaatje's book is rather like a tropical avatar of the legendary Jazz Age Society (perhaps most famously rendered in fiction in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*). One member of this class - the narrator's bohemian grandmother - "piss[es] behind bushes" at "Bishops College Girls School on Parents' Day" (p. 124) and regularly cheats at bridge (p. 122); another gets drunk, and having assaulted an army officer, proceeds to hold up the train in which he is travelling (p. 152-155). Though the narrator discloses that his sisters were ashamed of the first of these two incidents, given the values and outlook of Ondaatje's forebears' class (which readers can easily reconstruct from the narrative) one suspects that many of them would have celebrated and fetishized such acts rather than been genuinely embarrassed by, or felt guilty about, them. The class that Ondaatje is writing about is sophisticated and self-assured to the point where nothing it does can be in bad taste or socially "wrong." Behavior which in a less cultivated and socio-culturally dominant class would be seen to be gross and ugly ("uncivilized" or endemic to the "yakkos") becomes fashionable and fetchingly eccentric in this society.

Muller's focus in *The Jam Fruit Tree* is again the Sri Lankan Burgher community, but within this community, a group that is less socially elevated than Ondaatje's Burghers. To use the delicately nuanced taxonomy devised by Muller's narrator, the Burghers that Muller writes about (or the majority of them at any rate) would belong to the Burgher "middle class." Below this class is the "lower middle class" and above it are the Burgher "upper middle class" and "upper class" ("some sort of Burgher 'holy of holies'" comprising "those who moved in exalted circles with the British" [p. 100]).

Muller's account of "middle class" Burgher life in *The Jam Fruit Tree* is self-consciously post-modernist. "Facts" and "fiction" are fused in this novel within a narrative construct that the narrator labels "faction" in a metafictional interpolation towards the end of the novel's third section (p. 149-150). The interplay of "facts" and "fictional" elements in a hybrid narrative structure links *The Jam Fruit Tree* to such earlier Sri Lankan narratives of colonial life as *Running in the Family*, *Relative Merits*, Punyakante Wijenaik's *A Way of Life* (1987), and Lloyd Oscar de Silva's *Echoes in the Memory* (1992). The subject matter of *The Jam Fruit Tree*, however, is not, as in these earlier works, fictionalized/partly fictionalized autobiographical/factual material, but fictional material that is narrated as factual chronicle. Whereas Ondaatje and others fictionalize fact (to varying degrees), Muller can be said to "factualize" fiction. Hence the claim of faction. The realm of "fact" is incorporated into Muller's narrative not only (fictionally) through its chronicle-structure but (factually) through narratorial references to (f)actual events and people: to, for example, the Japanese air strike on Colombo on Easter Sunday 1942, and



to the contemporary Sri Lankan poet Jean Arasanayagam and the singer Lylie Godridge who enter the narrative to testify to the credibility of fictional episodes. The deliberate conflation of "fact" and "fiction" within the same narrative frame interrogates and collapses the traditional distinction between these categories and foregrounds the truthful dimension of fictional narrative and the fictional dimension (or literariness) of factual discourse. Like Yasmine Gooneratne's *Relative Merits* and Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*, *The Jam Fruit Tree* is a self-reflexive work which among other things sets out to dismantle the conventional typology of narrative categories and problematize the truth-fiction dichotomy in a fashion that is characteristic of post-modernist writing.

The subject matter of *The Jam Fruit Tree* is family history; the novel traces the history of a "middle class" Burgher clan over three generations, beginning in the 1930s and ending in the early 1990s, the time of the work's actual composition. The von Bloss clan (headed by the patriarch Cecilprins von Bloss) is relatively unified in the thirties, but gradually disperses and becomes fragmented in Cecilprins' grandson Carloboy's (Carl Muller's?) generation when many members of the clan migrate to western countries. The disintegration of the von Bloss family over the generations implicitly encapsulates the disintegration of the Sri Lankan Burgher community as a whole owing to the mass migration of Burghers in the wake of post-independence socio-political changes that proved to be unfavourable to them. Beyond this disintegration again is the still larger dislocation of the nation itself which, though politically unfree, is stable and unified in Cecilprins' generation, but as the narrator regretfully notes towards the end of the novel, is shaken by "ethnic rivalry, intolerance and strife" and "guys...going around throwing bombs and demanding separate states" (p. 137) when the narrative is being composed (in 1991). However this may be, the clan, community, and nation, though impoverished in many ways, survives into the 1990s like the resilient Jam fruit tree which functions in the novel as an image for the clan, but could just as appositely stand as a trope for the community and nation as well.

