THE SRI LANKA JOURNAL OF THE HUMANITIES

VOLUME XXIII NUMBERS 1 & 2

UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA, SRI LANKA
1997

The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities is a bi-annual issue of the University of Peradeniya. It is devoted to the publication of articles based on original research in the Humanities and Social Sciences, which pertain mainly, though not exclusively, to Sri Lanka. The Journal is designed to reach a readership of specialists as well as non-specialists.

Articles and other communications submitted for publication and all correspondence relating to editorial matters should be addressed to:

The Editor
The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities,
c/o The Department of English,
University of Peradeniya,
Peradeniya, Sri Lanka.

Since all submissions are scrutinized by at least two referees, potential contributors should send two copies of their manuscripts with their names appearing on the title page only. All views and conclusions are those of the authors of the articles and not necessarily those of the Editorial Board.

Annual subscription is Rs. 150. in Sri Lanka. The overseas rate is U. S. $ 8.50 or the equivalent in convertible currency and includes postage. Booksellers are entitled to a trade discount of 20%. All cheques, bank-drafts, and other forms of remittance should be drawn in favour of the Registrar, University of Peradeniya, and forwarded to the Managing Editor. All enquiries by institutes and libraries for obtaining the Journal on exchange must be addressed to the Assistant Librarian (Periodicals), The Library, University of Peradeniya (Sri Lanka). Please note that this information supersedes anything to the contrary in preceding issues of Journal. The Journal is indexed in IBZ (International Bibliography of Periodical Literature), IBZ (CD-ROM), IBR (International Bibliography of Book Reviews of Scholarly Literature), IBR (CD-ROM) and Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory, (ISSN 0069-2379)

THE SRI LANKA JOURNAL OF THE HUMANITIES

1997

UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA

VOLUME XXIII NUMBERS 1 & 2

CONTENTS

EDITOR'S NOTE

The deadline for the receipt of articles for the next volume of *SLJH* has been extended to the 31st of July 1998 because the Editorial Board decided to publish a double volume--24 and 25 (1998 and 1999) to mark fifty years of Independence and the 25th volume of the Journal. While this issue, which should appear in 1999, will include studies by scholars from Sri Lanka and abroad, we are especially hopeful that some of those who were involved with *The University of Ceylon Review* and the *Ceylon Journal of the Humanities* will provide articles for this special, double volume. The former commenced publication just before Independence and put out 25 issues before it was replaced initially by *CJH* and subsequently by *SLJH*. Since *SLJH* (or its progenitors) has been appearing throughout the island's postcolonial history, it is ideally suited to carry articles that reflect on the period under review and to look forward to the next millenium.

Although *SLJH* is intended primarily for those scholars from the University of Peradeniya who conduct original research in the Humanities and the Social Sciences, the current volume reinforces its growing status as an international journal by including five submissions from academics based in the US, Australia, and Germany. We hope to maintain this trend in the years ahead.

THE AKKACĀLAIP - PERUMPAḶḶI AT NĀKAPAṬṬINAM

An Inscription on a Bronze Buddha Image in the collection of Art belonging to the family of John Rockefeller III

The Cūḷāmaṇivarma Vihāram at Nākapaṭṭinam was established on the initiative of the Kings of Srī Vijaya. The work of construction which commenced in the reign of the Cōḻa King Rājarāja I (985 - 1016) was completed in the reign of his son and successor Rājendra I (1012 - 1044). This institution was also known as Rājarājaperumpaḷḷi. It was endowed with lands by Rājarāja and the charter recording the land-grant was issued by Rājendra. The establishment of the Rājendra Cōla-perumpaḷḷi in the subsequent period represented a decisive stage in the further development of the monastic complex at Nākapaṭṭinam. The two institutions are referred to in the copper plate charter issued by Kulottunga I (1070 - 1122). Some aspects of the history of the monastic complex at Nākapaṭṭinam have been discussed elsewhere, on the basis of the information recorded in the Cōḻa copper-plate inscriptions found at the Leyden Museum.[1]

2. A large number of Buddha images in bronze have been unearthed at the site of the monastic complex, especially during the years 1856, 1926 and 1934.[2] These bronzes, some of which contain inscribed labels on their pedestals, are of considerable significance on account of their quality as works of art and as sources of historical information. A bronze Buddha from Nākapaṭṭinam is one of the priceless antiquities in the collection of Asian art belonging to Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller III. When this collection was exhibited at the Idemitsu Museum of Arts in Tokyo in October 1992, Professor Noburu Karashima of the University of Tokyo and his associates recognized Tamil letters on the pedestal of the Buddha image fron Nākapaṭṭinam. Several photographs of the inscription were taken by them.

---

1. S. Pathmanathan, "The Cūḷāmaṇivarma Vikāram of Nākapaṭṭinam" (included in a volume which is to be published by the University of Uppsala).

2. T.N. Ramachandran, "The Nagapattinam and other Buddhist Bronzes in the Madras Museum," *Bulletin of the Madras Government Museum*, New Series, General Section, Vol. VII, No. 1, Madras, 1965.

Karashima and Subbarayalu deciphered the inscription and their report on its contents was published in an issue of the *Journal of East-West Maritime Relations*.[3] They have focussed attention on the unusual significance of this inscription for understanding some facets of the Buddhist monastic establishments at Nākapaṭṭinam, which have hitherto remained unknown. The inscription on the pedestal of the image, written in two lines in Grantha and Tamil characters of the 11th century, consists of three sentences. The text, which is entirely in Tamil, contains a brief description of the Buddha image on a lotus pedestal.

The text of the inscription as deciphered and translated by Karashima and Subbarayalu runs:

Text

(1) irājendracōḷa - perumpaḷḷi akkacālaip perumpaḷḷi āḻvār kōyilukku tiruvutsavam eluntarula āḻvar ivvalvarai eḻuntaruluvittār ciṟutavūr nālāṅkuṇākara udaiyar.

(2) svasti srī patineṇ vishayattukkum akkasālaikaḷ nāyakar.

Translation

(1) "(This is) the āḻvār for a festival procession of the temple of Akkasālaip-perumpaḷḷi in Rājendracōḷa-perumpaḷḷi. This āḻvār was set up by Nālāṅguṇākara-udaiyar of Ciṟudavūr."

(2) "Let it be auspicious! (This āḻvār called) akkasalaikaḷ nāyakar is for all the "padinenvishayam".[4]

3. The decipherment of the text by Karashima and Subbarayalu is faultless. However, their translation and interpretation of the second and third sentences of the text do not seem to reflect adequately the true significance of the

---

[3]. Karashima Noboru and Y. Subbarayalu, "An Inscription on the Pedestal of the Bronze Buddha Image of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd collection: International Character of Nagapattinam Merchants during the Chola Period", *Journal of East-West Maritime Relations*, Vol. 3, (The Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan) 1994, pp. 13-18.

[4]. They have been persuaded to assume that the last sentence in the text is a description of the Āḻvār (Buddha). It may, however, be construed as denoting one who held the position of being an agent of the *Patineṇviṣaiyam*, although the word nāyakar would seem to have been applied as a designation of the Buddha in certain other instances.

expressions occurring in them. The words and concepts found in the text, which are archaic and obsolete, pertain to institutions and practices which have disappeared long ago. They are not easily intelligible even to specialists and cannot be interpreted solely with the aid of lexicography. Besides, the brevity of the text by itself could be a cause of ambiguity. Therefore, a critical examination of these items in considerable detail has to be undertaken, especially on account of the unusual significance of the contents of this monument for understanding some elements of the forgotten aspects of South Indian history and culture.

In the text there are references to eight important items, namely:

(1) Irājendra cōḻap perumpaḷḷi
(2) Akkacālaip perumpaḷḷi
(3) Āḻvār Kōyil
(4) Āḻvār
(5) Utsavam
(6) Nālāṅkuṇākara Uṭṭaiyār
(7) Patineṇ Viṣaiyam
(8) Akkacālaikaḷ nāyakar

An elucidation of all these expressions is necessary for arriving at a correct understanding of the text. In such an exercise one has to be on the side of caution as some of the words found in the epigraph could be explained in different ways. For instance each of the three words, āḻvār, uṭaiyār and *nāyakar* have a variety of meanings. The fact that they could be construed also as synonyms could create confusion. These could be explained properly only with the aid of authentic epigraphical glossaries and on the basis of usages and tradition.

4. The word āḻvār occurs at three places in the text. In two places, the bronze image of the Buddha is referred to as āḻvār. In the other place, the word is combined with *kōyil* to form the compound expression *Āḻvār kōyil*, which means the temple of the Āḻvār. As the inscription refers to the image as āḻvār and describes a temple attached to a *perumpaḷḷi* (monastery) as *āḻvār kōyil*, it is clear that the word āḻvār is applied in the text as a designation of the Buddha. In epigraphy the two forms āḷvār and *āḻvār* are used interchangeably. The

form *āḻvār* is found in two 12th century Tamil inscriptions in Sri Lanka.[5] An image of the Buddha is described as *Vairattāḻvār* in an inscription from Polonnaruwa while another one from Māṅkanāy in the Trincomalee district refers to the *āḻvār* of *Veyka-Vēram*.

The principal connotations of the word Āḻvār are God, gods, supreme devotees, religious teachers and persons of great eminence. As a term of description it could be applied to those who attracted and brought under their sway and influence men and women through their charismatic qualities. The twelve principal leaders of the movement of devotional theism in South Indian Vaiṣṇavism are generally referred to as Āḻvār.[6] It is significant that the inscription concerned refers to the Buddha as Āḻvār. Here, an expression found in the local Vaiṣṇava tradition is applied to designate the Buddha.

In the epigraph it is stated that the image of the Buddha was to be taken on festival processsion(s) at the temple of the Buddha (āḻvār kōyil). The expressions *utsavam* (festival) *eḻuntarul* (i) and kōyil are also significant as providing an indication of the extent to which the terminology found in the local Hindu tradition had been adopted to describe Buddhist practices and institutions at Nākapaṭṭinam. It would seem that the Hindu influence on Buddhism was not merely confined to the adoption of terminology but also extended to the realm of ideas and practices. This matter could be clarified only on the basis of further investigation in the future.

---

5. H.C.P. Bell, *Archaeological Survey of Ceylon, Annual Report for 1909* (41 pages) Colombo, 1914, p. 27; K. Kanapathypillai, "Māṅkanai Inscription of Gajabahu II", *University of Ceylon Review*, Vol. XX, No. 1 (135 pages), April 1962, pp. 12 - 14.

6. 1. "One who is in deep meditation on the attributes of the supreme being,
2. the ten Vaiṣṇava canonized saints and
3. the title of Buddhist and Jaina saints are said to be the connotations of this word. In *Avirōtiyāḻvar* and *Maittiriiyāḻvār* it is combined with words which have a Buddhist significance. *Tamil Lexicon*, University of Madras, Reprint 1982, p. 253.

5. The *Āḻvārkōyil* attached to the *Akkacālaip-perumpaḷḷi* may be considered as an image-house or pratimā-ghara.[7] The fact that an institution called *Akkacālaip-perumpaḷḷi* was found at Nākapaṭṭinam is known exclusively from this inscription. As the inscription could be assigned to the late 11th century on paleographical considerations it may be assumed that it was established in the 11th century. The expressions *Rājendracōlap-perumpaḷḷi Akkacalaip-perumpaḷḷi* suggest that the *Akkacālaip-perumpaḷḷi* was affiliated to the *Rājendracōḻap-perumpaḷḷi* as one of its component units. The name *Akkacālaip-perumpaḷḷi* is significant as providing some indication of the interaction between a community of people associated with the *akkacalai* and the monastic institutions at Nākapaṭṭinam.

In the Tamil tradition the word *akkacalai* has two distinct connotations; it means a "mint" or an "artisan manufactory."[8] It may also be noted here that the streets occupied by the artisan communities in some towns are described as *Akkacālaip-perunteru* in inscriptions. The Akkacālaip-perumpaḷḷi at Nākapaṭṭinam seems to have been established and supported by artisans engaged in metal craft production, and named after them chiefly on account of that reason.[9]

6. The second sentence in the epigraph, which runs: '*Ivvālvārai eḻuntaruḻuvittār Ciṟutavūr-Nalāṅkuṇākara uṭaiyār*' seems to provide some useful hints about some aspects of monastic organization at Nākapaṭṭinam. It describes the performance of some solemn act in relation to the Buddha image by the person called Ciṟutavūr Nālāṅkuṇākara uṭaiyār. This person was presumably from the locality called Ciṟutavūr and, as suggested by the description, a person of eminence and some consequence.

---

7. There was a temple called *Akkacalai-īśvaram* at the coastal town of Koṟkai in the Pāṇḍya Kingdom. *Akkacālai-iśvaram uṭaiyar* of Koṟkai was, according to an inscription of the time of Kulottunga I (1070-1122), located at Koṟkai, otherwise called *Maturāntaka-nallūr* of *Kuṭa-nāṭu* in *Uttamacōḻa vaḷanāṭu*.

8. The expression as found in Tamil texts has two meanings; "metal works" and "mint". *Tamil Lexicon*, University of Madras, Vol. I, p. 2.

9. The same could be said also of the Śaiva shrine *Akkacālai-īśvaram* at Koṟkai in the Tirunelveli district of the Madras Presidency in British India.

The compound expression *nālāṇkunākara uṭaiyār* could be split into three words: *nālām, kuṇakara(r)* and *uṭaiyār*. The word nālam, meaning "the fourth", is an adjectival form qualifying the nominal form *kuṇākara(r)*.[10] The word uṭṭaiyār, which is suffixed to the name *kuṇākara(r)* in this text, has a variety of connotations. It means owner, lord, god, king, prince, chief or a venerable or respectable person.[11] The presiding deity at all temples dedicated for the worship of Śiva is consistently referred to as *uṭaiyar* in Cōḻa and other South Indian inscriptions. It was also used as a royal epithet in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.[12] *Uṭaiyār* was also the designation of local chieftains in the Tamil country. However, the precise meaning of the word as found in the epigraph under consideration could be understood only after the clarification of the significance of the compound expression *nālāṅkuṇākara(r)*.

In the case of Nālāṅkuṇākara(r) of Ciṟutavūr the expression *Uṭaiyār* does not seem to have been applied as a designation of rank. He is not described as the *Uṭaiyar* of Ciṟutavūr. It may therefore be considered as an honorific having the same significance as the work *Svāmi*. Such an assumption presupposes that Kuṇakara(r) was a venerable person, a religious dignitary. As the expression *nālām* meaning 'the fourth' is prefixed to Kuṇakara(r), the expression Kuṇākara may be considered as a designation of rank in the monastic order. So Kuṇākara IV may be identified as a monk who was the fourth in order of pupillary succession to attain that rank. Such an impression suggests the possibility that the order of monks of which *Kuṇākara IV* was the head had existed at Nākapaṭṭinam and its neighbourhood for four generations by the time this monument was set up. This interpretation is consistent with historical information pertaining to the origins and development of the monastic complex

---

10. *Kuṇākara(r)* is the Tamil form of the Sanskrit/Prākrit word *Guṇākara*, which is formed by combining the two words *guṇa* and *ākara*. It means "the repository of virtue."

11 "Lord", "master", *"cuvami"*, and "the headman of a village" are said to be the meanings of this word. *Tamil Lexicon*, Vol. I (Reprint) p. 401.

12 In the Cōḻa inscriptions the epithet *Uṭaiyar* is prefixed to the names of the Kings of the lineage of Vijayālaya until the accession of Kulottunga I (1070 - 1122). In the Tamil inscriptions of the Vijayanagara period the expression *Uṭaiyār* is suffixed to the names of kings, princes and dignitaries, in the form of an honorific appellation.

at Nākapaṭṭinam.[13] It is probable that the *Akkacālaip-perumpaḷḷi* was occupied and administered by the order of monks of which he was the head. It is presumably in that capacity that Kuṇākara IV had the Buddha image ceremonially installed at the *āḻvār kōyil* attached to the *Akkacālaip-perumpaḷḷi*.

7. The third sentence in the text runs; Svasti Srī! Patineṇ Viṣaiyattukkum, Akkacālaikaḷ nāyakar. In this sentence a relationship between a group or community called *Patineṇviṣaiyam* and a person who had the designation *Akkacālaikaḷ nāyakar* is indicated.[14] The *patineṇviṣaiyam* was the designation

---

[13] As the Cūḷāmanivarma - Vihāram had its origins in the reign of Rājarāja I (985-1016), the monastic orders occupying the monasteries affiliated to it could not have had an association with this particular monastic complex for a period exceeding a hundred years.

[14] Lord, master, husband, king, the Supreme Being, leader and conductor are among the several connotations of the word *nāyakan*. *Nāyakar* could be a singular honorific form of *nāyakan*. The interpretation that the combined expression *akkacalaikaḷ nāyakar* is a description of Lord Buddha (Āḻvār) does not seem to be tenable. *Akkacālaip perumpaḷḷi Āḻvār* and *Akkacālaikaḷ nāyakar* do not appear to have the same connotations. The word *nāyakar* when combined with *akkacālaikaḷ* conveys the meaning superintendent or conductor. This impression is confirmed by the association of the *Akkacālaikaḷ* with a mercantile community. The close association of metal workers with merchant guilds is well attested by historical evidence. They were also sometimes incorporated into the merchant guilds as evident from the Vaisāli seals and some of the inscriptions of the *Ayyāvoḷe* in India and Sri Lanka.

All the Tamil scholars whom the present author consulted understood these expressions in the manner in which they are explained here. The unlikelihood of the *Āḻvār* of the *Āḻvār kōyil* attached to the *Akkacālaip perumpaḷḷi* being referred to in a text intended to describe a standing image of the Buddha, which was donated for the purpose of being taken on festival processions is an important consideration in our explanation of the expressions concerned. If the formulators of the inscription had intended to describe the Buddha in the concluding sentence, one would expect them to have applied the expression āḻvār, which occurs at three places in the text as a designation of the Buddha. In the light of the foregoing considerations the last sentence of the epigraph translates: "Hail prosperity". "The prefect of the artisan

of a leading merchant guild in medieval South India. It was synonymous with *patineṉpūmi*, an appellation of the Nānādesis who are sometimes referred to also as the *Aññūṟṟuvar* 'of the thousand directions'.[15] It is therefore clear that the *Aññūṟṟuvar* were established at a commercial sector of Nākapaṭṭiṉam and that they had entered into an abiding relationship with the monastic establishment in that town. Such an impression is further confirmed by an elucidation of the concluding expressions of the epigraph, Akkacālaikaḷ nāyakar.

The word *nāyakar* also has many connotations. In the Śaiva tradition it is applied to God. In Buddhism it is applied to designate the rank of one who holds a position of leadership and authority in the monastic Organization.[16] It was also a designation of rank in military and political organization. "Chief", "leader" and "Superintendent" are also some of the connotations of this word. When the expression *nāyakar* is combined with the word *akkacālaikaḷ* meaning 'artisan manufactories' it cannot *denote* God or a rank in the hierarchy of

---

manufactories for the merchants of the eighteen countries."

The present author had consultation on this point with Paṇṭitar ka. ce. Naṭarācan, Vittuvān ka. na. Vēlan, Srīmati Vasantā Vaittiyanātan, formerly of the Tarumai Ātinam, S. Aruṇasalam, Senior Lecturer in Tamil, and S. Thillainathan, Professor of Tamil at the University of Peradeniya.

15 That the *Nānādesis* were otherwise called *Aññūṟṟuvar* is attested by their inscriptions found in Sri Lanka. The epigraph from Viharehinna contains a reference to the *"Nānātecit-ticaiāyirattaññūṟṟuvar"*, "The *nānādesis*", otherwise called the Aññūṟṟuvar of the thousand directions. It is significant that *patinenpūmi* is consistently applied as a qualifying expression in the description of the *Nānādesis* otherwise called *Aññūṟṟuvar*. The expressions *patineṉpūmit-tēcitticai-Āyirattaññṟṟuvar* are found in inscriptions from Polonnaruwa, Padaviya, Vahalkada and Viharehinna. A. Velupillai, *Ceylon Tamil Inscriptions*, Part I (77 pages), Peradeniya, 1971, pp. 53-56, *Ceylon Tamil Inscriptions*, Part II (101 pages), Peradeniya, 1972, p. 12.

16 In this connexion, similar expressions such as *Vanniyarmakkaḷ nāyan*, "the chief of the community of people called Vanniyar", and *Tēvāranāyakam*, "the one who conducts the recital of tēvaram hymns" are significant as providing some useful hints about the connotations of the relevant expression.

monastic organization. So the appropriate explanation of the combined expression *akkacālaikaḷ nāyakar* is that it denotes a "prefect" or "superintendent" of artisan manufactories.[17] Such a person may therefore be recognized as an agent or functionary of the mercantile community. This interpretation inevitably leads to the conclusion that the artisan manufactories were functioning under the direction and patronage of the merchants.

Our explanation of the relationship between the merchants and artisans, as indicated in the present inscription, is supported by a consideration of relevant information found in the inscriptions of the merchant guilds of India and Sri Lanka. That the artisan communities were incorporated into the guilds (*nigama*) of merchant communities in North India during the period of the Imperial Guptas is evident from the inscriptions on the Vaisāli seals of the 5th century A.D.[18] In the inscriptional preambles of the medieval South Indian merchant guilds artisans are listed among the communities associated with the mercantile communities. Some sectors of the *nakaram* towns administered by the mercantile communities were occupied by artisan communities.[19] It may also be noted here that the co-ordination and direction of craft production in a *nakaram* town by the governing body of the *nakaram* is suggested by the reference to *Akkacālai Vikkiramātittan* in an inscription of the *Nānādesis* from

---

[17] S. Pathmanathan, "The Bronze Seal of the Nānādesis from Hambantota, Sri Lanka", *Asian Panorama: Essays on Past and Present* - A selection of papers presented at the 11th Conference of the International Association of the Historians of Asia. Ed. K.M. de Silva, Sirima Kiribamuna, and C.R. de Silva, New Delhi, 1990, pp. 139 - 150.

[18] For instance, an inscription of the time of Rājarāja I from Chidambaram refers to the carpenters, blacksmiths, goldsmiths and leather workers as "the people of the *nakaram* of *Kuṇamēnankaipuram*". The artisan communities are reckoned as *Kīḻkkalanaikal*, "residents subject to the authority of the dominant group (merchants) administering the *nakaram*". Kenneth R. Hall, *Trade and Statecraft in the Age of the Colas*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1980 (238 pages) p. 52.

[19] S. Pathmanathan, "The Nakaram of the Nānādesis in Sri Lanka circa. A.D. 1000 - 1300" (pages 122 - 163), *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* Vol. X, Numbers 1 - 2 (University of Peradeniya) 1984 (published in 1987), p. 145.

Vahalkada in Sri Lanka.[20]

In the light of the foregoing considerations, it may be inferred that the institution called *Akkacālaipperumpaḷḷi* was established and supported by artisan communities associated with the *Aññūṟṟuvar* established at Nākapaṭṭinam. There are instances where some religious institutions at market towns in Sri Lanka dominated by merchant guilds were named after military communities affiliated to them. The temple of the Tooth Relic at Polonnaruwa was named after the *Veḷaikkāṟar* in the service of a *nakaram* of the *Vaḷañciyar* during the early part of the 12th century.[21] At Mākal, otherwise called *Vikkiramacalāmēkapuram*, a *nakaram* set up by the *Aññūrruvar*, there was a Buddhist institution called *Aññūṟṟuvanpaḷḷi*. The shrine of the Goddess Paramesvarī at the same locality was named after a military community called *Vīramākāḷam*, which was associated with the merchant guild.[22] The inscription on the pedestal of the bronze image from Nākapaṭṭinam is the only epigraphic record among those brought to light hitherto, which contains a reference to a Buddhist institution in the Tamil country which was named after artisan communities associated with a mercantile community. The ideas which have emerged from the present investigation suggest that there was a *nakaram* encompassing a marketing area of Nākapaṭṭinam, which was dominated by the *Aññūṟṟuvar*. It may be inferred that this particular mercantile community had negotiated and obtained for itself a major share in the supply of commodities of local and foreign origin to the monastic establishments of Nākapaṭṭinam.

Returning to the connotations of the expressions in the last sentence of the epigraph, it may be suggested that the expressions that read *patineṇviṣaiyattukkum akkacālaikaḷ nāyakar* translate: 'The prefect of the artisan manufactories' for the (entire) *patineṇviṣaiyam*. The form *Patineṇviṣaiyattukkum* seems to suggest the corporate character of the mercantile community concerned. It would seem that this bronze was made on the instruction of 'the prefect of the artisan manufactories' and donated by him. A further point that emerges from the present discussion is the possibility that

---

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 136 - 140.

21 S. Pathmanathan, "The Tamil Slab Inscription of the Vīrakkoṭi at Buddhumuttava, Nikaweratiya: Urbanization at Magala", *The Sri Lanka Journal of Humanities*, Vol. XX, numbers 1 - 2, University of Peradeniya Sri Lanka, 1994. (published in 1995) pp. 15 - 30.

22 S. Pathmanathan, "The Nagaram of the Nānādesis..." pp. 126 -127.

the person described in the final portion of the text was a master-craftsman.

It is noteworthy that most of the epigraphic records left behind by the merchant guilds at their commercial outposts are donative inscriptions recording their benefactions to religious foundations. There were many instances where images were donated by merchant guilds. Two miniature bronze images of the Mother Goddess, brought to light by archaeological excavations at Padaviya and the Jetavanarama complex, Anuradhapura, are among the most recent finds pertaining to the activities of the Nānādesis. The expression *Nānādesi* found inscribed in the form of a label on the pedestal of both these bronzes, suggests that they were donated by members of that corporate mercantile community.[23] It is also significant that one of the inscriptions set up by the *Nakaram* of *Ayyampoḻil paṭṭinam* at Padaviya in Sri Lanka, contains the expressions; *Vikkirakañ ceytu kuṭuttōm*, "we made images and donated them".[24]

9. In conclusion, it may be stated that the bronze Buddha image found in the collection of antiquities belonging to the family of John Rockefeller III is of a unique character as a work of art and as a historical monument. The inscription on its pedestal is of the utmost importance among the historical records bearing on the Buddhist monastic complex at Nākapaṭṭinam. It records vital information not found elsewhere. It highlights the fact that an institution called *Akkacālaip perumpaḷḷi* was established at some time during the 11th century. That it was founded and supported by artisan communities associated with a mercantile community described figuratively as "Those of the eighteen countries", and named after them is clear from the scrutiny of text. This institution which functioned as a unit of the *Irājendra cōḻap perumpaḷḷi* had a shrine called *Āḻvār kōyil* attached to it, where festivals were conducted at which images were taken in procession.

An examination of the text of the inscription suggests that the bronze image concerned was caused to be made and donated by a master-craftsman or 'The prefect of artisan manufactories' serving as a functionary of a merchant guild established at Nākapaṭṭinam. It was donated for the purpose of being taken on festival processions. It would seem that the image which was donated to the temple was ceremonially installed by a religious dignitary called Kuṇākara

---

23 A Velupillai, *Ceylon Tamil Inscriptions*, pt. II, pp. 19-20.

24 Karashima Noboru and Y. Subbarayalu, "An Inscription on the Pedestal of the Bronze Buddha Image...", *Journal of East West Maritime Relations*, Vol. 3, pp. 13-18.

IV of Cirutavūr. He was probably a dignitary who was the head of the monastic order which occupied the *Akkacālaip perumpaḷḷi* and administered the shrine (Āḻvar Kōyil) attached to it.

In the light of the present study the text of the inscription may be split up into three sentences and translated in the following order:

Text

1. Irājendracōḻap perumpaḷḷi Akkacālaip perumpaḷḷi Āḻvār Kōyilukku utsavam eḻuntaruḷa ālvār.

2. Ivvāḻvārai eḻuntaruḷuvittār Cirutavūr nālāṅkuṇākara Uṭaiyār.

3. Svasti Srī. Patineṇviṣaiyattukkum Akkacālaikaḷ nāyakar.

Translation

1. This image of the Lord (Buddha) is for festival procession(s) at the temple of the Lord (Buddha) attached to the **Akkacālaip Perumpaḷḷi** of **Irājendracōḻap perumpaḷḷi.**

2. This image of the Lord (Buddha) has been installed by the venerable Kuṇakara IV of Cirutavūr.

3. Hail Prosperity. "The prefect of artisan manufactories" for "the merchants of the eighteen countries".

S. PATHMANATHAN

ATTEMPTING THE SRI LANKAN NOVEL OF RESISTANCE AND RECONCILIATION: A. SIVANANDAN'S *WHEN MEMORY DIES*

Since the number of English novels produced in Sri Lanka continues to be small, despite a marked increase in output over the last few years, any new novel that appears is subjected to considerable scrutiny and inevitably compared and contrasted with previous work. A. Sivanandan's monumental novel *When Memory Dies* is no exception. It is partly, like Vijaya-Tunge's *Grass for My Feet*, Lucian de Zilwa's *Scenes of a Lifetime,* and Kenneth M. de Lanerolle's *Southern River*,[1] a work of remembrance--"partly" because *When Memory Dies*, in spite of its opening words, "[m]y memory begins, as always, with the rain - couched against the great wall of the old colonial building that once housed the post office,"[2] is not really set up as an autobiographical novel. The novel, furthermore, discloses parallels with Yasmine Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies* and Carl Muller's Von Bloss Trilogy[3] because it chronicles the social, political, and other changes in Sri Lanka over three generations, a period that saw the country transformed from a Crown Colony to a postcolonial or, some would argue, a neocolonial State. Then again, in trying to capture life in Jaffna before the ethnic conflict, the novel shows points of convergence with Jean Arasanayagam's *Peacocks and Dreams*.[4] And, written as it is by one who is now domiciled abroad, *When Memory Dies* also belongs to that increasing list

---

1 J. Vijaya-tunga *Grass for My Feet* (London: Edwin Arnold, 1935); Lucian de Zilwa, *Scenes of a Lifetime: The Autobiography of Lucian de Zilwa* (Colombo: H.W. Cave, 1967); Kenneth de Lanerolle, *Southern River* (Colombo: Hansa, 1971).

2 A. Sivanandan, *When Memory Dies* (London: Arcadia, 1997) p.5. All subsequent references are to this edition and are incorporated in the main body of the text.

3 Yasmine Gooneratne, *A Change of Skies* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1992); Carl Muller, *The Jam Fruit Tree* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1993), *Yakada Yaka: The Continuing Saga of Sonnaboy von Bloss and the Burgher Railwayman* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1994), and *Once Upon a Tender Time: The Concluding Part of the Von Bloss Family Saga* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1995).

4 Jean Arasanayagam, *Peacocks and Dreams* (New Delhi: Navarang, 1996).

of Sri Lankan expatriate novels.

To point out similarities between this novel and others, however, is not to suggest that Sivanandan merely repeats the concerns that have been covered by previous writers. Not only is *When Memory Dies* substantially more ambitious than many of the works cited above, but it will surely achieve a distinctive place in Sri Lankan Writing in English for the patently subaltern stance that it adopts and for its treatment of the ethnic conflict from angles and on a scale that have not been attempted previously. Raja Proctor's *Waiting for Surabiel*[5] is perhaps the only other Sri Lankan novel which gives such primacy to the subaltern, but it lacks the breadth, length and depth of *When Memory Dies*.

Sivanandan's book fits in neatly with the kind of appraisal made popular by members of the Subaltern Studies Group who dispute the claims of many "traditional" historians and historiographers. The latter conclude, for instance, that the Nationalist Movement in India was conducted and rendered successful by a few leaders of the *elite*. These formulations, as Said points out, ignore "the constitutive role of an enormous mass of subaltern Indians, the urban poor and the peasants, who throughout the nineteenth century and earlier, resisted British rule in terms and modes that were quite distinct from those employed by the elite."[6] The Subaltern Studies Group believes, therefore, "...that elitist historiography should be resolutely fought by developing an alternative discourse"[7] which gives primacy to the contribution of the marginalized, like workers, peasants and women to such struggles. Sivanandan has improved on these objectives by constructing a novel that presents subaltern perspectives, foregrounds subaltern themes, focusses on subaltern characters, and formulates subaltern solutions to the problems besetting the island. Conditions in the country are such that these "solutions" cannot be effected. But they do provide a basis for equitable, harmonious living when (or if) the blood-lust is replaced by even a modicum of normality.

---

5 Raja Proctor, *Waiting for Surabiel* (St. Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1981).

6 Edward Said, Preface. *Selected Subaltern Studies*. Ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Oxford: OUP, 1988) v-xii.

7 Ranajit Guha, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India." *Selected Subaltern Studies*. Ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Oxford: OUP, 1988) p. 43.

Sivanandan's subaltern stance, which is influenced by Marxist thought, is spelled out by several individuals. Rajan who narrates the middle section of the novel declares:

> Perhaps he should be a writer, a historian maybe, recover for his people the history they had lost? Put them back on course, help them change the history inflicted on them? It was not as though he had not given a lot of thought to his country, its formation, its predicament. But for whom would he write? He did not want to write for intellectuals, they made playthings of knowledge. For ordinary people? But he did not know people the way Lal knew people, he did not have the feel of them, he was still young and immature. He understood contradiction out there in society, but he did not grasp it in himself, in people. He had not till now seen conflict as necessary to one's personal growth, as an essential part of life, its motor, as natural as breathing. He had not seen that the dialectic was also a felt sensibility and, unless he grasped that, he would not be able to change anything. (p. 291)

His foster-father S.W. too declares that "the real heroes" in the workers' movement were not the educated leaders but "the ordinary people, who suffered a lot of hardship in helping the strikers" (p. 56). Lali for her part is amazed to find "wisdom and understanding and tolerance tucked away in a little hamlet beyond the reach of civilization" (p. 217) in people like Uncle Para and Uncle Pathi whom she regards as the "...real backbone of the country. They were the real custodians of our history and our culture, and they were everywhere. There was hope for the country yet" (p. 217). The subaltern "solution" to the country's woes is supplied by Vijay:

> The answer was simply that the people themselves should take power [...] ordinary people, and in Sri Lanka that meant the workers, peasants, fisherfolk, market women, artisans. But for them to want to do that, each of them, each of these groups, had to be shown how the new society could improve their own lives while improving the lives of others. And even within these groups there were sections whose interests might be different, like the *andé* cultivators, or dock workers who owned a bit of land back in the villages, or estate workers who worked the land but had none, or fisherman who fished for pearls not fish. It was a mistake to think that all workers, or all clerks had the same incentive to change things. (p. 271)

Neither the "hope" that Lali refers to here nor the pat "answer" that Vijay espouses ever materializes in the life of the novel. S.W., Para, Pathi, and others either die before they can make lasting contributions or are swept aside by people who are more interested in the material rewards offered by the open economy and in promoting the "superiority" of their race and class rather than in pursuing what they regard as the quaint idealism propounded by these others. Some of the leaders who replace them, though idealistic in the same way, are unable to galvanise sufficient support to resist the "enemy." They are often reduced to fighting individual battles that achieve little. It is this decision to project reality, rather than to romanticise the marginalized for whom Sivanandan's support is total, and his willingness to depict the many instances in which subaltern movements are defeated or corrupted that places *When Memory Dies* in the same league as political novels like André Malraux's *Man's Estate*.[8]

Marginalized groups, whether set up as Trade Unions, the JVP, or Tamil militants[9] show much promise initially, but they are eventually devitalized, corrupted, and subverted for a multiplicity of reasons. These interest groups are overcome by the might of the State, undermined when senior members make "deals" with the government, lose credibility when they begin to practise the bigotry and the chauvinism which their "manifestos" had denounced, and are ultimately destroyed when differences of opinion within the membership lead to rifts and ultimately to violence.

Although this novel refers to many politicians and public figures of our time, A.E. Goonesinha, the labour leader, is one of the few persons to be actually mentioned by name (Names of other notables are slightly altered or substituted by nicknames; for instance, Meril Sithu for Cyril Mathew, Victory Dick for J.R. Jayawardena, and Manda Shalini for Nanda Malini). Sivanandan gives considerable attention to Goonesinha because he represents the kind of labour leader who uses his position to aggrandise himself rather than to work for his followers. S.W., a true leader, instinctly distrusts Goonesinha; while Tissa, Goonesinha's loyal follower at the time, hangs on his every word. Tissa

---

[8] André Malraux, *Man's Estate*. Trans. Alastair Macdonald (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1978).

[9] The JVP is called the PLF which perhaps stands for "People's Liberation Front," a direct translation of "Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna" (that is, the JVP). The Tamil militant groups are called "the Boys" throughout the novel.

believes that Goonesinha will be able to mobilize the workers for a confrontation against the bosses. He even accepts Goonesinha's approach (which is essentially the British Labour Party's approach) that "first, they give us adult suffrage and then, when we have learnt to use the vote, independence" (p. 104). Tissa's belief in Goonesinha continues until some workers who storm the Police Station to protest the assault on Goonesinha are shot at by the police.[10] While Tissa is traumatized when his "disciple," Sultan, is killed in the shooting, what shatters him even more is the discovery of a symbolic partnership between the Raj and Mr. Goonesinha which is very dramatically rendered by Sivanandan:

> A stunned silence fell over the crowd. They had no time to run. Now they looked around them, gazed dazedly at the dead and wounded and slowly their sorrow turned to anger. But before it could flare into riot, a voice came over the loudspeaker. "Friends," it began, and the crowd stood still. Tissa looked up and he saw his Chief on the top step above him, beside a white man in a white suit, with braid and buttons, and a plumed white hat on his head
>
> "Friends," the velvet voice had put aside the loudspeaker. "The strike is over. The Colonial Secretary and I have come to an agreement." (pp. 110-111)

Any agreement after the killings is considered a betrayal by Tissa, and even the cautious Saha agrees with him. It comes as no surprise, therefore, when it is discovered on the eve of Independence that

> The Ceylon National Congress had sold out [since] ... all they were interested in was to hold on to their lands and privileges.... As for Goonesinha and the Labour Party, they had abandoned the cause of the workers long ago. Goonesinha himself was content to sit in the State Council or to drive around in his chauffeur-driven "limousine" ... doffing his pith hat, with the ever-thinning red band around it, to imaginary crowds. (p. 146)

---

[10] For a detailed, historical and sociological scrutiny of the events on which these episodes are based see the chapter entitled "'I Shall Have You Slippered': The General and the Particular in a Historical Conjuncture," in Michael Roberts, *Exploring Confrontations: Sri Lanka - Politics, Culture and History* (Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994), pp. 213-248.

Any Sri Lankan, or Sri Lankan expatriate who chooses to write a novel that privileges the ethnic issue lays himself/herself open to obvious charges. Given Sivanandan's background, a Tamil who emigrated to England after the riots of 1958, it is inevitable that any pronouncement he makes on the issue would be subjected to scrutiny by reviewers and critics intent on discovering incidence of racial bias. Sivanandan has taken up the challenge without demur. He does invoke stereotypes of the Sinhalese and Tamils on occasion, but for the most part explodes the stereotype as myth or explains the reason for stereotyping. Pandyan is portrayed as a "typical" man from Jaffna, simple, hardworking and, as the following near-Laurentian description discloses, one who lives close to the soil:

> He had fought and accepted and revelled in the recurring drought and the untimely rain. He had wept when the crops failed him and rejoiced when they broke through the barren land against all the dictates of heaven. And he had celebrated his own strength at having brought them through against the will of the gods before whom only a moment before he had lain an abject suppliant (p. 11).

He is rendered frugal by poverty and although he never thought of "[r]espect and security" as a young man, he is forced to seek the same through Saha when his farm is sold to pay for his sisters' dowries. Small wonder then that his son should initially be cautious of people in the South, who accustomed as they are to a land that was fruitful and lush, would while away their time on trivial pursuits, without having to struggle for their very existence like their counterparts in the North. He discovers eventually, however, that the South has much to offer him:

> By the time Sahadevan returned to Colombo a week later, his ideas about southern people had already begun to change. They were not as uncaring and self-indulgent as he had previously assumed. Though they had cause to be; their land was kinder to them, their hardships less fraught. Perhaps that explained their outgoing natures and their easy acceptance of life's vicissitudes. His own folk by contrast were impassive and dour, their relationships more principled, their kindnesses more harsh. They gave as the southerners gave but, unlike them, they knew the cost of their giving. (p. 21)

Despite such comparisons and contrasts, Sivanandan does not delve too deeply into the problems confronting the Sinhalese and Tamils in the first part of the novel. He is more interested in providing a homely account of life in

Sandilipay, in showing the peaceful co-existence which characterized relations between the two major communities in the South at that time, in critiquing Empire, and in outlining the worker's movement. Given the hospitable environment he finds in the South, it is no accident that S.W. should be more of a father to Saha than his own father and that his best friend should be Tissa. The relationship between the taciturn, thoughtful Saha and the intense Tissa, in fact, is one of the sequences in the book that is best presented.

Another factor that is deliberately constructed and not coincidental is the author's portrayal of two major players as bastards. Para, Saha's half-brother, is the product of Pandyan and the midwife, and Saha's "son" is not his own but Lali's child by Sena, a hospital attendant whom she was on the verge of marrying when he was killed during the *hartal*. Such a strategy allows the author to challenge the notion of a pure race and to focus on the intersections among races rather than the binary opposition favoured by those who wish to maintain differences between them; in other words, Sivanandan, like Regi Siriwardena in *The Lost Lenore: A Tale*,[11] gives hybridity a positive value. He adopts a similar method to interrogate the whole idea of class: Saha's first love is a lame pariah, and if he had not been killed, Vijay would have married Meena, the daughter of an estate labourer. Sivanandan's insistence on having individuals from various communities and classes becoming friends, comrades, lovers and spouses does at times draw too much attention and constitutes one of the weaknesses in the novel. But the strategy is generally effective. All these characters are cast as reliable, conscientious, and morally upright. And their attitudes and actions serve as an ironic commentary on the ridiculous lengths to which others take communalism and class-consciousness in the sequences that describe the country since independence. They also suggest an alternative mode of living for Sinhalese, Tamils and other communities in Sri Lanka.