In *The Jam Fruit Tree* Carl Muller does not claim to provide a definitive profile of the Sri Lankan Burgher community as a whole; nor, strictly speaking, perhaps even of the Burgher "middle class" to which most of his characters belong: his avowed subject is merely the fortunes of the von Bloss clan. But while the von Blosses are individuals, in the eyes of the reader they at the same time inevitably assume a broader significance, mirroring in some degree the group/class to which they belong. Particularly in the case of those whose first-hand knowledge of Sri Lankan Burghers is limited, the von Blosses would invariably take on a generic or representative status. The authenticity of Muller's picture of the Burghers can thus be expected to constitute an issue of some importance to many readers of his book.

What impression of Sri Lankan Burghers do we get from Muller's chronicle of the von Bloss family? In some ways Muller's account of Sri Lankan Burghers appears to endorse (or at any rate does nothing to contest) the essentially reductive yet pervasive perception prevailing in Sri Lanka - among the other races principally, but perhaps among the Burghers as well as an internalized self-image - that the Burghers are fundamentally fun loving, hedonistic, amoral, even immoral. In this stereotypical view the Burghers while



away their time drinking, copulating, and "putting parties." Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* comes dangerously close to reproducing this image.

Sex and festivity are indeed important themes of *The Jam Fruit Tree*. Some of the most memorable sections of this novel are descriptions of festive and celebratory occasions in the lives of the von Blosses. The account of the wedding of Cecilprins's daughter Anne and Colontota is an example. Here, through the accumulation of detail (food, clothes, etc.), energetic description, and lively narrative, the exuberant vitality of the von Blosses and the community that they represent is concretely established. Another example is Muller's account of a "Burgher Christmas". Here again the vigor of the Burgher lifestyle is communicated through the evocation of close detail (relating to food, ritual, and merrymaking) and fast-paced narrative. Lively action and carnival feature even in Cecilprins's wife Maudigirl's funeral (the other central dramatic event in the novel) when her drunken son Totoboy falls into the grave - "giving a series of banshee wails" - and the husband of the dead woman erupts in laughter upon returning home from the funeral:

Simmons stared. Then he gave a whoop of laughter and suddenly it seemed mandatory that everybody laugh too.....

Simmons went 'hoo, hoo' and wiped his eyes, 'Should have buried the bugger [Totoboy] also. Hoo, hoo, fell in, how did it happen?'

'Don't know,' Cecilprins roared, 'bending over and then phut! went inside.'

'Hoo, hoo, must have been pukka sight, no? Bella, you heard? Totoboy fell into the grave! Hoo, hoo' (p.79-80).

Funeral and festival merge in this episode when Cecilprins laughs uncontrollably and goes "indoors for a drink" with his neighbour (p. 80).

Sex occupies a position that is no less central than that of festivity in the life of the von Bloss clan. A wide range of sexual activity - heterosexual sex, homosexuality, masturbation, paedophilia, masochism, sadism, voyeurism, exhibitionism, even zoophilia - is described in the novel in varying degrees of detail and explicitness. In referring openly to sex and the erotic Muller brings into the English-language fiction of Sri Lanka a theme that it had hitherto marginalized or avoided altogether. This inclusion represents an important - and one feels healthy - extension of the thematic terrain of Sri Lankan English-language fiction:

It was the jam fruit tree that first gave the young ones an awareness of each other. Totoboy would climb and Anna would stand below and look up his short trousers and sing out: 'Chee, I can see.'

'See what?'



'Your birdie. It's hanging like a big worm.'  
 'You wait till I come down, will you.'  
 'I'll tell Mama.'  
 'So go and tell. Good for you to look, no? You also come up  
 and show yours.'  
 'But I haven't birdie like you.'  
 'So never mind. You climb, will you.'  
 And between the branches, hidden in the masses of foliage they  
 explored and wondered at the difference...(p. 20).

Sexuality is seen here in relatively Edenic terms. Sex (as I point out below) can take other, less innocent forms in the novel, but in general the prolific and polymorphous sexual activity of the von Blosses is not so much a symptom of moral degeneration on their part (or prurience on the author's) as a dimension of their Rabelaisian energy and ebullience. It denotes the acceptance of the erotic as an integral and natural part of life.