Sivanandan spares neither the Sinhala only fraternity nor the Tamil chauvinists in sections two and three in which he views with anguish the increasing polarization of the two communities. These positions are sometimes expressed by bigots and on other occasions (most alarmingly) by people who are normally reasonable. The "debate" between Rajan and Visvappa is so crucial in showing Sivanandan's impartiality *vis a vis* the communal issue that it is reproduced here in almost its entirety:

> "You don't understand these *Cheenapulis, thambi*," Visvappa broke into my thoughts. They are not civilized. They have no culture. What can

---

[11] Regi Siriwardena, *The Lost Lenore: A Tale* (Colombo: n.p., 1996).

you expect from them? Where are their poets their Valmiki's and Barathis, their ... "

The man's arrogance infuriated me. I had half a mind to tell him that my wife was a *Cheenapuli* too, and my son, but he was my father's friend and a guest in our house. I turned off waiting for an opportunity to escape and wondering how a learned man like him - he was a contributor to the *Madras Hindu* and a popular Tamil novelist - could be proud of his prejudices.

"Perhaps that's why the Sinhalese want their language back," I heard my father say, emphasising 'Sinhalese' as though to give Visvappa notice that he would not have them derided as *Cheenapulis*. "We never lost ours, you know, even under the British."

"But that's because it's an ancient language." Visvappa was unabashed, "And spoken all over the world [...] Where is Sinhala spoken except here in Ceylon among a handful of people?" [...]

"You really have taught me something, Mr Visvappa, sir," my father said after a while, in measured tones. "You really have." Visvappa smiled, acknowledging the compliment as his due, and even I was taken in. "Here I was getting mad about the Sinhala-only business [...] And it is people like you [...] who make communalists of us all" (pp. 205-06).

Sivanandan finds equally obnoxious the racist and propagandist material found in school text books which is calculated to deceive immature children. One junior school history reader declares, for instance, that "The history of Lanka [...] is the history of the Sinhala race. The Land nourishes the Race, the Race civilizes the land" (p. 308).[12] Such rhetoric not only ignores the plurality that constitutes Sri Lankan society but also inculcates in young minds the preposterous suggestion that Sri Lanka is a Sinhalese preserve.

These absurd "debates" and the descriptions of damaging yet hilarious readers are soon rendered redundant, however, once the fist, the knife, the torch, the bomb, and the gun take over. Sivanandan takes pains to recount with increasing horror the atrocities of 1958, 1977, and 1983 that largely affected the

---

[12] See also the discussion between Vijay and his students about Sinhalese and Tamils in pages 295 and 296.

poorer classes and in particular the estate labourers who find themselves "in a sort of no-man's-land between the Tamils and the Sinhalese" (p. 355). Particularly horrendous is the gang-rape and murder of Lali who is mistaken for a Tamil, which confirms a point that Sivanandan implies throughout the book that by maiming and killing each other, the Sinhalese and Tamils are merely victimizing themselves.

Sivanandan does not concentrate too much attention on the PLF (JVP) insurgency of 1971, the first major threat to the State since Independence which serves to reinforces a comment made by Thiru Kandiah long before this novel was published that Sri Lankan English writers show "... a reluctance to confront fully and grapple with all of the issues thrown up by the events dealt with, in all of their complexity"[13] *vis a vis* this event. Perhaps Sivanandan's decision not to devote much attention to the same was influenced by the scale and range of his novel. Too great a focus on the insurgency would have imperilled the examination of other issues and events that are equally important. What little is presented is given in retrospect. The author highlights the manner in which "the PLF leadership had gone for each other during the trials" (p. 260) and shows how dispirited and disillusioned the new generation of university students had become in the wake of the failure of the insurgency which had after all originated from within their ranks. Sivanandan also indicates (especially in the sequence at the Peradeniya University Faculty Club) how academics who had been "quick to redeem an injustice" in the old days can now only "drink to forget what we have forgotten" (p. 260). Even more disturbing and damning, however, is the author's disclosure that even the PLF which had been founded on the most "pristine" Left Wing principles was vitiated by communalism. Vijay discovered this to his cost when he had tried to speak up for plantation workers:

> The party line was that India was an Imperial power and that the Indian estate workers in Ceylon, and all Tamils for that matter, were a fifth column. Vijay had opposed the view vehemently and was accused, in the ensuing row, of being fathered by a Tamil. Pathirana, it was alleged, was not his real name though that was how it stood in his birth certificate. Vijay was suspended from the party "for further inquiry"

---

[13] Thiru Kandiah, "Inadequate Responses and the Attenuation of Creativity: Sri Lankan English Fiction of the Insurgency of 1971" *The Writer as Historical Witness: Studies in Commonwealth Literature*. Ed. Edwin Thumboo and Thiru Kandiah (Singapore: UniPress, 1995) p. 407.

and, though Padma fought for him tooth and nail, it was not till Vijay was discovered to be the "real" son of a Sinhalese hero of the *hartal* of 1953 that he was allowed back into the fold. (p. 254)

"The Boys," according to Sivanandan, appeared in Jaffna against the background of the language policies, attacks on Tamils in the South, their harassment in the North by the police and the armed forces, the introduction of standardization which they felt was mostly targeted at Tamils, and the denial of employment to them on the basic that they had more than their fair share of jobs during colonial occupation. As a member of Rights and Justice, his connections with the North and the South, and his credo that all socialist groups irrespective of race and creed should join hands to set the country back on the right track, Vijay is potentially acceptable to most as a mediator in the conflict between Tamils and Sinhalese. The Boys he first encounters seem reasonable enough. They are not interested in brandishing the "historical claims of the Sinhalese and the Tamils (p. 327);" rather, they wish to find out why the Left Movement had failed in the South and how well intentioned people like Vijay could be of practical use to them. The intelligentsia in Jaffna, however, are little different from the pundits in the South:

> ...they all had the same views and displayed the same leaden quality of righteousness as his Sinhala colleagues "back home"--the same stereotypes, the same myths, the same determination to reshape history to their prejudices, only in reverse. It was as though they had never known Sinhalese people, lived among them, married into their families, stood beside each other worshipping the same gods. All they would say over and over again and in nightmarish unison, was that they were a separate people who had, for centuries, been mixed up like an *achachru* [...] by European colonialists and now wanted to be returned to their pristine separateness in their pristine homelands. And their historical and their archaeological findings led them, like their counterparts in the Sinhalese universities, to the conclusion that they had worked for. (p. 324)

This quotation, while disclosing the futility of expecting people of the Old Guard in both camps to come together to bring the country out of the Slough of Despond it had fallen into, provides further evidence that the novel does not valorize the cause of Tamils at the expense of the majority community. Not only does Sivanandan give voice to other perspectives, but he even dramatizes the contradictions, the procrastinations, and the mistakes of those, like Vijay, who represent the subaltern perspective that he endorses.

The country, unfortunately, is not ready for compromise and concessions. The last sections of the novel concentrate on rigged elections, spurious referendums, the stifling of political opposition and more communal violence. Sivanandan cleverly insinuates Vijay into the Welikade jail as a suspected terrorist sympathiser after an interrogation that is reminiscent of scenes from Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* or Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.[14] He is initially placed in solitary confinement and then with hardcore criminals because the cells have to be vacated to accommodate the "dhemmalas" (p. 367) who have been rounded up. It is under these circumstances that Vijay witnesses the infamous prison "riot" of the early 80s during which many Tamil detainees suspected of being associated with the separatists were killed, and is himself knocked senseless in trying to intervene. What is implied in the entire episode is that warders, guards, prisoners, and perhaps outsiders colluded in this "riot." The fact that some rioters with injuries and others like Vijay who are hurt by accident were conveniently placed near a hospital reinforces this theory.

The title of this novel is taken from a conversation between Para and Vijay:

> "When memory dies, a people die," Uncle Para broke into his reverie, and Vijay had the eerie feeling that the old man was privy to his thoughts before he was. But, remembering his experiences of the last few days, he asked: "What if we make up false memories?"
>
> "That is worse, replied the old man, "that is murder." (p. 335)

An abbreviated version of this sequence is also given as an epigraph in the third section. Memory is indubitably of crucial importance to this novel. It is the recollection of his wife's brutal murder that drives Rajan insane, and remembrances of Sri Lanka before the communal clashes are often compared and contrasted with the present. The "amnesia" that Vijay suffers is another example of Sivanandan's subtle use of this motif. The "official" story of a prison riot cannot surely be sustained when an onlooker explains the incident otherwise. What the State and its supporters (Vijay's wife Manel among them) do is to persuade the public that the "other" version is a fantasy brought about by amnesia:

---

[14] Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*. Trans. Daphne Hardy. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1978). George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1981).

> Now stop it. It's all a part of your delirium. Didn't the doctors tell you? You got a blow on your head, during one of your election stunts I expect, and lost your memory, and somehow or other ended up in Colombo. (p. 368)

In such sequences, the author challenges the reader to glean the facts from what is derisively dismissed as fiction and to identify the fantasy in what is presented as given truth.

Sivanandan ends his novel not in the south, but in Jaffna, where it all began. Vijay's marriage to Manel, though "comfortable" on occasion, cannot survive the tempestuous situation in the country. They discover that their values and loyalties are at odds when the racial riots that careen out of control demand that they clearly define their separate positions on issues relating to race. Their relationship is also vitiated by Vijay's love for Meena, an estate labourer's daughter, whom Vijay meets by accident. When the Tamils in the South, and especially the estate labourers, are threatened with total destruction, Vijay breaks with Manel and temporarily gives up his politics to accompany Meena to Jaffna where he hopes to marry her.

Jaffna town and Sandilipay, however, have been transformed utterly. The "basic, fundamental, feudal" (p. 335) life that his "ancestors" had enjoyed is now replaced by one in which the boys and the army tussle for supremacy. Para's formerly cheerful and humane grandson, Ravi, is now cast as a "faceless" commander who in the crucial final scene is described as, "a portly figure in battle fatigues and side arms, flanked by two armed men" (p. 410), a man who orders Kugan to be hanged on a lamppost without taking any measures to discover whether he is the real informer.

The blurb at the back of the book glibly informs the reader that "...through the travails of their lives emerges the possibility of another future." Such a reading cannot be maintained in the face of that final scene which is rendered dramatically and with subtle irony. Vijay, a Sinhalese, and the adopted son of Rajan, a Tamil, is shot by Ravi (Para's grandson) while trying to prevent the latter from killing a low-caste toddy tapper. Ravi is now so blinded by his role as commander and of the necessity of finding a scapegoat that he cannot (or chooses not to) recognize his cousin. All that this family has stood for--concern for the downtrodden, respect for other communities, and the determination to see that justice will prevail--is destroyed in one fell swoop. Meena's anguished cry, "You have killed the only decent thing left in this land ... We'll never be whole again" (p. 410), furthermore, negates any "possibility of another future" because

by dispensing "instant justice" Ravi has prevented Vijay from marrying Meena, a much needed symbolic union between race and class.

If the government, organized labour, and even the educational system cannot be relied on to change a cataclysmic trend, the text does not show much promise in the boys either. The culminating gesture of the novel is Yogi's knocking the gun from Ravi's hand to prevent the latter from killing Meena too. This action, and the words that accompany the deed, "[t]hat's enough ... I am taking over" (p. 410) is a continuation of the in-fighting "over who would serve the people better, which faction, which dogma" (p. 394) that had already vitiated the cause, and provides a foretaste of the other leadership struggles that would splinter the movement in the latter half of the 1980s.

To accuse Sivanandan of valorizing Tamils in general and the boys in particular, then, is to indulge in a blinkered reading of this novel. No doubt, he mourns the destruction of the North and the plight of thousands of Tamils who were innocent victims in a race war that they neither desired nor carried out. He is, however, equally concerned about the dehumanization of life in the South. His anger is not directed at a particular race but at Sri Lankans from both sides of the racial divide who by their apathy or active involvement in the conflict have made the polarization complete. Sivanandan's invoking the famous concluding line from Hopkins' poem, "Thou art indeed just, Lord..." as an epigraph for the second section is very significant in this context. The line "Mine, O thou Lord of Life, send my roots rain" and the poem as a whole articulate that the speaker is sterile, that his creativity has suffered, and that he cannot function without God's grace. Given the fissures that now affect the island, there is little that Sri Lankans can do by themselves to remedy the situation; the selfless efforts of the few need to be supported by considerable interventions by Providence.

Recent Sri Lankan novels, including those written by expatriates, are characterized by their use of journalese, diffuse narrative, diary entries, and other techniques that provide a plethora of voices and styles. While Sivanandan eschews such palpably postmodernist formulae, concentrating instead on a narrative line that is relatively "realistic" and straightforward, this simplicity masks some neat novelistic strategies. The three sections of the book encompass the lives of three principals with Rajan narrating his own story and the Saha and Vijay sections--the first preceding and the other succeeding Rajan's story--being largely given in third person narrative. A closer reading establishes that the mode of narration is a shade more complex, however. Rajan, in fact, introduces himself as the narrator of the first section, but gradually effaces himself from the

story by substituting Sahadevan or Saha for "my father." Rajan, furthermore, maintains a shadowy narrative presence in Vijay's story too in his letters to his son which Vijay constantly re-reads. Since Rajan survives all the principals, it is possible then that he is the real narrator. Not only does his exilic status provide a reading of events that is at once interested and detached, but this individual who had lost his sanity after witnessing his wife's rape and murder and "flips out" again when he visits the scene some years later is, ironically, the only person capable of providing a lucid account of the "madness" prevailing in the country.

Any author undertaking a novel that deals with the same themes and motifs over three generations should guard against repetition (especially in constructing character), and the danger of losing intensity and focus. Although Sivanandan has succeeded in making Pandyan, Saha, Rajan, and Vijay different from each other, despite their "blood" connections and other similarities, he is occasionally guilty of sameness in his portrayal of some of the minor characters who share socialist views. Lal, Tissa, Sarath, and Dana, for instance, are too similar to each other. Sivanandan, furthermore, cannot maintain throughout the level of intensity required from a novel that chooses not to provide many "still points." The novel could have been condensed to good effect. Sivanandan, finally, is vulnerable in his portrayal of love relationships. The only relationships that are credible are those that are barely described, like the "unspoken life which wove [Pandyan and his wife] together" (p. 9). The tempestuous marriage between the selfless Vijay and the ambitious Manel does not convince, and the Lali/Rajan and Meena/Vijay relationships, cut short as they are by violent death, are more important for their potential rather than for what they actually achieve. Sivanandan's insistence on conjoining "unlikely" couples, though important to prove his thesis, is, as already indicated, a shade overdone. Saha's infatuation for the lame, "untouchable" Rani, and the University educated Vijay's falling for Meena, the estate labour's daughter, are two such instances.[15]

To dwell on these lapses would be carping, however. Despite his support for oppressed classes and his predilection for pre-independence life in Northern villages, Sivanandan has no intention of falling prey to what Rajiva Wijesinha

---

[15] Regi Siriwardena's review of *When Memory Dies*, published in *Nēthrā* 1.4 (1997): pp. 74-81, which I read after I completed this article, provides some valuable insights and also analyses the novel's weaknesses in great depth.

has called "the village well syndrome."[16] The simplicity associated with life in Sandilipay, though infinitely preferable to the terror that replaced it, is not complete in itself; in fact, the author takes pains to highlight some of the disadvantages in such an insular existence. The connection between jingoistic educationalists and self-seeking politicians, on the one hand, and the fanning of communal conflict, on the other, is made, but Sivanandan is not so deterministic as to place all blame on politicians and educationalists. While his support for the oppressed is well nigh total, he assembles an honest account of the subaltern, not one that is romanticized. In adopting such a posture, Sivanandan goes beyond Robert Boyers' stipulation for the political novel which would have it that "[t]he dominant ethical perspective [in a political novel] will not cancel out the other perspectives generated in the work, will not make others 'look bad' so as to have the field all to itself."[17]

When Memory Dies is an eloquent and (it must be said) tragic novel for our time. The socialistic "solutions" offered by the positive characters bring little relief--least of all to those articulating these views. Chances of the same solutions providing any sustenance to readers, therefore, are remote indeed. Sivanandan, however, has done justice to a complex terrain by capturing the interplay of various forces. He has articulated with compassion and insight but without sentimentality the "normality" in the island that some of us mercifully still remember, while candidly detailing the horrors of the present. Such a presentation will, it is hoped, shock, shame, or in some other way, induce readers of all communities to work towards a reconciliatory future.

S.W. PERERA

---

[16] Rajiva Wijesinha, "Forms of Alienation: Sri Lankan Fiction in English," *Navasilu: Journal of the English Association of Sri Lanka* 11 and 12 (1994): p. 103.

[17] Robert Boyers, *Atrocity and Amnesia: The Political Novel since 1945* (New York: Oxford, 1985) p. 28.

EARLY FOOTFALLS IN THE GROVES OF ACADEME: WOMEN AT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE (1921-42)

Modern education is an area in which Sri Lankan women have made significant gains over time. This achievement was the culmination of a slow trek, spanning well over a century of British colonial rule and nearly a half century thereafter. The focus of this paper is on the closing phase of British rule, a period in which women created their own space in one of the earliest sanctums of higher learning, University College. Education as an agent of social change is often rated below politics and economics. Nevertheless, social analysts are agreed that the education of women has been largely instrumental in enhancing the physical quality of life in Sri Lanka. Despite its early class bias, the expansion of women's access to higher education has had far-reaching repercussions on the rest of society. To chart the history of women at University College (1921-42) is to look at how women responded to the challenge of new opportunities and became trail-blazers in an ever widening social phenomenon, which has to a large extent transcended both class and gender.

British colonial policy in Sri Lanka during the nineteenth century set in motion certain fundamental social changes, some of which gathered a momentum of their own. One such was female education. The need for English educated personnel to man the middle levels of the colonial administration and the belief that Westernisation and Christianisation could be effectively achieved by providing these junior administrators with educated Christian wives were significant factors behind the promotion of English teaching.[1] The local response to this scheme of thinking came from the Sri Lankan elite who had secured social prominence by the second half of the 19th century. Having benefited from colonial economic enterprise, they had the financial resources to send their sons and daughters to English schools which levied high fees, and on the completion of high school, some among them could even afford to send their children to Universities overseas e.g. Madras, Calcutta, or London. English education was yet another attribute of elite status and a passport to professional or administrative positions.

---

[1] Swarna Jayaweera, "Colonial Educational Policy and Gender Ideology under the British Colonial Administration in Sri Lanka." *Asian Panorama: Essays in Asian History, Past and Present*, ed. K M de Silva, et.al., Vikas, 1990, pp. 218-220.

In seeking out English education for their offspring, boys seem to have had favoured treatment, as parental aspirations were directed towards public office and professional careers for their sons and mere western social graces for their daughters.[2] Administrative positions were not available to women and the opening up of the professions was a slow process. Fewer girls than boys enrolled in the schools and in the early years very few of the former opted for anything beyond an elementary education. This situation changed with time and during the last two decades of the 19th century the enrolment of girls in English schools rose from 9.5 percent of total enrolment in 1880 to 26.8 percent in 1895 - a nearly three-fold increase.[3] The demand for English education for girls and the growth of missionary schools appear to have complemented each other and preparing for Cambridge examinations kept the standard of English education available to boys and girls on an even keel.

The first Sri Lankan girl sat the Local Cambridge Senior Examination in 1885. By 1910 the number had risen to 44, 8.5 percent of the total.[4] For the large majority of these girls it was the end of the road as far as education was concerned. The J.J.R. Bridge Report which provides some very interesting data in this regard states that of the 108 boys who passed the Local Cambridge Senior Examination in 1911, 17 took up medicine, 16 law, 27 teaching, 4 government service, 6 joined the church, 6 went to British universities and 12 entered a school to study for the Intermediate Examination. As for the girls, 17 were successful at the same examination. Of them a few are said to have taken up teaching and other professions but the majority stayed at home or were married.[5] It is important to note that at least a few school-leavers among the girls were taking to the professions, a fact that was recognized by the Macleod Committee on Education which "was not thinking of a complete domestication of women and had recognized the extra-domestic roles of women."[6]

Responses to the questions raised by the Macleod Committee showed that

---

2 *ibid.*, pp. 217-220.

3 *ibid.*, p. 215.

4 Report of J.J.R. Bridge on Secondary English Schools in Ceylon. *Sessional Paper* XXI of 1912, p. 14.

5 *ibid.*, p. 8.