The stress on feasting and sexuality may invest Muller's portrait of the Burghers with a trace of a stock perception of this race, but his account of their life includes, too, a darker dimension that saves it from being crudely stereotypical. The fun and conviviality that figure prominently in the lives of Muller's Burghers are balanced by loss, suffering, brutality, and socio-cultural displacement and fracture. Some members of Cecilprins's family are separated from it early, never to be heard of again. Thus Ruthie, one of the daughters, marries a sailor - who turns out to be a Goanese cook - and is permanently cut off from the family circle. Her sister Marla (who is exhorted to conduct herself more decorously than her sister) leaves home without warning, and like her sister, is not heard of thereafter. Viva, a son, marries the daughter of a Pentecostal zealot, settles down in Bandarawela, and loses touch with the family to the point where he even fails to attend his mother Maudigirl's funeral. The mood and tempo of the narrative change with Maudigirl's death. Her death brings into the narrative sorrow and pathos that contrast with and also complement the sense of proliferating life that dominates the story of the von Blosses:

Maudigirl swallowed two spoons of the *conjee* and lay back.  
 'That's nice,' she whispered and closed her eyes, opened them again to seek out Cecilprins and raise a hand to him. He held on to it as the children closed around and father Romiel told all to kneel as he anointed her and made the sign of the cross on her eyes, mouth and on her breasts and then, with hands under the covers anointed the other openings in her body, sanctifying it, lest evil invade her in these dying moments. Gently, Cecilprins, his hands trembling, placed Maudigirl's rosary between her fingers and her eyes flicked from him to her children, one by one. They drew closer, touching her, willing her to stay, and she smiled, a large tear trickling down her cheek (sic), shuddered and gripped her husband's hand.

And so she died and the shrieks and wailings and the broken sobs of the men were terrible to hear (p.73).



The novel's principal embodiment of instinctive life, Sonnaboy himself, has a dark and less attractive side to his personality. He emerges in the narrative as an embodiment of childlike ingenuousness and earthy vitality, but is at the same time capable of violence and brutality, and habitually uses his immense strength to crush physically those who provoke him. Among the victims of his physical violence are George de Mello, Colontota, and the Werkmeister brothers, whom he beats up to "a pulp-like consistence" (p. 112). Towards the end of the story Sonnaboy degenerates into a figure that is alternately pitiful and menacing. His wife proves to be unfaithful to him, even going to the extent of having a child from her lover, and Sonnaboy, succumbing to an instinct that was always there, turns into an alcoholic. He takes revenge on his wife by battering her sexually, perversely using the phallus as an instrument of torture and intimidation. Sexuality, which earlier on in the story was an expression of naturalness and life, now decays into an impulse that inflicts pain and humiliation. The motifs of sexuality and aggression (both of which are associated with Sonnaboy in the novel) converge at this point in the narrative into open sadism:

Surely, suspicious, ugly after arrack, he began to look for an find enemies everywhere. Moving out of 34th Lane into Mahadangahawatte Lane, he took savage satisfaction in assailing Beryl with his penis. He used it as a weapon on her, constantly taking, constantly impregnating her.... There was no more love. Just Sonnaboy and his arrack; Beryl and the children (p. 207-8).

Loss, alienation, pain, suffering and cruelty coexist, then, in the lives of the Burghers with those other elements that are conventionally associated with them: fun, festivity, hedonism, and so on. Muller does not idealize the Burghers. His portrait of this community contains both attractive and unattractive sides. In this respect the Burghers are perhaps ultimately like any other community anywhere.

The loss and dislocation that the von Bloss clan experiences, as I have noted above, are reflected on a larger scale in the Sri Lankan Burgher community in general. The community, which was once secure in Sri Lanka, even privileged to some extent (as a glance at such accounts of Burgher society as Drieberg's *Looking Back* and Joseph Grenier's *Leaves from My Life* [1923] would suggest), becomes increasingly marginalized in post-Independence Sri Lanka and decimated by migration to the West. Of the von Bloss family, hardly anyone is left in the country by the time the narrative approaches the present; other Burgher families are equally dislocated. At this level the novel is about the disintegration of a family and a community. It has comedy and carnival in it, but these are tempered by elements of elegy and even of tragedy.