6 Swarna Jayaweera, 1990, *op.cit.*, p. 221.

those who advocated Cambridge examinations for girls were not strictly targeting them for tertiary education or careers. Even parents who wished their daughters secure Cambridge certificates mostly considered a high level of English socially desirable for marriage. Nevertheless, changes once initiated develop a natural momentum of their own and the aspirations of some, both parents and students, were kindled. Verona E Wirasekera, recalling her entry to Medical College in 1903 says that is was to fulfil her father's aspirations and not her own that she decided to become a doctor.[7]

The only institution of higher learning which admitted women at the turn of the 19th century was Medical College. Although founded in 1870, it took 22 years before the College could recruit its first female students, Misses E. Davidson and H. Keyt, in 1892. Even afterwards female enrolment at Medical College was painfully slow. Miss Alice de Boer, who entered Medical College in 1893, was the first woman to get her Licentiate in Medicine and Surgery.[8] However, the turn out of women doctors was a mere trickle compared to that of male doctors. Women were not yet equal competitors in the field of higher education. The legal profession which was available to men from the early years of British rule was opened to women only in 1930 and Law College, founded in 1911, took in its first 2 women students in 1934.[9] The government English Teachers' Training College was opened in 1903 and women were allowed admission in 1908.

The lack of opportunities for the education of girls beyond the formal school system is eloquently stated by the Head Mistress of Clifton School, Maligakanda, in her response to the Macleod Committee: "As it is there is a break in a girl's education after 17; if she is ambitious and poor she joins a correspondence college in England; if she is ambitious and rich, she has private tutors. If she is not ambitious she either leaves school or hangs on until she is made a teacher, and then, perhaps, after a year's experimenting, joins the

---

7 Miss Verona F Wirasekera, "The Medical College in My Time, 1903-1909," *The Colombo Medical School Centenary, 1876-1970*, ed. S R Kottegoda, Colombo, 1970, pp. 21-24.

8 Deloraine Brohier, *Dr Alice de Boer and Some Pioneer Burgher Women Doctors*, Social Scientists' Association, 1994, p. 25.

9 R K W Gunasekera, "Legal Education" *Education in Ceylon, A Centenary Volume*, Colombo, 1969, p. 862.

Training College."[10]

Not many avenues, in fact, were available to school-goers of either sex in terms of higher education during this period. However, girls were much more disadvantaged than boys. Some of the bigger schools were affiliated to the Universities of Calcutta or Madras for the First in Arts and BA examinations, a practice which was abandoned after 1911. These opportunities were mostly available to senior boys as very few girls' schools had facilities to train students beyond the entrance examinations of these universities. A few parents who had adequate financial resources sent their children to India for further qualifications,[11] but here again males would have predominated given the cultural norms of the time. That the education of sons had priority over the education of daughters bears repetition. It is noteworthy that of the girls who sought admission to Indian universities, the majority were from the Tamil majority schools of the northern province--and Calcutta and Madras were not their only choice. A few girls ventured out even as far afield as Singapore for medical degrees.[12] The numbers involved, however, were very few and far between.

For parents with high aspirations for their children, Indian degrees were only a second best compared to British qualifications. However, only the very affluent could send their sons to England to obtain these qualifications. It would seem that daughters were considered for a British education only on very rare occasions.[13] In 1870 boys of the Colombo Academy were afforded the

---

10 *Sessional Paper* XX of 1912, p. 88.

11 A.G. Fraser, "Madras or London," *The Ceylon National Review*, No. 1, January 1906, p. 36.

12 *Chundukuli: Jubilee Reminiscences* 1896-1946, Jaffna, 1946, p. 350.

13 Responding to the Macleod Committee on Education (1911), Rev. G.J. Trimmer, Chairman and General Superintendent of the Wesleyan Mission in North Ceylon, recalls just one girl who qualified in Europe as a doctor. Sessional Paper XX of 1912, p. 190. Nallamma Williams Murugesu of Vembadi Girls' High School, Jaffna, first went to study medicine in Madras and later went to Edinburgh and Dublin for further qualifications. It is claimed that she was the first Tamil lady to take up medicine and practice as a doctor. *A History of the Methodist Church in Ceylon, 1814-1964*, ed. W.J.T. Small, Wesley Press, Colombo, n.d.,

opportunity of competing for an annual British University scholarship, a privilege which was thrown open to other schools of equal standing in 1880. Girls however, do not figure in this scheme. 1907 saw the establishment of 2 scholarships instead of one, awarded on the results of the London Intermediate Examination in Arts and Science. These examinations were now held locally but very few girls' schools were equipped to train students for them. Between 1908 and 1910, 34 boys sat the Arts Intermediate Examination, the number of girls was only 2. They were both from St. Johns' Panadura. During this period 11 boys presented themselves for the parallel science examination for which there were no girls.[14] What seems clear is that higher education for girls had neither institutional nor social support.

Although numbers were small, by the beginning of the 20th century the entry of women into higher education was a *fait accompli*. Women had begun to enter Medical College; London Intermediate classes for girls were started in a few schools; enrolment of Sri Lankan women in Indian universities was not uncommon and there were rare instances of parental support for daughters in western universities. It is important to recognise that these developments were the result of an internal social dynamic unaided by any clear commitment to the higher education of women in terms of government policy. In 1900 the Director of Public Instruction, arguing for the establishment of a local institute of higher education, states that parents want for their sons a degree without having to send them to England for it.[15] Again the Macleod Committee on education echoes these same sentiments regarding the aspirations of parents for their sons.[16] As for girls, the Committee emphasises the need to impart domestic skills in the higher forms, as the majority of parents opted for marriage for their daughters.

Despite the weightage given to the domestic roles of women, the Macleod Committee report displays a clear commitment to careers as a possible option. This was however circumscribed by the notion of appropriate careers of which teaching took pride of place. In 1912 there were 133 locally recruited women teachers in English schools and 74 foreigners, of whom only 4 had

---

pp. 442-443.

14 *Sessional Paper* XXI of 1912, p. 19.

15 *Admin. Report of the Director of Public Instruction*, 1900.

16 *Sessional Paper* XIX of 1911/12, p. 5.

university degrees.[17] That the large majority of teachers, both men and women, were not qualified to teach was the view of the Macleod Committee as well as of J.J.R. Bridge, who reported on the English Secondary Schools in 1912. This is one of the strongest arguments used in both reports for an institution of higher learning (university college or university), one which would provide qualified teachers for the English schools. One notes here a commitment to university education that was gender blind - women were not out of the reckoning. A report by Sir Robert Chalmers, the Governor, in 1916 clearly enunciates the principle that women will be admitted to the future University College.[18]

The establishment of a university college in 1921 was a significant event in the history of female education in Sri Lanka. Many of the obstacles women had to contend with in the sphere of higher education began to crumble, albeit slowly. The concentration of training facilities in a single institution of higher learning eliminated gender disparities created by the unequal distribution of tertiary level teaching resources in boys and girls schools. Being more affordable than a British education more parents could spread out their incomes on the higher education of both sons and daughters. One cannot however disregard the fact that some parents would still have had to decide between sons and daughters in regard to a college education. In addition to tuition fees there were examination fees payable to London University and for students outside Colombo there was the additional burden of hostel fees. Also accommodation itself appears to have been a problem for outstation women students. The financial constraints which prevented the government from providing a hostel for women find repeated mention in the administration reports of the University College Principal prior to 1932. In this year the Representative Council of Missions set up a University Women's hostel and the Principal's observations in this regard brings out one more reason why women were poorly represented in University College during the first decade or so. He says "the opening of a hostel is bound to result in an increase of women students as parents from the outstations have been reluctant to send their daughters to Colombo without adequately supervised accommodation."[19] University College did have a system of scholarships, exhibitions and studentships but these were not adequate to equalise educational

---

17 *Sessional Paper* XXI of 1912, p. 10.

18 *Sessional Paper* XIV of 1916, p. 2.

19 *Administration Report of the Principal, University College, 1931-32*, Colombo, 1933, p. B11.

opportunities either in terms of gender or class. With regard to studentships the women may have had an advantage although on the face of it they appear discriminatory. These studentships were awarded to 2 boys and 1 girl annually.[20] Considering the wide gender disparity in admissions the few women who sought admission may have had a better chance of obtaining a scholarship from among those reserved for women.

Additionally, University College was an answer to the cultural prejudice that some parents would have had against sending out young girls for a university education to distant lands. This is why Indian universities were favoured by Jaffna parents - proximity and cultural affinity being potent reasons.[21] It would seem that University College opened out much wider vistas for women than had hitherto been available. Affiliated to the University of London, it trained men and women for arts and science degrees of that university.

Women had a fair amount of backlog to clear before they could make full use of the advantages University College had to offer them. When the institution opened on 24 January 1921, the number of students on roll was 115,[22] of whom 4[23] were women, a mere 3.5%. This is not surprising, considering the lower enrolment of girls than boys in the schools and the poor retention of girls in the higher forms. In 1920 female students in English schools

---

[20] *Ceylon University College Prospectus, 1936-37*, Colombo, 1936, pp. 12-13.

[21] The cultural factor perhaps explains why some Jaffna parents continued to send their daughters to Indian universities, particularly of the south, even after the establishment of University College and later the University of Ceylon. As late as 1946, apart from enrolment at the University of Ceylon and Medical College, girls from Chundukuli Girls' College, Jaffna, were studying at Women's' Christian College, Madras; Queen Mary's College, Madras; Holy Cross College, Trichinopoly; Medical College, Vellore; Adayar, Madras; Annamalai University and Isabella Thoburn College, Lucknow. *Chundukuli Jubilee Reminiscences 1896-1946*, Jaffna, 1946, pp. 350-352.

[22] *Ceylon University College Prospectus, 1925-26*, Colombo, 1925, p. 4.

[23] They were Misses P Sornacanthy, Laurel Tambimuttu, Dorothy Anghie and Ernestine de Silva.

were about 22% of the total. As for the Cambridge Senior and London Matriculation forms gender disparities were even greater. Socio-cultural attitudes did not provide the same incentives to both girls and boys to remain in the higher forms.

Students seeking admission to the full course at University College were expected to have the London Matriculation or to have gained exemption from it, having satisfied certain conditions at the Cambridge Senior Examination.[24] Most higher level English schools trained students for the Cambridge Senior and only very few of them sent up students for the London Matriculation, less so the girls schools. Once the admissions policy of University College was spelt out, there was some concern that the schools were not producing a sufficient number of matriculated students. The administration reports of the Director of Education for both 1919 and 1920 express the hope that "when the University College is opened, more candidates will take the London Matriculation, which is accepted as a qualifying test for admission to the University College." This was a more demanding test than the Cambridge Senior and very few girls schools had a Matriculation class. For instance, in 1910 St John's Panadura was the only girls school which sent up candidates for the London Matriculation, whereas about 18 schools sent girls for the Cambridge Senior.[25] With this constraint women at University College had a modest beginning in terms of numbers. The expansion that followed was slow but steady. In October 1921 pre-medical students were admitted to University College. This, however, did not result in any increase of the proportion of women in the student community. There was, in fact, a very definite gender bias in science education in the schools so that in the early years the number of women opting for medical and science degrees was very much smaller than those reading for arts degrees. During the first five years female enrolment at University College grew very slowly. By July 1926 there were 15 women on the roll, the number having increased from 3.5 percent in 1921 to 4.8 percent of the total.[26]

Further progress is recorded during the next five years. There was some increase in the number of women following the pre-medical course. Medical

---

24 *Ceylon Administration Reports, 1921*, Report of the Acting Director of Education, p. A2.

25 *Sessional Paper* XX of 1912 appendix J, p. 281.

26 *Ceylon University College Prospectus, 1927-28*, Colombo, 1927, p. 5.

training was much more expensive than any other discipline,[27] and the linkage between financial constraints and female education has already been noted. In 1927 Medical College began to award 3 annual bursaries to cover the cost of pre-medical training of deserving students whose parents could not afford the required fee. There was a certain element of affirmative action in this scheme, for one of the 3 bursaries was reserved for women. The bursary scheme seems to have provided an incentive for more students to seek admission to a medical career, an observation made by the Acting Principal of University College in 1929.[28] The Registrar of the Ceylon Medical College makes the further observation that "the most noteworthy feature of the year (1928-29) is the increased entry, especially of women students."[29] However, gender disparities remained relatively more acute at Medical College. More important than external factors was an internal dynamic created within the system itself which began to show results in female enrolment during the second five year period of the history of University College. In fact numbers slightly more than doubled, the figures on record at July 1931 being 33 women out of a total of 355 students.[30] Women were now 9.3 percent of the total, a significant jump from 4.8 percent in 1926. University College in its second and last decade (1931-41) witnessed only a modest growth in female enrolment. By July 1938 women had reached the 10 percent mark, with 66 out of 664 students being female.[31] In its last academic year, 1941-42, 69 out of 645 or 10.7 percent of the students were women. However, when the University of Ceylon came into existence in July 1942, women were back to 10 percent, 91 out of a total enrolment of 904. The reason for this drop was the amalgamation of Medical College as an integral part of the University. As noted already, gender disparities were much more marked among medical students. At this point in time only about 7 percent of the students at Medical College were women (19 out of 258), whereas among the

---

[27] *Report of the University Commission: Ceylon Sessional Papers*, 1929, Appendix IV.

[28] *Ceylon University College Prospectus, 1928-29*, Colombo, 1928, p. 16.

[29] *Administration Report of the Acting Principal, University College, 1928-29*, Colombo, 1930, p. C50.

[30] *Ceylon University College Prospectus, 1932-33*, Colombo, 1932, p. 5.

[31] *Ceylon University College Prospectus, 1939-40*, Colombo, 1939, p. 5.

rest women constituted 11 percent of the total (72 out of 646).[32]

Reviewing the overall numerical data of women at University College, the increase was from 3.5 percent in 1921 to 10.7 in 1942. This may not appear to be a spectacular achievement for a period of 21 years. However, the small but increasing number of women leaving the portals of University College formed a significant nucleus of educated women who acted as change agents in society.

Despite the unequal competition they had to face in gaining admission to University College, these pioneering women were off to a creditable start when Miss P Sornacanthy distinguished herself by winning one of ten awards made to new entrants in January 1921.[33] Between 1921 and 1939 a total of 116 scholarships and 126 exhibitions were awarded to students at the beginning of their College careers. Of them 7 scholarships (i.e. 6%) and 13 exhibitions (i.e. 10.3%) were won by women, the overall percentage being 8.26 of the total. This was a fair achievement considering the fact that female enrolment during this period ranged from only 3.5% in 1921 to 10% in 1938.[34]

Once in College, women did not have the same incentives to be high achievers. Whatever their academic record was, the most they could hope for was a teaching job and at best a principalship of a school. Even with a degree, many were satisfied with 'enlightened motherhood.' Prestigious positions in the public service were only for men. Women, therefore, were not as motivated as the men to concentrate on examination performance. The observations of Dr. K. Kanapathipillai, Head of the Department of Tamil, are quite illuminating in this regard. In his report for the year 1936/37, he deplores the careerist mentality of students. In his opinion they study only to pass examinations and not for the sake of knowledge, but adds "... the women students are less utilitarian in their studies than the men. They are in a position to appreciate a study for its own sake." This is not surprising because high academic achievement did not bring the kind of rewards which were in store for the men. Women were not in the rat race for career positions and perhaps had the time to relax and appreciate the

---

32 *University of Ceylon - First Annual Report of the Council for 1942*, pp. 1-2.

33 5 arts and 5 science scholarships were awarded for proficiency in single subjects at a special scholarship examination. Miss Sornacanthy's award was for geography.

34 *University College Prospectus, 1939-40*, Colombo, 1939, p. 5.

cultural value of subjects like Tamil, as stated by Dr Kanapathipillai.[35] Many of the internal prizes, medals etc. went to the men. Nevertheless we do find that between 1929 and 1939 the Pestonji Dhinshawji Khan gold medal for Economics was won by a woman 3 out of 8 times and between 1926 and 1938 the Pettah Library Prize for English went to a woman on 2 occasions.[36] University scholarships which enabled students to proceed to English universities, awarded to the best honours candidates completing the BA/BSc degrees, also remained somewhat elusive to women. Although the award of London degrees to University College women began in 1925, the first First Class is recorded in 1935. This distinction goes to Evelyn Hester La Brooy, an English Honours graduate, who was awarded a special scholarship to study at Oxford University. She did not qualify for the regular university scholarship, being over the age limit for it by a few months.[37] The first woman to win a regular government scholarship for study abroad was Phyllis Treherne Dickman (later Mrs Dissanayake). She graduated with a second class upper division in history in 1938.[38]

University College began to present students for the London BA and BSc examinations from the very first year of its existence. These early graduates would have come in with intermediate qualifications. None of the women seem to have had this advantage and for the first time two women graduated in 1925. They were Dorothy Anghie, who secured a BA in arts and Laurel Tambimuttu (later Casinader) who was awarded a BSc in economics. This event was obviously considered a milestone in the history of University College for special note is taken of it in the official reports of both 1926 and 1927,[39] underscoring

---

35 *Administration Report of the Principal, University College for 1936/37*, Colombo, 1938, p. B6.

36 *Ceylon University College Prospectus, 1939-40*, Colombo, 1939, pp. 19-20.

37 *Administration Report of the Principal, University College for 1934-35*, Colombo, 1936, pp. B4 & B14.

38 *Ceylon University College Prospectus, 1939-40*, Colombo, 1939, pp. 74-75.

39 *Ceylon University College Prospectus, 1926-27*, p. 5 and 1927-28, p. 5, Colombo, 1926 and 1927.

the paucity of women in higher education. The number of women who secured degrees during the life time of University College was not very large. The total hardly exceeded five in any given year. Between 1921 and 1938, 454 persons from the institution had got London University degrees. Of them 38 or 8.37 percent were women.[40] This seems proportionate to the intake of women during this period. It is important to note that some students, both men and women, left after the Intermediate Examination and a few failed to graduate. Marriage was among the reasons why women dropped out mid-stream. Laurel Casinader (nee Tambimuttu), one of the first women to enter University College, recalls that "of the first 3 or 4 one died and one left to be married."[41] In view of these circumstances 8.37 percent of the total for women graduates seems a fair tally, especially in view of the fact that women were under 4 percent of the total intake in 1921 and rose to 10 percent only in 1938.

The high cost of English education made inevitable an upper class bias among women seeking degrees. Therefore employment and economic gain were not the main objectives of the large majority of these pioneering women. Even as late as 1948, Sir Ivor Jennings, the then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ceylon, remarks, "the majority of women graduates do not enter the professions but get married and raise families. This is not a waste because an educated woman can do so much more for her children as a mother."[42] The concept of educated motherhood which would bring forth great sons is characteristic of the early phase of female education in all cultures.[43] However, not everyone sought self-expression in the domestic sphere. Many were absorbed by the teaching profession, which was in dire need of qualified personnel. Colombo schools were the biggest beneficiaries in this regard but a few of the women graduates did fan out to places such as Moratuwa, Kandy, Galle and Matara,

---

40 *ibid.*, 1939-40, Colombo, 1939, p. 5.

41 Extract from the unpublished memoirs of Laurel Casinader (nee Tambimuttu). This was made available to the writer through the kind courtesy of her daughter, Dr. Suvendrni Jazeel nee Casinader).

42 Ivor Jennings, *Students' Guide to University Education*, Colombo: University of Ceylon Press, 1948, p. 23.

43 Linda Kerber, "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment, an American Perspective," *American Quarterly*, 28, No. 2, 1976.

perhaps their home stations.[44]

During the period under review almost all girls' English schools were administered by principals brought over from the west. Sujatha Nimalasuriya, a 1930 history honours graduate, became one of the first 'outsiders' to join this exclusive club of English women when she was appointed principal of Musaeus College, Colombo in 1931.[45] By 1934 Miss Neri Anandam Naekem, a 1927 graduate, became vice-principal of Ananda Balika, Colombo.[46] With the turn over of local graduates, the recruitment of school principals from overseas came to an end and by the time the English principals were due to retire, Sri Lankan women graduates, with teaching experience, were available to take their place. One needs to add that not all those pioneering women who were ready to take up leadership positions in female education were University College graduates. A very few had qualified in British or American universities. A small number sat for the London BA independently and some, especially the women of Jaffna, had obtained their degrees from Indian universities, mostly Madras. The fact that most career-minded women graduates had few other options than teaching had a salutary effect on the progress of female education during this period.

The only government department which accommodated a woman at this time was the Department of Income Tax. Mildred Felicianus Constance Weerasooriya (later Mrs Ekanayake), who obtained a BSc Economics degree, was recruited as an Assistant Assessor in 1932, not very long after graduation. This indeed was a rare instance, after which the Income Tax Department did not

---

44 Girls' High School, Kandy; St. Claires, Wellawatte; Southlands College, Galle; Methodist College, Colombo; Musaeus College, Colombo; Ladies' College, Colombo; St. Paul's Girls' High School, Colombo; Presbyterian Girls' School, Dehiwela; St. Paul's Girls' School, Bambalapitiya; Moratuwa Convent; Princess of Wales, Moratuwa; Bishop's College, Colombo; Ananda Balika, Colombo and St. Thomas' School, Matara were among the early beneficiaries in terms of graduate teachers from University College. (*Ceylon University College Prospectus, 1928-29*, Colombo, 1928, pp. 47-48; 1931-32, Colombo, 1931, pp. 45-50; 1932-33, Colombo, 1932, pp. 43-48; 1934-35, Colombo, 1934, pp. 47-51; 1935-36, Colombo, 1935, pp. 48-57; and 1936-37, Colombo, 1936, pp. 52-61)

45 *University College Prospectus, 1931-32*, Colombo, 1931, p. 50.