Considered as a whole, though, *The Jam Fruit Tree* is predominantly comic in its effect. It is a "comic novel," and contains both characters and situations that are vividly comic: Colontota, Papa Ludwick, Bertie Carrom and George de Mello are examples of the former, while the latter include Colontota's wedding, Sonnaboy's epistolary lovemaking to Brea, and the farcical attempts of representatives of the colonial judiciary to seize Sonnaboy's possessions (in lieu of a fine that the court imposes on him that he doesn't



pay).

For some readers, another source of the comic in this novel would be its dialogue - or much of it. Many of the characters in Muller's narrative speak a variety of Sri Lankan English that has traditionally been used by Sri Lankan English-language writers for comic effect, for example by H.C.N. de Lanerolle in his plays and more recently by E.C.T. Candappa in some of the stories in his collection *A Cage of Her Own* (1986). The humour here feeds on audience snobbery: laughter is directed at what the audience perceives to be a register of English that is inferior to its own (the implied Standard), a comically distorted, ridiculous ("mustee") version of the "normal" language: what H.A. Passe dismissed as "a very mixed and impure form of English" in his influential study of Lankan English *The Use and Abuse of English: Common Errors in Ceylon English* (p.6). This is the speech of a socially and culturally less evolved Other. The language of many of Muller's characters belongs to this category: it deviates from the Standard "serious" variety and would strike a certain kind of reader as being "funny" regardless of the author's intention. The Standard class of English against which the Other class is customarily (and comically) contrasted is used in the novel by such socially "superior" characters as Carrom, the Mother Superior of the Good Shepherd's Convent, the judge who presides over Sonnaboy's trial, and of course the narrator himself. The narrator of this story is "superior" to his characters, more powerful than they, not only by virtue of the superior knowledge that he shares with all omniscient narrators, but also by virtue of his possession of a "superior" tongue. This distinction is nowhere better illustrated than in the narrator's concluding line in which, in using a phrase appropriated from the language of his less educated characters (one that incidentally epitomizes their lifestyle) he dissociates himself from their language - and them - by fastidiously setting off the borrowed phrase in inverted commas: "we can still 'put a party'" (p. 210). Although the narrator claims that he is himself a "polyglot" Burgher (p. 29), he is clearly not a typical member of the class to which the majority of his characters belong. His language establishes and reveals his socio-cultural superiority over them. Though in many ways innovative and in some ways even iconoclastic, *The Jam Fruit Tree* is relatively conservative when it comes to language: Standard English is used for the narrative while the use of native English (or a variety thereof) is limited to sections of the dialogue. The latter variety of English is clearly not deemed to be sufficiently mature and respectable to be conferred the responsibility - and power/authority - of narrative.

The actual mechanics of the narrator's deployment of English in *The Jam Fruit Tree*, however, are not likely to concern most readers of the book. Being familiar with a tradition of Sri Lankan English-language writing that uses our English/es to generate humour, they would see in the Lankan English of Muller's Burghers simply comic material that complements the - perhaps more legitimate - comedy of situation and character found in the novel. Whether or not this English was/is actually used by any class of Sri Lankan is difficult to determine; equally difficult to determine is whether the kind of life that Muller portrays actually existed within the Sri Lankan Burgher community. These questions arise, of course, only if one considers Muller's work from the standpoint of mimetic fiction, chronicle, history, or reportage. *The Jam Fruit Tree* cannot be contained within any of these narrative categories; it is as hybrid as its subjects, the Burghers, or



their language, deriving its form from elements belonging to all of the genres noted above as well as from such non-mimetic forms as fantasy, caricature, parody, burlesque, and farce. The question of whether its material is "true-to-life" is in a sense irrelevant in a work that draws as heavily as does *The Jam Fruit Tree* on non-realistic narrative sources. To assess the quality of *The Jam Fruit Tree* it is necessary to lay aside the reductive framework of realistic fiction; freed thus one would find in the book an energetic and well-constructed plot, vivid characters and situations, and lively dialogue. Whether it is "realistic" or not, *The Jam Fruit Tree* is on its own terms as aesthetically satisfying novel that makes an important contribution to the still thin line of Sri Lanka's post-modernist English-language literature. This line would no doubt be further strengthened by the sequel to *The Jam Fruit Tree* that is due to be published shortly by Indian Penguin.

NIHAL FERNANDO



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