46 *ibid.*, 1934-35, Colombo 1934, p. 47.

recruit women for many years to come. Economics was new and unknown to the secondary school curriculum and only the more adventurous among the women attempted it initially. Laurel Casinader (nee Tambimuttu), the first woman to specialize in economics says "I was very keen on continuing my studies and at that time a young Oxford graduate, Sunderalingam, joined the newly inaugurated University College affiliated to the London University and he persuaded my father to let me read economics which was the coming science."[47] But with rare exceptions as in the case of Constance Weerasooriya, this "coming science" was not very useful to university women whose professional options were mostly confined to teaching.

English, Latin and Western History were the hot favourites of most female undergraduates in those early years. A fourth subject which was required at Intermediate level was chosen from among Geography, Economics, Mathematics and British Constitution. Women who followed honours courses opted mostly for English or Western History. The bias towards English, Latin and Western History reflects the cultural ethos of that segment of society from which the early women undergraduates were drawn as well as their training in Christian denominational schools staffed by English principals and sometimes even English teachers. These subjects were also symbols of class and therefore the natural choice of those who saw the link between social status and western culture.

It took a while for women to seek degrees in 'Orientalia.' G. P. Malalasekera, Head of the Department of Sanskrit, Pali and Sinhalese, remarks in his report for 1931-32, "I particularly welcome the increasing number of women students in our Department, a very healthy sign of the growth of interest in Orientalia in this country. I have great hopes that in the renaissance of Sinhalese culture which is inevitable, the women will play a very important part."[48] This new awakening among women in oriental subjects is also noted by the Head of the Department of Tamil, Rev. F Kingsbury. He considered it important to mention in his report for 1930-31 that "for the first time in the history of the College, one woman student, Soundaramma Suppramaniam, passed the Intermediate Examination, offering Tamil as one of the four subjects

---

47 Laurel Casinader, Unpublished Memoirs, *op.cit.*

48 *Administration Report of the Principal, University College, 1931-32*, Colombo, 1933, p. B5.

required."[49] When she graduated, Rev. Kingsbury remarks once again "for the first time in the history of the Tamil Department in the University College and probably for the first time in the history of the University of London, a woman student passed the BA General Degree Examination, offering Tamil as one of the subjects."[50] Miss Suppramaniam scored first class marks in Tamil and was offered the Arunachalam scholarship to proceed to Annamalai University for a BA honours course in Tamil. She however declined the award. In 1936 a second woman, Miss T Apputhurai, got her BA London with Tamil as a subject. This again Rev. Kingsbury considered was an event worth recording in his administrative report for that year.[51] In 1934 Regina de Silva became the first woman to specialize in Oriental languages or Indo-Aryan.

Very slowly a new genre of students rooted in the traditional culture of the country were taking their place in the student community. Trail blazers in this regard were people like E.W. Adikaram and K. Kanapathipillai.[52] Women followed close on their heels. Nationalist spokesmen like G.P. Malalasekera considered the entry of women into Oriental disciplines as symbolic of a future cultural revival. The perception that women are the custodians of culture often weighs heavily on them. Nevertheless, it is significant that by the 1930s a group of men and women had begun to venture off the beaten track which had favoured western cultural values. Later on many of them gave intellectual leadership to the nationalist revival in the country. The women who mostly took to teaching were able to make an impact in the schools, resulting in a wider interest in Oriental subjects.

Science was an area of study in which women took a back seat. This reflected the inadequate facilities in girls' schools for science instruction, a fact to which Sir Ivor Jennings draws attention even in 1942.[53] Girls were encouraged to do home science and not pure science. It was natural that this

---

[49] *ibid.*, 1930-31, Colombo, 1932, p. B7.

[50] *ibid.*, 1931-32, Colombo, 1933, p. B5.

[51] *ibid.*, 1935-36, Colombo, 1937, p. B7.

[52] *Ceylon University College Prospectus, 1930-31*, Colombo, 1930, p. 51 and 1931-32, Colombo, 1931, pp. 48-49.

[53] Ivor Jennings, *Students' Guide to University Education*, University of Ceylon Press Board, 1948, p. 24.

gender bias in school education should extend to the enrolment pattern at University College as well. A science degree was awarded to a woman for the first time only in 1930. Violet Ponnamma Jayasothi Thamotheram, who has this distinction, read mathematics and physics for her degree.[54] The turn over of women science graduates was very small, producing a vicious circle which inhibited the expansion of science education in girls' schools. This together with the cultural prejudice against pure science for girls and its lower utilitarian value for them in terms of employment, allowed gender disparities in science education to continue for a long time. One needs however to note that the medical profession was available to women with an inclination for bio-science and some did opt for it, especially in view of the fact that medicine was considered a gender appropriate job for females. However, as has been already noted, gender disparities at Medical College were very pronounced both due to financial reasons and the lack of training facilities at school level.

In addition to the predominance of men in the student community, the administrative and academic staff were almost exclusively male. The warden of the women's hostel was naturally a female and there was an occasional visiting lecturer who was a woman. It is noteworthy that successive wardens of the women's hostel were persons with very high academic credentials. They would have provided some leadership to the few women who succeeded in getting hostel accommodation. The first to be appointed warden of "Cruden" or the women's hostel was Mrs Soma Samarasinghe who had graduated with second class honours in the Oriental Languages Tripos and the English Tripos at Cambridge University. She was later to join the staff of Women's Christian College, Madras,[55] and eventually became Principal of Hillwood College, Kandy, where she counted a long period of distinguished and devoted service. In July 1933, Mrs Samarasinghe left to join her husband in Calcutta and she was succeeded by Enid Salgadoe[56] who held the post of warden for two years. The next warden was Miss Helen Rutnam, a lady with a distinguished academic record. She had graduated with first class honours from the University of Toronto, reading English and French and was awarded two gold medals.[57]

---

[54] *Ceylon University College Prospectus, 1931-32*, Colombo, 1931, p. 49.

[55] *Administration Report of the Principal, University College, 1931-32*, Colombo, 1933, p. B11.

[56] *ibid.*, 1932-33, Colombo, 1934, p. B13.

[57] *ibid.*, 1934-35, Colombo, 1936, p. B12.

Perhaps it was this record which won her the rare privilege of being a visiting lecturer in English at University College,[58] for women do not seem to have found a place in this exclusive club very easily. Until the appointment of Miss Kanmalar Mathiaparanam in 1941 as lecturer in logic and ethics and Head of the Department of Philosophy,[59] no women were appointed to the regular academic staff. Mrs Rene Perera (nee Fernando) a 1932 English honours graduate also served as a visiting lecturer at University College for some time.[60] But Miss Mathiaparanam's was a distinctive first. An old girl of Uduvil College, Jaffna, she had an MA from Madras University where she not only secured a first class at the examination but also the first place in the Madras Presidency, a laudable achievement indeed. Before she joined University College she was Professor of Philosophy at Kinnaird College, Lahore.[61]

Miss Mathiaparanam's appointment was towards the end of the life-span of University College. Her contribution to the higher education of women has to be assessed in the context of the University of Ceylon and of Peradeniya where she was a towering personality. But as far as University College is concerned it would be correct to say that almost throughout, except for the occasional visiting lecturer and the hostel warden, women students functioned in a largely male environment. In this atmosphere traditions were created by a curious amalgam of both the acceptance and rejection of traditional social norms, a contradictory situation in which the juniors mostly emulated the seniors before them. Erica La Brooy (nee Christofellsz) says precisely this in a personal communication, "Regina de Silva, head girl of the hostel and Dharambhai Nilgiriya (both senior students) were my mentors."[62]

When University College was established, an advisory academic committee of 26 members of university teachers and other eminent persons was

---

58 *ibid.*, 1936-37, Colombo, 1938, p. B4.

59 *Ceylon University College Magazine*, Vol, XIV, No. 6, 1941-42, pp. 47-48.

60 Lorna Devaraja, ed. *Growth and Development of the Sri Lanka Federation of University Women, 1941-1991*, Colombo, 1991, p. 137.

61 *Uduvil 1911-1936*, Ceylon Mission Press, Tellippalai, Ceylon (n.d.), pp. 182 & 197.

62 Erica La Brooy, personal communication dated 30.01.1994.

appointed. As women formed part of the student population, a token appointment was made to the academic committee, the appointee being Mrs W.T. Southern, the Commissioner of the Girl Guides Association. According to the first two reports of the Principal, University College (1921-22 and 1922-23), the academic committee was asked to consult Mrs Southern on matters relating to courses and regulations for women students. It is on record that she arranged to meet with a group of women interested in education to discuss the problems of female students at University College. Details of these deliberations are not available. Soon after, Miss G.F. Opie, Principal of Ladies' College, Colombo, was appointed to serve on the committee. Representing the headmistresses of girls' schools, she continued to be the one woman on the committee right through the days of University College and when the University of Ceylon was founded in 1942, she took her place, this time with a few other women, as a member of the University Court. Not being members of the academic staff, neither Mrs. Southern nor Miss Opie would have had much contact with students and there is no record of their contribution to women's education at University College, although Miss Opie's services as Principal of Ladies' College are well known.

For the early women undergraduates, functioning in a climate dominated by male administrators, teachers and students, interaction with these men was perhaps the most significant influence on the development of their personalities. Therefore it is important to understand the gender sensibilities of the men at University College and their attitude to this emerging class of educated women. For the latter, coming from sheltered homes and girls' schools, it was a severe testing period which they weathered with a great deal of success. Although the documented reactions of the women themselves are sometimes ambiguous, by and large they seem to have found their own space in the academic, social and cultural life of the community at University College which, according to Erica La Brooy, gave them "a good foundation for life."[63]

Presiding over the destinies of University College for the most part of its lifespan (1921-39) was Mr. R. Marrs, the Principal, whose annual reports appear to suggest that his major concern was the education and training of the men in his care. The students are always referred to as the "boys." For instance in 1933/34 he speaks of the falling off of the quality of the "boys" who attempt the Open Scholarship Examination and the need to attract more mature "boys" to University College. Either the standard of the girls who entered was no concern of the Principal or "boys" was a gender neutral term for him. However,

---

[63] *ibid.*

one is not entirely convinced of this. Writing to the Reunion Supplement of the University College Magazine in 1934, he says "It is to be anticipated that a large proportion of those men who have been prominent as speakers in our debates at this College will ultimately take leading places in the public life of the country." In the same magazine the secretary of the Union Society waxes eloquent regarding the debating skills of the women, but Mr. Marrs is content to single out the men. In this instance we cannot argue that 'men' was used as a gender neutral term, for women as a rule were not associated with "the public life of the country." With the University College male population consistently reaching the over 90 percent mark, Mr. Marrs did not perhaps perceive the women as a significant element in the higher education structure.

Women, however, did come into his ken when one of them gained some special distinction or when the Principal was called upon to address a pressing need such as a ladies' common room or a women's hostel. The latter look 11 years to become a reality, although from 1929/30, rising numbers made him draw repeated attention to the need for it. Quite ironically Mr. Marrs found himself taking note of women in his very first administration report. Commenting on the unfortunate death of Mr. E.B. Fernando, the Treasurer of the student society, he says "his place as Treasurer has been ably filled by Miss E. de Silva.[64] There can be few institutions of university status, other than those founded for women only, in which a lady student occupies a position of this nature. Our lady students are small in number, but there seem after this to be few rights left for them to claim."[65] He seems suitably impressed by the fact that a woman had attained to this position despite their poor numerical strength and also that they were creating their own niche in student government. In his second report, Mr. Marrs says "the Treasurer is still a lady student, and everyone will be gratified to see the ladies establish a tradition with regard to this post."[66] For the Principal the treasurership of the student society appears to have been the ultimate in women's rights. What one misses here is the hope that women might attain to greater heights in the future. As far as Mr. Marrs was concerned, his concerns were centered on the men. For sometime after this the treasurer continued to be a woman but it had become too commonplace for

---

[64] Ernestine de Silva died before graduation on 14th August 1925 (*The Ceylon University College Magazine*, Vol. I, No. 2, 1925, p. 38).

[65] *Administration Report of the Principal, University College, Oct. 1921-Sept. 1922*, Colombo, 1923, p. B6.

[66] *ibid.*, 1922-23, Colombo, 1924, p B9.

special comment. Judging from the records, it could be safely said that Mr. Marrs was no visionary with regard to the higher education of women. Ivor Jennings, who succeeded Mr. Marrs as Principal in the last year of University College, had a more positive attitude to female education. In his students' guide to university education published in 1948, be argues strongly for gender equality in higher education. But the Jenningsian era belongs not to University College but to the University of Ceylon which succeeded it in 1942.

Although there does not seem to have been much positive direction from the top, women seem to have been quite fortunate with their male teachers at University College. The pleasure with which Dr. G.P. Malalasekera welcomed the growing interest of women in Oriental languages and the complimentary words of Dr. K. Kanapathipillai regarding women reading Tamil have been referred to already. No doubt they were both a source of great encouragement to the women. Dr. B.B. Das Gupta of the Economics Department writes in lighter vein regarding the women students of his time. He compliments them on their good figures as well as their intelligence. The women he says belong to two classes, "those who are intelligent and those who are still more intelligent."[67] It would seem that Dr. Das Gupta did not consider the women second class citizens. At least two lecturers seem to have taken a caring attitude towards the women undergraduates." J.L.C. Rodrigo (lecturer in Classics) kept a sharp eye on the C.M.S. and Panadura girls" writes Erica La Brooy "and Professor Gulasekeram (lecturer in Mathematics) on those from the north." Speaking of the lecturers of the History Department she says "Professor Pakeman, Justin La Brooy (later her husband) and G.C. Mendis were very reliable and Mr. De was great fun."[68] According to her, lecturers like C.W. Amerasinghe, Professor Cooray and Justin La Brooy encouraged the women to take an interest in some of the more scholarly societies like the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society. This interest, especially on the part of the younger lecturers, appears to have been more than academic, judging from the happy marriages of lecturers like C.W. Amerasinghe, Justin La Brooy and Doric de Souza to their colleagues, to mention only three.

Romance was even more in the air among men and women students. Always under 10 percent of the total, the women were very much in demand and judging from reports in the College magazine their participation in student

---

67 *The Ceylon University College Magazine*, Vol, IV, No. 1, Feb. 1929, p. 5.

68 Erica La Brooy, *op.cit.*

activities was greatly sought after. The more adventurous among the men tried to forge close links with the women of their choice, often flouting social conventions of the traditional middle class. "Pillaring" in the corridors was a common practice among College couples, according to Tissa Chandrasoma.[69] Some of these liaisons became more permanent like his own association with Gerty Fonseka, but not everyone was as fortunate. Some of these romantic men broke into poetry. A large number of "love lyrics [were] addressed to alluring females" and submitted to the College magazine. Some of these contributions, one editor of the College magazine says, he had to discard.[70] The tennis courts were a happy meeting ground even though they were not very skilled in the game. Erica La Brooy writes, "...in tennis we were in great demand - serve and stand back, I'll take the shots"[71] was the attitude of the men. In 1932, according to an "observer" there were 30 female students in College, "tennis enthusiasts to a woman." Men clamour to be their partners and cutting 3 o'clock lectures for practice games seems to have been commonplace.[72] For these students, University College was their first experience in co-education. It broke down existing gender barriers and provided the women with new freedoms, although within limits. In the women's hostel, for instance, the 6 p.m. curfew was strictly enforced and male escorts after this hour had to have prior parental approval.[73] Nevertheless these women were on the threshold of a process of change where existing norms and values were beginning to be challenged.

According to the available evidence, the Secretaries and Presidents of Student Societies complained frequently of the lack of participation of their female colleagues in student activities, but whether College men were anxious that women should participate equally is a moot point. Making an after dinner speech in 1926, G.C. Mendis, who had already graduated by this time, observed that what students of his generation had left undone was extending equal rights

---

69 Tissa Chandrasoma, Personal interview - 12.05.1994.

70 *The Ceylon University College Magazine*, October 1929, p. 2.

71 Erica La Brooy, *op.cit.*

72 *The Ceylon University College Magazine*, Vol, VII, No. 2, April 1932, pp. 10-11.

73 Erica La Brooy, *op.cit.*

to women.[74] In these early years the passive role of women at Union meetings drew sarcastic comments. According to one writer they were only a distraction[75] and in 1930 the Secretary of the Union Society reports that the women only cast sweet looks at the men they favour but do not speak.[76] A female undergraduate writing under the pseudonym 'Sylvia Pankhurst'[77] confirms the fact that women were not very articulate during this time. She says, "it is refreshing to note that young ladies of our College retain that shy and retiring disposition which should be the characteristic of our sex, yet I think that the occasional upliftment of a woman's voice would relieve the monotony of the men's growling. But as at present we lack the confidence to speak in public, there is no way in which we can voice our sentiments except through the pages of your magazine."[78] She is critical of the men shuffling their feet when the women enter class-rooms but in a rejoinder to her, a male colleague states that the shuffling happens only because the women walk in after the lecturer and it is this "walking in ceremony" which brings on the shuffling.[79] Obviously the women did not feel comfortable in the lecture room, with the men. It is not surprising that they shied away from speaking to mixed audiences.

One would have thought that women were off to a good start when Ernestine de Silva became Treasurer of the main student assembly in 1922. Women held on to this position for a few more years but by about 1931 the situation changed and women began to be represented in the Union by a single 'Lady Committee Member,' a token measure which later spread to associations like the Sinhalese and Tamil Societies as well. It is somewhat ironical that at a time when women had gained equal political rights with men in the wider society, there should have been a reversal of their position in Union representation. Perhaps this situation was created by the very climate of competitive politics emanating from universal adult franchise introduced by the Donoughmore Commission. These reforms did not leave the students unaffected

---

74 *The Ceylon University College Magazine*, Vol, I, No. 3, 1926, p. 4.

75 *ibid.*, p. 32.

76 *ibid.*, April 1930, p. 46.

77 A suffragette who fought for womens' rights.

78 *The Ceylon University College Magazine, April 1930*, p. 25.

79 *ibid.*, Vol. VI, No. 1, October 1930, p. 32ff.

and student elections began to be competitive. Women, who were in a small minority, seem to have been reluctant to enter the fray. The post of 'Lady Committee Member' was always uncontested except once in 1936 when two women competed for it. This was hailed as an event of great significance. The Secretary of the Union Society observed that it was "encouraging evidence of the growing political consciousness of the woman undergraduate and of her determination to assert her claims openly and fearlessly.[80] But competing for 'Lady Committee Member' was a far cry from equal competition in student government. The lack of initiative on the part of women did meet with some severe criticism. In the opinion of one writer "in these days of equality, fraternity, democracy and even socialism, the ladies should face elections with the rest."[81] Two ladies did just that in the following year (1940). The General Secretary of the Union Society writes: "...for the first time in the history of the Union, ladies have been found fully qualified for election to any post in the Society. Two of them braved the storm at the polls this year. This is very encouraging evidence of the growing political consciousness of the lady undergraduate."[82] Unfortunately neither of the women won!

It is perhaps the unequal competition which women had to face that prompted women to form their own association in 1941. Ivor Jennings who was invited for the inaugural meeting considered it a progressive move but not so the men who showed great antagonism. The editor of the Union Magazine is on record disagreeing with Jennings that the women were progressive for "not one of them has contributed an article either to this magazine or the last." He pours a great deal of scorn and invective on the women for attempting to form their own Union. He says, "finding themselves inferior to the men in the standard of debate, the women have decided to form a Union of their own as a training ground for the members before they enter the wider arena of the University Union."[83] Women's skills in debate have been richly documented, a subject to which we will return to later in this paper. A comment by the General Secretary of the Union Society in December 1939 would suffice at this point. "As for the ladies, one wonders why in days when women are fighting for equal

---

[80] *The Ceylon University College Magazine*, Vol. XII, No. 1, October 1936, p. 46.

[81] *ibid.*, Vol. 13, No. 2, July 1938-39, p. 11.

[82] *ibid.*, Vol. XIV, No. 2, June 1940, p. 29.

[83] *ibid.*, Vol. XIV, No. 5, December 1941, p. 9.

rights with men, they are yet content in the Union Society to yield the first place to the men, they never ask questions at Union meetings or join in the discussion when debates are open to the House, and why they require so much persuasion before they consent to speak in debates. But it must be admitted that whenever they did speak, they always acquitted themselves creditably and proved that they possess a dormant talent that can easily produce the Sarojini Naidus and the Chattopadyayas of Ceylon."[84] That they were inferior to the men in debate was unfair criticism to shame the women so that they would not organise on their own. In this the men seem to have been successful for we do not hear of the Women's Union anymore.

The attempt to Unionise as a separate women's group reflects the discomfort they felt in a mixed Union. Vastly outnumbered in the student population, perhaps even more so at Union meetings and given the social norms that women should be 'shy and retiring' and not be in the public gaze, the female undergraduates were obviously looking for a more congenial and friendly forum to express themselves and to realize their inner aspirations. That women were reluctant to speak from the floor at debates and discussions[85] and that sometimes it was an arduous task to persuade them to participate as formal speakers at debates[86] is a perennial complaint of Union Secretaries. Comments such as "they should not remain in ivory towers like their Victorian grandmothers"[87] and it is typical of the mid-Victorian mentality of the Ceylonese undergraduate, that while her sisters in other universities are fighting hard for enfranchisement, she, after being granted it, should remain apathetic"[88] are not infrequent. But when they did speak, which was often, women made a

---

84 *ibid.*, Vol. XIV, No. 1, December 1939, pp. 20-21.

85 *ibid.*, April 1930; Vol. VII, No. 2, April 1932, p. 3; Vol. XII, No. 3, April 1938, pp. 12-13; Vol. XIV, No. 1, December 1939, p. 20; Vol. XIV, No. 3, November 1940, p. 46; Vol. XIV, No. 4, September 1941, p. 30; Vol. XIV, No. 5, December 1941, p. 41; Vol. XIV, No. 6, March 1942, pp. 30-31.

86 *ibid.*, Vol XIII, No. 1, December 1938, p. 11, Vol, XIV, No. 1, December 1939; Vol XIV, No. 3, November 1940, p. 29.

87 *ibid.*, Vol. XII, No. 3, April 1938, p. 76.

88 *ibid.*, Vol. XIII, No. 1, December 1938, p. 11.

positive contribution, and not everyone had to be so 'arduously persuaded.'[89]

It is from the beginning of the 1930s that one detects the increasing involvement of women in the activities of the Union Society and also of other cultural associations where they played significant roles. This phenomenon coincided with the increased associations where they played significant roles. This phenomenon coincided with the increased enrolment of women at University College by 1931, which may partly account for a new feeling of courage. One has also to remember that at this point in time women were taking significant strides in the wider society. Equal voting rights with men, admission to the legal profession and the election of a woman (Adeline Molamure) to the State Council were important milestones reached during the 1930-31 period. This was also a time when the educated youth were gripped by the prevailing intellectual and political ferment in the country created by the agitation for independence from British rule, the demand for social reform, the spread of Marxist ideology and anti-imperialist campaigns like the Suriya Mal movement. These issues were widely discussed at Union meetings and judging from the subjects debated in the Union Society, the Sinhalese Society and the Tamil Society, even the women's issue seems to have been high on the undergraduate agenda. The men no doubt were more vocal. In fact Tissa Chandrasoma (1932-35) remembers the students waving black flags during the visit of a member of the British royal family.[90] The women were not completely silent. Some debated current issues at meetings of undergraduate associations, although they most often seconded the men. Others made their views known through the College magazine and a few like Selina Peiris and Sarojini Sivapragasam took an active part in the prevailing political discourse.

The academic year 1931-2 marked the entry of women to the debating platform of the Union Society. The novelty of it was not lost on the Secretary even in the following year when he wrote, "The ladies stepped forward, threw off their veil of shyness on several occasions and lent us the charm of their personality and the music of their language."[91] There were however some limitations to these exercises in public speaking. As already noted, when the women joined in as debaters whether it was in the Union, Sinhalese or Tamil Societies, they seconded the proposer and opposer of the motion, leaving the

---

[89] *ibid.*, Vol. XIV, No. 2, June 1940, pp. 29-30.

[90] Tissa Chandrasoma, *op.cit.*

[91] *The Ceylon University College Magazine*, Vol. VIII, No. 2, 1933, p. 21.

men to take the lead roles.[92] Whether social conventions precluded the women from pressing forward or the men preferred to arrange things that way are themselves debatable issues. That not all the men were happy to see women in the forefront is brought home by the report of the General Secretary in 1935/36, a time when women reached high visibility in Union Society activities. He says, "the charge of feminism has been levelled against the Union Society by carping critics who appear to resent the prominence given to the fair sex in a few of the debates held this year."[93] Women did lead discussions when debates were arranged between all female teams.[94] There were some occasions when men and women took opposite sides in serious debates,[95] although those arranged by the male hostels with the residents of the women's hostel and non-resident women were more social events.[96] One or two instances where a woman appeared as the first speaker seconded by a male have been documented,[97] but the rule was for women to bring up the rear. In the Union Society magazine published in December 1938, Theja Piyadasa (later Gunawardena) remonstrates with her female colleagues on this score--"Apart from merely seconding the proposer and opposer, ladies should speak from the house and contribute ... to the ... debates."

Even as second speakers the women seem to have performed extremely well. At freshers' debates the young men, who led the discussions, were usually heckled throughout their speeches but when it was the turn of the women to speak they were listened to with "the traditional behaviour of members towards

---

92 *ibid.*, Vol. XI, No. 1, Dec. 1935, p. 44; Vol. XII, No. 1, Oct. 1936, pp. 47-48.

93 *ibid.*, Vol. XII, No. 1, May 1936, pp. 30-31.

94 *ibid.*, Vol. VII, No. 2, April 1932, p. 25; Vol. VIII, No. 1, October 1932, pp. 18 & 22; Vol. VIII, No. 2, June 1933, p. 22' Vol. IX, No. 2, April 1934, pp. 26-27.

95 *ibid.*, Vol. X, No. 2, March 1934, p. 30; Vol. VIII, No. 2, June 1933, p. 22.

96 *ibid.*, Vol. XIV, No. 1, December 1939, pp. 43-49; Vol. XIV, No. 3, November 1940, pp. 64-65; Vol. XIV, No. 6, March 1942, pp. 60-62.

97 *ibid.*, Vol. XII, No. 2, 1937/8 (Sinhalese Society), p. 127; Vol. XIV, No. 1, December 1939 (Union Society), p. 22.

ladies."[98] The age of chivalry was not dead! Numerous compliments are paid to women debaters and comments such as "certain new-comers among the ladies came off with flying colours,"[99] and "the lady speakers made remarkable speeches,"[100] are not infrequent in the College magazine. Young women who had learnt to compete only with members of their own sex at school and who were used to giving way to their brothers at home now learnt to compete with men in the tutorial class, at examinations and a few were emboldened to debate with them on issues which were both serious and at times lightly humorous.

Women appear to have kept out of Union Society activities particularly when the going was rough. During the 1937/38 period Union meetings were getting to be very stormy and it is reported that there was a lack of restraint at debates. The poor participation of women drew this angry comment by the secretary: "The crass indifference of the ladies towards all matters concerning the Union cannot be condoned."[101] However, a different observation that: "Except for a few hardy spirits, the women students generally boycotted Union meetings"[102] seems to explain why women made themselves scarce. But already the situation had begun to improve with the election of Theja Piyadasa (later Gunawardena) as Lady Committee Member of the Union Society. She seems to have given her female colleagues a strong and dynamic leadership improving their participation in Union activities.[103]

Like Theja Piyadasa, there were other charismatic individuals who gave direction to their fellow-women at University College. One of them whose personality becomes visible through the papers of the College magazine is Regina de Silva (later Mrs Balasuriya). Short in stature, according to her contemporaries, Regina de Silva towered among the rest leaving her imprint on a number of College activities. Erica La Brooy, who was Head-girl of the

---

98 *ibid.*, Vol. XIII, No. 1, December 1938, p. 49.

99 *ibid.*, Vol. IX, No. 1, October 1933, p. 5.

100 *ibid.*, p. 29.

101 *ibid.*, Vol. XII, No. 3, April 1938, pp. 12-13.

102 *ibid.*, Vol. XIII, No. 1, December 1938, p. 11.

103 *ibid.*

women's hostel, counts Regina de Silva as one of her mentors.[104] Among her major concerns was the promotion of the Sinhalese language and culture, a concern which had been close to her heart even in earlier times. She was a teacher at Visakha Vidyalaya before she entered University College and Gerty Chandrasoma (nee Fonseka), one of her pupils at that time, recalls with awesome praise the skill with which she inspired the Visakhians of her class to take an interest in their own language and literature. For her own prowess in Sinhalese writing (Gerty Fonseka was joint-editor responsible for the Sinhalese section of the Union magazine in 1933/34 and she was a composer of Sinhalese verse),[105] Mrs Chandrasoma gives full credit to this great teacher who inspired her in her school days.[106] As an undergraduate, Regina de Silva became an enthusiastic supporter of the Sinhalese Society, "stimulating other ladies to attend meetings regularly." At a time when it was difficult to persuade women to act on stage, she consented to take part in the annual Sinhalese play in 1930/31 "inspite of many inconveniences." Her acting has been described as 'skillful.'[107] In the following year she co-edited the College magazine, taking charge of its Sinhalese Society when Dr. G.P. Malalasekera was its President, "a definite recognition of the part women were playing in the Society's activities."[108] She went on to become the 'Lady Committee Member' of the Union Society in 1933 and it is said of her that she "made herself indispensable to the Committee by her very useful advice, criticisms and suggestions."[109] Regina de Silva's hopes for women are embodied in an article she wrote on 'Viharamahadevi,' in the College magazine, where she holds out this courageous and patriotic queen as a great exemplar worthy of emulation.[110] The first woman to graduate in Indo-Aryan, she took to teaching, the only career then

---

104 Erica La Brooy, *op.cit.*

105 *The Ceylon University College Magazine*, Vol. IX, Nos. 1&2, October 1933 and December 1934.

106 Gertie Chandrasoma, Personal Interview (12.05.1994).

107 *The Ceylon University College Magazine*, Vol. VI, No. 2, March 1931, p. 41.

108 *ibid.*, Vol. VII, No. 1, October 1932, p. 24.

109 *ibid.*, Vol. IX, No. 1, October 1933, p. 29.

110 *ibid.*, Vol. VII, No. 2, April 1932, p. 40ff.

open to women with a degree in the arts and humanities, and eventually became principal of Sujatha Vidyalaya, Matara.

The above cameo of Regina Balasuriya (nee de Silva) illustrates the fact that the more charismatic and dynamic women did respond to opportunities available to undergraduates, their gender notwithstanding. In some ways Regina Balasuriya was a trend-setter. After her it seems to have become almost a convention that a woman should edit the Sinhalese section of the College magazine. The chain of women editors (Misses de Silva, Fonseka,[111] Pathville[112] and Randunu[113]) was broken only in 1936 when D.J. Wijeratna stepped into this position. The tradition was once again revived by Miss D.V.B. Kannangara in 1939.[114]

A student society in which women found space for self-expression was the Dramatic Society. Functioning under names such as the 'Dramatic and Musical Society" and the 'Dramatic Club' at different times, it brought together a small group of people interested in drama and music. Women found a congenial atmosphere here, as gender disparities were not very pronounced. From the composition of the committee over the years, one can see that women rose to responsible positions and they seem to have been always part of the decision-making process. It is significant to note that at most times two or three office-bearers in the Committee were women. In early 1935 history was made in the Society when Evelyn La Brooy became its first 'Lady President.[115]' This was repeated in 1938[116] and in 1940,[117] an index to the high level of female

---

[111] *ibid.*, Vol. IX, No. 1, October 1933, p. 31.

[112] *ibid.*, Vol. X, No. 1, October 1934, p. 21 and No. 2, March 1935 (Sinhalese section), p. 1 .

[113] *ibid.*, Vol. XI, No. 2, May 1936 (Sinhalese section), p. 1, *ibid.*, Vol. XI, No. 1, Dec. 1935 (Sinhalese section), p. 1.

[114] *ibid.*, Vol. XIV, No. 1, December 1939, p. 64.

[115] *ibid.*, Vol. X, No. 2, March 1935, p. 34; *ibid.*, Vol. XI, No. 1, March 1935, p. 40.

[116] *ibid.*, Vol. XII, No. 3, April 1938, p. 92.

[117] *ibid.*, Vol. XIV, No. 2, June 1940, p. 38.

participation in the Dramatic Society. On many occasions the Vice-President was a woman[118] and almost always women were assigned the post of Junior Treasurer.[119] Women were popularly elected to the post of Secretary as well. Members of the society had opportunities to give expression to their talents at musical performances and on stage. At special meetings men and women played instrumental music, pianoforte recitals being the forte of women.[120] With respect to their main interest, drama, starting with play-readings where women were enthusiastic participants,[121] the Dramatic Society graduated into play production. During the period 1929 to 1932 plays were staged for in-house audiences at University College. In 1933 the Dramatic Society had its first public performance of a play with a not so inappropriate title "Where women rule."[122] Whether it was for public or College audiences, there is no record of any reluctance on the part of women to act on the English stage. It is noteworthy that many of the women who took part in these plays belonged to the Burgher community but there were some Sinhalese as well. This compliance contrasts with the negative reactions of women to act in Sinhalese and Tamil plays. The social acceptance of women acting in English plays probably had something to do with encouraging facets of western culture and also the fact that they were playing to exclusively English-speaking audiences, one's own social club as it were. Whatever the reasons, there is no doubt that the actresses themselves developed a great deal of self-confidence and derived a sense of fulfilment. Also the Dramatic Society afforded undergraduates opportunities to develop close staff- student relations, for, not only were members of the academic staff involved in play production but some of the younger men acted on stage with the undergraduates.

---

118 *ibid.*, October 1929, p. 34; Vol. IX, No. 1, October 1933, p. 32; Vol. X, No. 1, October 1934, p. 22; Vol. X, No. 2, March 1935, p. 34; Vol. XI, No. 1, December 1935, p. 51; Vol. XII, No. 3, April 1938, p. 92, Vol. XIV, No. 1, December 1939, p. 63.

119 *ibid.*, Vols VI-XIV, 1929-1940.

120 *ibid.*, Vol. VII, No. 1, 1931-2, p. 21; Vol. IX, No. 2, April 1934, p. 28.

121 *ibid.*, Vol. I, No. 2, p. 22; No. 3, 1925-26, p. 33; Vol. II, No. 1, 1927, p. 22; Vol. VI, No. 2, 1931, p. 39.

122 *ibid.*, Vol. IX, No. 1, October 1933, p. 33.

Acting in Sinhalese and Tamil plays was obviously not a desired social attainment. According to one undergraduate writer, women took a great leap forward in 1930 when they consented to act in a Sinhalese play.[123] However the practice did not catch on. Finding women to take part in Sinhalese plays was uphill work,[124] and in 1941 the last year of University College, the Sinhalese play had to be abandoned because it was not possible to find actresses.[125] The Tamil Society found their situation to be far worse. Having staged "Savitri" in September 1932, the Secretary strikes a very optimistic note. "This is perhaps the first time in the history of Ceylon when Tamil ladies (amateurs) have appeared with men on stage and it certainly augurs well for the future of our womanhood."[126] But from that time onwards a regular lament of the Tamil Society was the difficulty of finding Tamil speaking women willing to appear on stage.[127] In a comment on Tamil plays, a writer to the 1934 Reunion Supplement of the College magazine says "...parents yet exist who are not prepared to allow their daughters to appear on the University College stage."[128] Parental resistance no doubt stemmed from the cultural norms in traditional society where even in the folk plays women's roles were performed by men in appropriate dress. In 1935 a Tamil play had to be abandoned as there was no one to take the heroine's part.[129] In 1940 the Secretary sums up the situation when he says that "it has always been a problem to get our ladies to take part in plays."[130] However, those women who did act in Sinhalese and Tamil plays had the courage to swim against the tide and perhaps paved the way for renowned dramatists like Ediriweera Sarachchandra to find some of his most

---

123 *ibid.*, Reunion Supplement, 1934, p. 20.

124 *ibid.*, Vol. XIII, No. 2, July 1939, p. 86; Vol. XIV, No. 2, June 1940, p. 54.

125 *ibid.*, Vol. XIV, No. 6, March 1942 (Sinhala section), p. XIX.

126 *ibid.*, Vol. VIII, No. 1, October 1932, p. 19.

127 *ibid.*, Vol. XI, No. 1, December 1935, p. 40; Vol. XII, No. 2, 1936, 85, Vol. 14, No. 2, June 1940, p. 56.

128 *ibid.*, *Reunion Supplement*, 1934, p. 19.

129 *ibid.*, Vol. XI, No. 1, December 1935, p. 49.

130 *ibid.*, Vol. 14, No. 2, June 1940, p. 56.

talented actresses from the undergraduate community later on. Therefore this is an area in which a few University College women challenged existing values and norms, setting a trend which society came to accept. Playing to public audiences in the social climate of that time demanded a great deal of courage. The struggle between conformity and liberation for women had only just begun.

Two societies, devoted to academic pursuits, in which women showed serious interest were the 'Literary Circle' and the 'Curia Historica.' This is not surprising, English and History being the two most favoured subjects among women. Women functioned as office bearers in both societies and one of them, Erica Christoffelsz (later La Brooy) was elected to the position of President of the History Society.[131] Women participated in presenting papers at meetings of the Literary Circle and the Curia Historica,[132] and their contributions were no less esteemed than those of the men. The fortunes of the two societies had an uneven history, so did women's participation in them. By and large it would seem that the smaller associations provided women with greater space for self-fulfilment and leadership. In them men and women worked together, perhaps a new experience opening out new perspectives for both groups.

Interaction between the sexes was also manifest in the arena of sports where men and women played together. As noted already, tennis was the game favoured by women. Despite cynics who believed that the men's game suffered by playing 'mixed-doubles,'[133] and 'conservative' critics who deplored 'their masculine garb' describing them as 'mildly insane tomboys,'[134] the women continued to play tennis. After a time they had sufficient confidence to play with the Women's International Club, albeit losing all their matches in 1934 and winning one out of five in 1941.[135] Hockey and badminton were games in

---

131 *ibid.*, Vol. XI, No. 2, May 1936, p. 38.

132 *ibid.*, Vol. I, No. 1, 1924, p. 25; Vol. I, No. 3, 1926, p. 39; Vol. 2, No. 1, 1927, p. 22; October 1929, p. 15; April 1930, Vol. XI, No. 2, May 1936, p. 39; Vol. 13, No. 1, December 1938, p. 89 & Vol. 14, No. 1, December 1939, p. 58.

133 *ibid.*, Vol. VII, No. 2, April 1932, pp. 10-11.

134 *ibid.*, Vol. XI, No. 2, May 1936, p. 7.

135 *ibid.*, Vol. X, No. 1, October 1934, p. 27 & Vol. XIV, No. 4, September 1941, p. 27.

which both men and women participated but not many students were attracted to either. Cricket was the game of men but the women were there to cheer them on at matches.[136] Netball, introduced in 1933, was exclusively for women and it was the turn of the men to watch.[137] Athletics for women was the *bete noir* of the conservative male. "Spirited admonitions on the inadvisability of athletics for young ladies" were heard in the tuck-shop according to one report.[138] In 1936 a male undergraduate who euphemistically calls himself 'Conservative' expresses great satisfaction that athletics was still not available to women and hopes that it never will be.[139] But by 1939 they had crossed this barrier and for the first time women ran a 'ladies race' at the athletics meet. They had indeed come a long way. The editor of the College magazine remarks, "it is gratifying to note that having vindicated their rights in the tuck-shop, they have now established their equality in the competition for colours."[140] It would seem that women had broken into another male preserve. This equality spread into other areas as well. "It has now become fashionable for university women to ride bicycles," observes the editor of the College magazine in 1941.[141] More than a decade earlier Dr. Das Gupta speaking of College men who own bicycles and those who are owned by them says "the women only ride rickshaws."[142] Women riding bicycles seems hardly to have been anticipated. Although events such as this may not be characterized as major revolutions, they are symptomatic of the slow but deep-seated change that was taking place in social attitudes in general and women's lives in particular. Contributing in some measure to these changing mores was the experience of co-education at University College.

Besides an internal momentum of change created through mutual interaction among students, conflicting signals were received from outside. Conceptual positions regarding women's roles ranged from ultra conservative to

---

136 *ibid.*, Vol. VI, No. 1, October, p. 41.

137 *ibid.*, Vol. XI, No. 2, May 1936, p. 35.

138 *ibid.*, October 1929, p. 3.

139 *ibid.*, Vol. XI, No. 2, May 1936, p. 7.

140 *ibid.*, Vol. XIV, No. 1, Dec. 1939, p. 10.

141 *ibid.*, Vol. XIV, No. 6, March 1942, p. 8.

142 *ibid.*, Vol. IV, No. 1, February 1929, p. 5.

mildly liberal during this time. These positions informed the larger debate between tradition and change. Western values were a challenge to traditional norms and responding to this challenge was the upsurge of traditionalism and nationalism. Men and women at University College were part of this debate which echoed down the groves of academe. The social position of women was widely discussed and on this issue the female undergraduates were as much vocal as their male colleagues.

Perhaps it was natural that higher education for women and co-education found acceptance in both student and staff circles at University College. Frequent admonitions to women that they should give up "Victorian mentalities," leave their "ivory towers" and fight for equal rights with men show that further progress was a desired goal. Nevertheless, some of the topics taken up for debate show that there were lurking doubts which remained in some quarters. Well over a decade after the establishment of University College it was still considered topical to place both co-education and higher education for women on the debating floor.[143] With the mooting of an autonomous university, the issue of university education for women came up for debate in the form of a motion that "women should have no place in the Ceylon University."[144] Predictably, it was defeated. It can be argued that undergraduate debates were mostly intended to be provocative and in lighter vein. Nevertheless, the fact that the subject could have been raised even in jest nearly 20 years after women had gained entry to University College, shows that the issue had not been fully laid to rest.

Whatever misgivings there were, higher education for women was a *fait accompli*. The major concern was how it would affect gender roles. Setting up barricades and limiting opportunities are the usual strategies of those who wish to safeguard privilege, and these strategies were used in the 1920s and 1930s to keep women in their place. That higher education was good and desirable for enlightened motherhood[145] vied with the view that it was "detrimental to the

---

143 *ibid.*, Vol. VIII, No. 1, October 1932, p. 18 & No. 2, June 1933, p. 22.

144 *ibid.*, Vol. XIV, No. 2, June 1940, p. 20.

145 *ibid.*, Vol. XI, No. 2, May 1936, pp. 5-7; Vol. XIV, No. 5, December 1941, pp. 14-16.

interests of the home."[146] At times women were humoured with cliches such as "the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world"[147] and "woman is the unquestionable goddess of the home."[148] Not surprisingly Westernisation was a women's issue. The Sinhalese Society debated the proposal that "the western system of education was not suitable for Ceylon women" and it was carried by a large majority.[149] In the same year the Union Society took up a more positive attitude when it debated that "it is desirable that eastern women should be granted the same privileges as their western sisters."[150] The principle seems to be that westernisation for men was a given, it is the women who have to tread warily on that path. A concession that is sometimes made is that they should take what is good from the west while respecting their own cultural norms.[151] That women, not men, are the custodians of culture is not new.

The public-private dichotomy strongly underscored the discourse on gender roles and women, in spite of their degrees, were not encouraged in the public arena. Appropriate professions were medicine and teaching as they fitted the caring and nurturing roles of women. Although in principal the legal profession was opened to them in 1930, some appear to have continued to entertain doubts. The Tamil Society debated the issue in 1933/4.[152] Two years later a 'conservative' critic has gone on record that the law courts and kachcheris were not the place for women. He even expressed the view that votes for women "sounded the death knell of the sanctity of Ceylon's womanhood."[153] This had been part of the rhetoric against the grant of equal political rights to women during the deliberations of the Donoughmore Commission. College students had taken note of these discussions, having

---

146 *ibid.*, Vol. VIII, No. 1, 1932, p. 18.

147 *ibid.*, Vol X No. 1, March 1935, p. 30.

148 *ibid.*, Vol. II, No. 1, 1927, p. 3.

149 *ibid.*, Vol. II, No. 1, 1927, p. 23.

150 *ibid.*, p. 21.

151 *ibid.*, Vol. XI, No. 1, December 1935 (Sinhalese section), pp. 1-2.

152 *ibid.*, Vol. IX, No. 2, April 1934, pp. 26-27.

153 *ibid.*, Vol. XI No. 2, May 1936, pp. 5-7.

debated a motion in 1924 that "Women in Ceylon should be given equal political rights with men."[154] With only 22 women on the roll in 1928, one could hardly expect a women's lobby as such and when the Union Secretary observed in that year that "..... the ladies did not seem anxious to support the proposals for female franchise,"[155] it could be a reference to the poor representation of women at meetings. This question was once again raised at a time when two women had already taken their place in the State Council. The election of Adeline Molamure and Naysum Saravanamuttu to the legislature followed quickly on the heels of the Donoughmore constitution. One wonders if this sent alarm bells ringing, for in 1935, the students debated the proposition that "this house views with alarm the entry of women into politics."[156] It was lost by 17 votes.

Political rights and University degrees did not create for women equal opportunities in social or public life, nor did women demand them at this stage. There was a contradiction between intellectual attainment and the unequal utility value of such attainment as far as women were concerned. According to Conway "...if co-education were really to result in equal treatment for males and females, there should be the same pattern of career development for men and women into the professional elites of society."[157] Attention has already been drawn to the limited employment opportunities available to women. No one, not even the women, thought of equal participation in the public service. Women were content with teaching, the lowest rung in graduate employment. In an editorial of the College magazine in 1938, the jobs available to graduates are spelt out in order of preference. Teaching, it is said, was the last resort of the unemployed graduate, "the graduate scum," in the words of the editor. This last choice of the men was the only choice available to women. Thus existing socio-economic imbalances between men and women remained unchallenged.

Nevertheless, by fanning out to the English schools as teachers these women graduates satisfied a demand and performed a useful social role. As a special cohort of educated women who had had exposure to an environment of

---

154 *ibid.*, Vol. I. No. 1, 1924, p. 14.

155 *ibid.*, Vol. III, No. 1, 1927-28, p. 18.

156 *ibid.*, Vo. XI, No. 1, December 1935, p. 44.

157 Jill K. Conway, *American Higher Education: Toward an Uncertain Future*, Vol I, Fall, 1974, p. 239.

challenge and change, they were able to provide leadership and often acted as role models and mentors to a new generation of educated women. A changing value system would have percolated into the middle class through the schools where these early graduates found employment. Women graduates were perhaps in the best sector of employment to function as agents of social change.

"Education at times reflects society and the changes within it. At other times it reacts with change and brings about further developments. At yet other times because of its autonomy and its own dynamics it develops contradictions and conflicts...."[158] The general tenor of debate among undergraduates shows that despite some enlightened opinion, there was no consensus among them on the emancipation of women from the shackles of the past. Ambivalence between conformity and change is present in all societies and this is mostly true regarding the role and status of women in the period under survey. Higher education for women is not associated with social mobility during this early period. It catered to the demands of the upper classes and remained very much their privilege. In a sense during this period, higher education even exacerbated existing social imbalances by widening the gap between the English educated class and the rest. One must, however note the credit side. There is no doubt that from the experiences at University College there emerged a new female personality. For some it served to nurture new ambitions and skills. Academic training would have broadened intellectual horizons and individual achievement no doubt gave a feeling of self-worth. Although there was oscillation between tradition and change, women at University College did break new ground when they acted on stage, contested elections, spoke in public, took part in athletics and even rode bicycles. The female graduates of University College were the forerunners of an ever widening circle of educated women whose dynamism has in no small measure influenced the improvement of the status of women in Sri Lanka.

SIRIMA KIRIBAMUNE

---

158 A.R. Kamat, "Higher Education," *Higher Education in India*, ed. Amrik Singh and G.D. Sharma, Konark, 1988.

ILLISA'S BUMP AND AMPHITRYON'S BOWL: DIVINE IMPERSONATION IN A GREEK MYTH AND AN INDIAN JĀTAKA

By way of explaining how the sovereignty of Lydia passed from the Heraclids to the Mermnadae, Herodotus narrates in a highly dramatic style the story of King Candaules' tragic passion and its fateful consequence.[1] Candaules, it seems, was so infatuated by the beauty of his wife that he wished another to share this experience. He therefore asked his favourite bodyguard, Gyges, to view her naked as he used to see her, and notwithstanding the man's protestations, he concealed him behind the bedroom door at night, when the queen undressed to go to bed. But it so happened that she saw the intruder, and yet, though flustered, pretended she did not. The next morning she sent for Gyges and, intending revenge on the king for insulting her modesty, gave the man the option of either killing the king and taking her as his wife, or himself dying over the sight he should not have seen. When he chose the former, that night she put a knife in his hand and hid him behind that same door. Thus, when Candaules was asleep, Gyges stabbed him, married the queen and usurped the throne, initiating the dynasty of the Mermnadae in Lydia.

Those familiar with the *Mahāvaṃsa* story of how the gate-keeper, Subha, seized the throne of Yasalalakatissa, who ruled in Anuradhapura, through the practical joke the king used to play from their close resemblance to each other,[2] will remark the fair similarity of the two yarns on how sovereignty passed to two lowly underlings (- I call these "yarns" as no serious historian would be prepared to go along with them). But this latter story engrosses for its plot a factor that shows from where it drew its true inspiration. This factor is Subha's resemblance to Yasalalakatissa, which brings into play the element of mistaken identity and thus directs our attention, like two or three other anecdotes of kings and princesses in the *Mahāvaṃsa*, to a jātaka. In this instance it is the *Illīsa Jātaka* (No. 78), which I wish to review here, albeit cursorily, for the reason that it itself bears a fair resemblance in motif to a Greek myth -- one which chronologically antedates the Indian jātaka and may possibly have something to do with the inspiration that created the latter.

---

1. i. 8-12. A somewhat different version of the story is to be found in Plato *Republic* 359d-360a.

2. xxxv. 51-56.

The *paccuppannavatthu* or "present-life story" of the *Illīsa* is concerned with a wealthy but miserly Treasurer who lived in the city of Sakkhara near Rajagaha. This man, who would not give away "so much as the tiniest drop of oil a blade of grass will take up", saw a yokel enjoying a stuffed cake and craved to eat one himself. As a result he grew thinner and thinner. But when his wife found out the cause and offered to make him a cake, he saw to it that it was to be just the one for himself, not even another for her. And he bid her cook it on the seventh floor of his house for fear others would find out and call over for a share. Becoming aware of this that same day and intending to convert the man to self-denial, the Buddha despatched the Elder, Moggallāna, to exercise his transcendental powers and bring the man, his wife, cakes, milk, ghee and all from Sakkhara to his presence in Rajagaha. This Moggallāna achieved by presenting himself in the air outside the seventh floor in an attitude of begging for alms and not quitting, despite all efforts of the miser to shoo him off, then by a miracle making the dough increase and the cakes stick to each other, until the Treasurer burst into perspiration tugging them apart and his craving left him. Then Moggallāna brought them all to the presence of the Master by the miracle of making the staircase touch ground at the main gate of Jetavana while its head was still in the man's house at Sakkhara. As with Christ's miracle of the loaves and the fishes[3] the cakes remained as much as there was at the beginning even after the Buddha and five hundred brethren and all the rest had eaten. So, on the Buddha's instructions the remaining cakes were dumped in a cave not far from the gateway "and to this day", says the *paccuppannavatthu* of the *Illīsa Jātaka*, "a spot called 'The Crock Cake' (*Kapallapūvapabbhāra*) is shown at the extremity of the cave."[4] As for the Treasurer and his wife, the pair attained Fruition of the First Path of Salvation (*sotāpattiphale patiṭṭhāpesi*).

This however was not the first time, says the *paccuppannavatthu* of the *Illīsa Jātaka*, that the miserly Treasurer had been converted by Moggallāna. In earlier lives too Moggallāna had been doing the same - though, as far as can then be seen from his persistent miserliness, to little effect! However, in the past life, when it so happened (as in 390 odd other jātakas) Brahmadatta was

---

3. Cp. Jesus Christ's miracles when he fed huge multitudes with five and again seven loaves and two or a few fishes and still had basketsful of crumbs to throw away at the end. *Mat.* 14.17; 15.34; *Mark* 6.38 and 8.7; *Luke* 9.13 and *John* 6.9.

4. An attempt to give the story a pseudo-aetiological clinch. See for instance the *Nalapāna Jātaka* (No. 20) - though the author here fails to understand the implication - the *Kakkata Jātaka* (No. 266) *et al.*

king in Benares, this same man had been born once again as a miserly Treasurer, then named Illīsa, a lame crook-back with a squint, who broke down the family almonry, hoarded his wealth and drove the poor away. That time however the yokel he saw was one who was not eating, but (for variation no doubt) drinking - and what he did to satisfy his selfish craving was, not even to have his wife brew liquor at home for himself for fear of having to give others potions, but send a servant out for a penny-worth for himself, which he got him to hide in a remote thicket and imbibed all by himself.

The way in which Moggallāna had set about reforming the Treasurer as Illīsa in that past life is however somewhat different from the course he adopted in this one - and it is in this procedure that our interest lies. For Moggallāna, who had then been Illīsa's father and died and been reborn as the god Sakka, when he saw that his son had burnt down the almonry and driven away the poor and determined to establish him in the merit of generosity, now seeing him drinking all by himself away from home, adopted a ruse which in its rascality rather emulates Juppiter's doings *apropos* Amphitryon in the well-known Plautine comedy named after the hero.

For (a) God that he is now, Sakka comes down from the Realm of the Devas and (b) assumes by divine power the exact semblance of Illīsa, lameness, crook-back, squint and all; (c) In this guise he visits the king and asks his permission to distribute his possessions among the people. (d) He then proceeds to Illīsa's house, and deceiving his wife and everybody else by his impersonation, proceeds to distribute everything of Illīsa left and right. (e) Illīsa, coming to know of this rushed home, only to be himself treated as an interloper (on instructions by Sakka) and thrown out of doors with a cudgelling by the people, who are already convinced Sakka is the true Illīsa. (f) His complaint to the king fails, for the king asks was it not he himself who asked him leave to distribute his property. (g) At this stage there is a confrontation of the two Illīsas (the impersonating Sakka and the man himself) and an attempt by Illīsa to prove himself the true Illīsa, first by appeal to the king, then his wife and finally by reference to a piece of material evidence, a bump (possibly a wart, *piḷakā*) on his head, which only he and his barber knew of - all of which fail, including the bump, since Sakka immediately forestalled him by miraculously creating one on his own head as well. (h) With his identity thus comprehensively and convincingly duplicated by Sakka through his divine power, the flabbergasted Illīsa falls in a faint. (i) Thereupon Sakka, revealing himself, says, "Not Illīsa am I but Sakka" and explains the purpose of his masquerade; whereupon (j) Illīsa is reconciled to the why and the wherefore of all that he underwent.

As observed before, the first part of this jātaka proper is hardly very different from the first part of the *paccuppannavatthu*, so much so that the author, at the latter stage of it, is content with remarking that "what follows is to be told in the words of the former story" and getting on to the variant ruse adopted by Moggallāna in that past instance. It will be found that several jātakas altogether or partially duplicate their respective *paccuppannavatthu* - that is, when it is not the other way round. A second thing worth noting in the jātaka proper of the *Illīsa* - and this more clearly evidencing adoption of the story from a non-Buddhistic source, is the insignificant role played in it by the Bodhisatta - he is only the barber called in to testify to the bump on Illīsa's head, and even in such capacity proves absolutely unhelpful when Sakka duplicates it on his own head as well. This may have been from a justifiable fear, at least in this particular jātaka, of involving him in a stunt not quite becoming of him as the Buddha-to-be.[5]

To turn attention to the fully elaborated, if also humourously dramatized version of the myth in Plautus' play, the *Amphitryon,* we see that (a) god though he is, Jove comes down from Olympus and (b) assumes by divine power the exact semblance of Amphitryon, who had gone to war with the Teleboans and had just got back (c) He then proceeds to Amphitryon's house and, deceiving Amphitryon's wife and everybody else by his impersonation of the man, proceeds to make love to her. (e) Amphitryon comes home, only to receive a cool welcome, his wife swearing he had been with her earlier and making him suspect her of adultery. (f) As proof of his having been home earlier, she produces material evidence in the form of a golden bowl which he had gifted her (though it was then that he for the first time was bringing it to her, but he finds the box miraculously empty, and the gift already with her)[6] When he leaves and comes back again, he is treated as an interloper (on instruction from Zeus), kept out of the house by force and has the dregs of wine thrown in his face. (g) At this stage there is a confrontation of the two Amphitryons (the impersonating Jove and the man himself) and an attempt by Amphitryon to prove himself

---

[5] As is well known, in stories where none of the participants can be healthily identified with the Bodhisatta, he is made a non-participant observer of the drama, a tree- or water-deity or such. Even so, many stories incorporated as jātakas, whatever other quality they may seek to commend as his, prove detrimental to his ethical image arising from the *dhamma*. See my 'The Jataka Bodhisatta' *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* vol. XXII (1996) p. 51-61.

[6] On this bowl, see n. 12 below.

Amphitryon by appeal to the captain of his ship, Blepharo, who leaves, confused (like the barber, Bodhisatta of the *Illīsa*). (h) With his identity thus comprehensively and conclusively duplicated by Jove through his divine power, the flabbergasted Amphitryon decides to resort to the king (i) at which point their is a thunderous crash, accompanied by a flash of lightening, as a result of which Amphitryon faints. (j) Thereupon Jove, revealing himself in a booming voice to the lady, says: "Alcmena, fear not, help is at hand. The regent of the skies is here with comfort for thee and thine", explains that it was he who slept with her unbeknown and that of the twins born to her, one was his, the other Amphitryon's. (k) Amphitryon is reconciled to the why and the wherefore of all that he underwent.

It is fascinating to think then that these two stories, the Indian and the Greek/Roman, whose motifs are based on impersonation, are themselves so strikingly impersonations of one another even to the degree of detail, that the author of one must have had some knowledge of the other - though who of which is still to be seen. For no one, so far as I know, has so far remarked this similarity of the *Illīsa Jātaka* with the Amphitryon story, let alone gone into the question.

In 1889 Robert Chalmers (who is the first to have given us an English translation of the *Illīsa Jātaka*) drew attention to the argument of a poem of William Morris, 'The Proud king,[7] in which a haughty king, Jovanian by name, when bathing has his clothes stolen and his form assumed by an archangel, who is then recognized by courtiers, servants and his own queen as their lord, Jovinian, while he himself is driven with blows from his own palace, and does not regain his kingdom and his honour until, in his deep humiliation, he humbles himself to God. This story of the proud king, like the old French 'Moralité l'orgueil et presomption de l'empereur Jovinian' is undoubtedly taken from the 13th century story book, the *Gesta Romanorum*.[8]

---

7 'The Lineage of "The Proud King"' *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1892) Art. II, p. 39-51. In this article he only gives a lengthy summary of the *jātaka*. The whole of it, with *paccuppannavatthu* and all, he translates for the E.B. Cowell edition *The Jataka* vol. I (1895) see 1973 ed. Delhi, p. 187-201.

8 A collection of entertaining moral stories composed in Latin by Christian monks for their use in sermons, much as were the jataka by the Buddhist. Fictitious even when involving recognizable historical personalities, they have the quality of parable, each tagged with an

Chalmers traces this story further back, to the Koran's verse:

> "And we did try Solomon and we threw upon his throne
> a form; then he turned repentant."

the commentaries on which refer to a story in which Solomon is said to have practiced idolatry and God punished him by allowing a demon of the interesting name of Ṣakhr (or Ṣakhar) to steal his signet ring. With this ring and assumed likeness of the king, Ṣakhr sat on the throne, while Solomon, unrecognized by all, went around begging for forty days - after which punishment, the demon Ṣakhr flew away, throwing the ring into the sea. The ring was recovered miraculously by Solomon from inside a fish,[9] after which he recovered his kingdom and threw Ṣakhr himself into a lake with a stone round his neck. In the Babylonian recension of this work, c. A.D. 500, Solomon, unrecognized even in Jerusalem after the loss of his ring, is mocked by his own porter and driven away with blows from his own door. Here too he finds his ring inside a fish before he is again recognized for who he really is. The demon, in this called Asmodeus, seeing the ring, shrieks and flees and Solomon regains his throne a reformed man.

Of this "Talmudic-Koranic fiction" Sir Richard Burton had found the *Gesta Romanorum* story (and therefore, adds Chalmers, Morris' poem) "the manifest descendant", though he himself says "with greater caution, and perhaps more certainty, it may be maintained that the traditions are *akin*, springing from one stock." Chalmers goes even further to suggest that the Koranic version itself is not borrowed from the Talmudic "but much greater probability attaches to the view that the two are merely parallel or sister versions;" for even if names do not count for much (evidently when they differ), he points to the difference of name of the two demons, Asmodeus in the Talmud and Ṣakhr in the Koranic legend. But then he observes that the name "Ṣakhr" is itself indicative of Indian

---

'Application' comparable to the *samodhana* of a jātaka, in which the participants, and even creatures, places, things are given an interpretation in the light of Christianity and Christian doctrine.

[9] Chalmers makes no comment on this detail. In the *Macchuddāna Jātaka* (No. 288) a parcel of money belonging to the Bodhisatta comes back to him through a fish that had swallowed it; in Kalidasa's *Sakuntala* however, it is a ring. But the oldest and most striking instance is the story of the tyrant Polycrates' ring, narrated by Herodotus (iii. 40-44), to which other such stories may owe their detail.

origin. "Ṣakhr is simply the god Cakra of the older Indian theology, the archangel Sakka of Pali. And in the Pali Jatakas occurs the story of Illisa, who is punished for sin and brought to repentance by the archangel Sakka assuming is form."

"It is a far cry from Gotama the Buddha to William Morris," says Chalmers, at the outset of this article on 'The Lineage of the Proud King' "but it will be the object of these pages to establish the succession, not apostolic but literary, linking together the Victorian poet and the Indian sage of the fifth century B.C." Then he goes on to add later, "The chain of sequence of the Jataka to Mr. Morris is still far from complete and it may be hoped that scholars with a larger knowledge than I can lay claim to, of the several literatures in which the story appears, may be willing to amplify and extend this sketch."

What Chalmers proposes is that the study be extended forwards, as he had done. As regards the motif as present in the *Illīsa Jātaka* itself however, he does not concede it to have been original with the author - and he should be right there - yet has not looked any further *back* for its prototype, contenting himself with the speculations (1) that the earliest Buddhist form was not so elaborate as that of the present Jātaka book and (2) that Buddhism borrowed the tale, with Sakka, from pre-Buddhist folk-lore, now lost.[10]

---

[10] Chalmers falls back on Rhys-Davids (*Buddhist Birth-Stories*(Trubner 1881) for the dating of the jātakas. In his *Buddhist India* London (1903) p. 113 Rhys-Davids admits that the whole of the longer stories in vol. VI are later than the rest, but some of these were in existence in the third century B.C. For putting the others (without their frame story) at an older date, Rhys-David relies on the studies of Fick and Hofrath Bühler, both of whom must presume that all that wealth of stories had come down from that greater antiquity to "the time when Buddhism was becoming a power in India" in a fixed language and form (- though at the same time they concede "they were handed down from mouth to mouth" (Fick) and that "the Buddhist monks had altered much" (Bühler)). Transmission *in ipsissimis verbis* is hardly likely with such a huge volume of prose literature, which admitted adaptation as well. What would have come down from antiquity in India or from elsewhere are the *motifs* - or at best the stories retold as each narrator pleased, which then were either expanded or retold, or both, by the monks, freely dealing with them to give them a distinct Buddhist flavour. This is what is found of other oral traditions. The style of a single author is often to be seen in several jātakas in the collection, a thing which is

For all that, I thought that speculation was possible for him in another line, which would have been opened up when he was discussing names. For, while the name of Ṣakhr in the Koranic story pointed him to the *Illīsa Jātaka*, there was the name "Jovinian" in the *Gesta Romanorum* which he has let ride. (And yet he was aware of the possibility of the existence of traditions that could have been *akin*!) For, just as much as Sakka is the impersonating god of the *Illīsa* story, Jove is the god who impersonates Amphitryon in the Roman play of Plautus -- so that the composer of the *Gesta Romanorum* story of Jovinian reveals his source (as much as Ṣakhr does in the Koranic) by his play on that name (Jove-Jovinian) for the hero of his story. If however he now uses it in this form for the impersonated hero and not the impersonating archangel, one must appreciate the new context of his story, which is Christian, with the divinity involved as the Christian God (as against the classical) and the angel here as the agent of that Christian God.

This is not to suggest that the Plautine play was the immediate inspiration for the *Illīsa Jātaka*. A certain amount of chronology stands in the way, for the *Amphitryon* is dated at c. 195 B.C, and Roman influence had not still permeated the regions of Buddhist India. But the myth used by Plautus, and with scope for much of its dramatic detail, had already been developed in Greek literature well before Plautus and then also well before Greek literature would have been carried to India following Alexander's conquest and the Greek settlement of those same regions. The Plautine play is just as much heir to the motif as would be the *Illīsa*, even if the former, as it were, flaunts itself in toga and the latter in dhoti.

First appearance of the myth of Amphitryon's impersonation by Zeus (Jove) is as early as the eight century B.C. when Hesiod, in his *Shield of Hercules*,[11] says of how Zeus, "wanted to beget a protector against destruction

---

impossible if they were a hotch-potch of a folk antiquity "handed down from mouth to mouth". Their *terminus ante quem* is however quite another matter, and depending on the dating of the canonical verses and, more particularly for those that appear on the bas-reliefs of the Bharhut and Sanchi stupas, the dating of these *stūpas*.

[11] *Aspis* 27-56 Herodotus makes him contemporary with Homer but modern opinion tends to put him somewhat later. T.W. Allen (*Homer: The Origins and Transmission* (1924) ch. 4) however dates him as early as 800 B.C. The myth concerns the miraculous conception of Heracles by Alcmena, wife of Amphitryon. Hercules, in his lifetime rid the

for both gods and men who eat bread" - and so, in the absence of Amphitryon from his home, "he rose up from Olympus, mulling deception in his mind and lusting for the love of the well-girt woman." And so he lay with Electryon's daughter and all his desires were accomplished. That same night Amphitryon, returning from war, would do nothing till he had gone to bed with his wife. "And the lady, submitting to the god and the man, far best of men in Thebes of the Seven Gates, bore twin sons; but one a lesser man". Then describing Heracles, Hesiod says "this one she conceived under the embraces of Zeus, the dark-clouded, but the other one, Iphicles, to Amphitryon of the restless spear - seed that were separate; one, lying with a mortal man and one with Zeus, son of Cronos, marshal of all immortals."

Diodorus Siculus[12] too makes mention of the deception, saying Zeus used deception in Alcmena's case as he did not want to offer her violence as in the case of other women, while at the same time he thought he could not persuade her because of her chastity. So he decided on using deception; he deceived Alcmena by assuming in every respect the form of Amphitryon. Apollodorus[13] had in his version of the myth the point that Zeus also tricked her by telling her all that took place in the war which the true Amphitryon fought against the Teleboans, and that when Amphitryon himself arrived she gave him no big welcome, and that when he inquired why, she told him that he had come last night and slept with her. Amphitryon then learns from Tiresias, the blind seer, that the interloper was Zeus himself - a necessity Plautus' Amphitryon at the termination of the play flippantly asserts he can well dispense with, now that Jove (Zeus) had revealed himself as Alcmena's lover.

The whole story had apparently been told by Pherecydes of Leros, who lived in the first half of the 5th century B.C., as we learn from the scholiasts on

---

world of many monsters and villains.

12 iv.9.

13 *Bibliotheka* II. iv. 7-8. Who introduced this bowl into the deception of the god cannot be known, but Herodotus (v. 59) had himself seen a cauldron in the temple of Ismenian Apollo with very ancient "Cadmeian characters' stating that it was dedicated by Amphitryon from the spoils of the Teleboans. This may have something to do with the idea of King Pterelaus' bowl which figures in Plautus' play. For Amphitryon's expedition against the Teleboans (or Taphians) see Strabo x.2.20, Pausanias i.37.6 and Plautus *Amphitryon* 183-256.

Homer *Iliad* XIV. 323 and *Odyssey* XI. 266.,[14] and it is likely that Apollodorus followed him, for he refers to him immediately after he gives his own account.

Sophocles produced a play called *Amphitryon* and Euripides one called *Alcmena*, both dealing with the same myth,but they are lost. Wernicke infers that Sophocles followed the earlier version, recorded by Apollodorus, according to which the deception practiced by Zeus and his intercourse with Alcmena were made known to Amphitryon by Tiresias.[15] Accius (or Attius) Roman tragic poet born in 170 B.C. and who lived to a great age, wrote an *Amphitryon* thought to be adopting Sophocles - especially since the only other tragedy so entitled was by the Alexandrian Aeschylus. "In any case", says A.C. Pearson, "the plot may be taken to have covered the same ground as the well-known travesty of Plautus."[16] Opinion has been divided whether Sophocles' play was a tragedy or a satyr play; more likely it was a tragedy.[17] On the other hand Euripides' play, the *Alcmena*, from which H.J. Rose conjectures the fable as given by Hyginus is derived,[18] appears to have been a parody and hardly different from the plot of Plautus' boisterous comedy - even if it is possible that (as scholars agree) Euripides innovated that Amphitryon tried to burn Alcmena on a funeral pyre for her adultery and Zeus intervened to save her.[19]

---

[14] He was a logographer who lived in Athens and wrote copiously on myths and genealogies. His work would have served Apollodorus as a model for his own book. All Pherecydes' writings have unfortunately perished.

[15] In Pauly-Wissowa I. 1573.

[16] *The Fragments of Sophocles* vol. I. Cambr. (1917) p. 76.

[17] See F.G. Wagner ed. *Aeschyli et Sophoclis Perditarum Fabularum Fragmenta* Bratislavia (1852) p. 233. See also Pearson *loc.cit.* "The old guess that the *Amphitryon* was a satyr-play (Osann in *Rh.Mus* II p. 312) has nothing in its favour, unless indeed Porson's view of Fr. 1127 is adopted."

[18] See Hyginus *Fables* ed. H.J. Rose p. 30 Fable XXIX:Alcimena, and note thereto.

[19] Pearson *loc.cit,*. who cites Nauck *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* p. 386 and Wilamowitz *Eur. Herakl.* 1. p. 54. for this detail.

The foregoing treatment of the myth as narrative, tragedy, satyr play, parody or comedy go to show its potentiality to be cast in either a tragic or a humorous form, or both, as is professed by Mercury in the prologue of Plautus' play.[20] Be that as it may, the antiquity and popularity of the story in Greek, if not Roman literature, should satisfy any but the most obstinate on the question of chronology as well as probability that its motif, with the impersonating god and all, could have found its way to India, there to give rise to such a jātaka as the *Illīsa*. One has only to concede the brilliance of the Illīsa's author in having dressed it as a thoroughly Indian, indeed Buddhist story, to realize how close the two stories then stand, the Graeco-Roman myth of the hero Amphitryon impersonated by Zeus/Juppiter and the Indian Jātaka of the treasurer, Illīsa impersonated by the god Sakka. The inspiration which has fundamentally transformed the guise of the Indian story is surely directed to the property of the human victim upon whom the god plays his prank. In the Greek/Roman it was the man's wife, in the Indian she is retained, but now it is the man's wealth. At any rate, one can hardly expect Sakka to fornicate with other people's wives as freely as do the Greek gods - certainly not, if he was then also a prior incarnation of that august Elder, Mahāmoggalāna!

MERLIN PERIS

---

[20] At the climax of the play, when the bowl, which her husband had brought with him but was still to gift to her, Amphitryon's slave, Sosia (whose identity too Plautus had duplicated in his play) exclaims (vs.785-786)

tu peperisti Amphitruonem, ego alium peperi Sosiam;
nunc si patera paateram peperit, omnes congeminavimus

("Tell you what, sir - you've got a twin Amphitryon, I've got a twin Sosia, and if the bowl's got a twin bowl we're all seeing double!")

SŪTRA SANNAYAS AND SARAṆAṂKARA: CHANGES IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY BUDDHIST EDUCATION[1]

Introduction

A striking feature of Buddhist manuscript evidence from eighteenth and nineteenth-century Sri Lanka is the large number of Sinhala-language commentaries on Pāli *suttas*. These commentaries, known as *sūtra sannayas*, and/or as *sūtra vistara sannayas*, were composed in large numbers beginning in the middle of the eighteenth century. In what follows, I present the historical context for this change in Buddhist textual practices, explaining how the emergence of these commentaries was part of broader changes in Sri Lankan Buddhist monastic life. Examining two *sūtra sannayas* more closely, I explore several features of their commentarial style which made them useful in training monks as preachers. I go on to analyze the impact of this new commentarial style on Buddhist communities in Sri Lanka more generally, arguing that they played a central role in the formation of a new Buddhist "textual community."

What is a *Sūtra* Sannaya?

A *sūtra sannaya* is a type of commentary, distinguished by the type of text on which it comments and by the way in which it comments. As the name suggests, *sūtra sannayas* are commentaries written on Buddhist *suttas* (*sūtras*, to use the Sanskrit term which was usually used by the Sinhala writers of these commentaries), or the discourses attributed to Sakyamuni Buddha. In principle, a *sūtra sannaya* could be written for any *sutta* found in the Pāli *tipiṭaka*. In fact, the manuscript evidence shows that *sūtra sannayas* were written for a much smaller number of *sūtras*, which appear to have been the favourite discourses of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Buddhists. Judging from extant manuscripts, the *paritta* (or *pirit*) *suttas* -- including Metta Sutta, Maṇgala Sutta, Karaṇīyametta Sutta, and Dhajagga Sutta, for instance -- were among these favourites. Among the other popular *suttas* we find Dhammacakkappavattana

---

[1] This paper is respectfully dedicated to Professor P.B. Meegaskumbura, who has so generously shared his knowledge with me, and to Godwin Samararatne, whose kindness and wisdom have enriched my visits to Sri Lanka. Any faults herein, of course, are solely mine.

Sutta, Mahāsaṭipatthāna Sutta and Brahmajāla Sutta.[2]

A *sannaya* is an explanation or exposition (*vyāhyāva*) which may be an elucidation of meaning (*arthavivaraṇaya*) or an exposition of detail (*vistara kathanaya*).[3] Here the distinction between elucidation of meaning and exposition of detail roughly parallels that between *padavaṇṇanā* and *aṭṭhavaṇṇanā* in the Pāli commentarial traditions. That is, in both instances, the first commentarial style--*arthavivaraṇaya* or *padavaṇṇanā*--focuses on the immediate meaning of the word or phrase by unpacking grammatical compounds and providing synonyms while the second -- *vistara kathanaya* or *aṭṭhavaṇṇanā* -- explores the broader possibilities for meaning by placing a word or phrase within a more extensive narrative context.[4]

The *sūtra sannayas* produced in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Sri Lanka consistently combine the two functions of elucidating basic meaning and providing more detailed exposition. The commentary written in Sinhala for a Pāli *sutta* within a *sūtra sannaya* will, for instance, provide a simple translation of a Pāli word or phrase, which also clarifies tense, number, etc. However, the style of commentary used in the *sūtra sannayas* does not restrict itself to a word-for-word translation, or to an analysis of grammatical structure. Rather, *sūtra sannayas* typically introduce phrases, and sometimes longer sentences and even short narratives, to elaborate the Pāli word or words in question.

A simple example can be drawn from the opening lines of a *sūtra sannaya*, which comment upon the "evaṃ me sutaṃ" which starts a Pāli sutta. The Sinhala commentary typically first explains that "me" means "by me." It then goes on to explain, for instance, that the manner in which the sutta was heard is the manner in which it was heard by the Venerable Kassapa at the First Council. Other straightforward examples include the way in which the Pāli term "bhagavā" is often given a lengthy comment which elaborates particular virtues

---

[2] Somadasa's (1959) *Laṃkāvē Puskoḷa Pot Nāmāvaliya* is one source of evidence for the popularity of particular *sūtra sannayas*. My recent work in temple libraries in the Kandy and *Sat Koralē* areas shows that the *sūtra sannayas* mentioned here also consistently dominate temple collections.

[3] See Sorata (1963) sv. sanna.

[4] See Bond (1982, esp. pp. 149-50) for a useful discussion of Pāli *aṭṭhavaṇṇanā*.

of the Buddha, or the way in which the Sinhala comment explains how certain Pāli place names are derived (such-and-such happened there, etc.). Below I will present some examples of more elaborate *sūtra sannaya* commentary.

To clarify the structure and function of *sūtra sannayas* we can also use the Sinhala-language distinction between *arthavyākhyāna* and *dharmavyākhyāna*. While *arthavyākhyānas* focus on authoritative sources word for word, *dharmavyākhyānas* (like the *Saddharmaratnāvaliya*) are bound only to convey the idea of the original. As commentarial works which contain a substantial proportion of detailed exposition, the *sūtra sannaya's* function is not exhausted by the relatively restricted exegetical aims of *arthavyākhyāna* texts. Their adherence to the word order and structure of the Pāli texts upon which they comment, however, prevents them from attaining the level of sustained and independent narrative characteristic of *dharmavyākhyānas*. A *sūtra sannaya* is best understood as an intermediate form between the narrowest and broadest Sinhala exegetical styles.

Sūtra sannayas appeared as early as the twelfth century but were, in Somadasa's words, only "a minor literary genre prior to the eighteenth century" (1987, x). The production of *sūtra sannaya* texts began in the twelfth century and ceased in the fifteenth for reasons which remain unclear. It is likely that the early *sūtra sannayas* drew on earlier (5th-7th century) translations of Pāli *suttas* into Sinhala but this cannot be confirmed as none of these earlier translations are extant.[5] Śrī Dharmakirti analyzes the prominence of *sannayas* in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in terms of linguistic change within Sinhala culture, arguing that works written in the Sinhala language of the earlier Anuradhapura Period were no longer accessible to later readers of Sinhala and that new commentarial works were necessary to mediate between Pāli and Sinhala (1961, 136).

Why Write *Sūtra Sannayas*?

For those interested in placing textual production within a broader historical context, the sudden emergence of *sūtra sannaya* commentaries in the eighteenth century provides an intriguing puzzle, leading us to ask: what changes in Buddhist institutions and/or devotional practices brought the *sūtra sannaya* to prominence at this time?

---

[5] In this regard see Godakumbura (1955, p. 23).

When we look for other evidence of Buddhist life during this period which might shed light on such questions, we find that the first *sūtra sannaya*--called Sārārthadīpanī (or, Illuminator of Excellent Meaning) -- written since the fifteenth century was written sometime between 1739 and 1747 by a novice monk named Vĕliviṭa Saraṇaṃkara living in the Kandyan Kingdom. We also find evidence which points to a reorganization of monastic institutions in the mid-eighteenth century, one which included the development of a new educational system in which Pāli instruction and trained preaching played a major role. In what follows I will explore the reasons or the popularity of *sūtra sannayas* in this context, and the way in which they were used within the newly organized monastic, and especially educational, system.[6]

Decentralized Monasticism

In the early part of the eighteenth century, upasampadā festivals ceased to be held because the necessary monastic quorum no longer existed. Thus, despite the fact that upasampadā was reintroduced twice from Southeast Asia, in 1596 and 1697, the community of upsampadā monks did not take strong hold. The last upasampadā monk during this period was Hulaṃgamuvē Jinadāsa, who died in 1729 (Dewaraja 1988, 166). The absence of higher ordination during this time is important not only because it may have allowed for (and resulted from) altered expectations of monastic discipline but also because it meant the absence of certain collective monastic observances, like the recitation of the pātimokkha on uposatha days and the delegation of authority over younger monks during upasampadā, which helped to create and maintain a clear and centralized system of monastic organization and administration.

Despite the fact that monks no longer attained upasampadā, and no longer participated in many of the acts of the monastic community for which upasampadā monks are responsible, many Buddhist temples were not uninhabited. They were, instead, maintained by men who lived as novice monks, or by monks who had chosen to give up their upsampadā status while

---

[6] Others have noted the popularity of *sūtra sannayas* in eighteenth-century Sri Lanka, and have linked this popularity to the preaching practices of that period (Sannasgala 1964, 492 and Somadasa 1987, ix). However, the precise institutional context in which the *sūtra sannaya* commentarial style developed, and its impact on Sri Lankan Buddhism, has not yet been examined.

retaining temple positions. Although such monks did not have upasampadā status, it appears that at least some of them (those in the wealthier temples or with good family connections) had high social standing and participated actively in the administration of the Kandyan Kingdom.[7] These monks, sometimes called gaṇinnānses, also preached to lay men and women. According to some accounts, these monks were also active as doctors and astrologers, while looking after temple lands and living with wives and children.[8] This may be true, at least in part, but it is difficult to develop a clear picture of the ganinnānse lifestyle because, as I have argued elsewhere, our evidence of it consists of highly rhetorical statements written by monks and laymen who wished to distance themselves from their gaṇinnānse predecessors (Blackburn 1997).

There is evidence to suggest that learning was not absent from Sri Lankan Buddhist communities after the death of Parakramabahu VI in 1465, but that it became increasingly determined by local factors, lacking the strong educational infrastructure which had characterized the most stable political domains during the reign of Parakramabahu VI of Kotte (De Silva 1992, 95-7; Mirando 1985, 19-20).

Two particularly influential eighteenth-century hagiographies are usually cited as evidence for the low level of Buddhist education from the late fifteenth to the early eighteenth centuries. These works, the Saṃgharājasadhucariyāva and the Saṃgharājavata, describe the life and work of the monk named Vĕliviṭa Saraṇaṃkara who became a key monastic leader in the mid-eighteenth century and was active in the process of monastic reorganization which I will describe in more detail below. These works describe Saraṇaṃkara's attempts to educate himself in heroic terms, emphasizing, in particular, the lack of teachers skilled in Pāli, and the dearth of Buddhist manuscripts.[9] Although, as I hope to show below, it is important not to underestimate the impact of Saraṇaṃkara's learning and leadership on Buddhism in Sri Lanka, careful historical work requires that we do not too quickly dismiss the years immediately preceding his labours as an age of ignorance.

---

[7] For details in this regard, see Dewaraja (1988).

[8] See, for instance, Ratnapala (1971, p. 97; pp. 107-8), SSC (14), and SV (58, 80). In what follows, SSC refers to pages from *Saṃgharājasadhucariyāva*, SV to verses from *Saṃgharājavata*, CV to verses from *Cūlavamsa*, and SD to pages from *Sārārthadīpani*.

[9] See, for instance, SSC (15-21).

If Vācissara is correct, both gaṇinnānses and lay people living in the early eighteenth century were familiar with portions of the jātaka corpus, although for many that familiarity would have come through Sinhala rather than Pāli, and through hearing rather than reading. Vācissara describes a style of religious instruction in which gaṇinnānses recited Pāli jātakas before explaining their meaning in Sinhala (1964, 50).

Robert Knox, in his account of Kandyan culture written about his stay in the region during the 1660s, gives clear evidence of religious instruction in which a sonorous recitation (probably in Pāli) is followed by an explanation of its meaning in more accessible language (1966, 141). It is likely, especially in the light of Hēvāvasam's comments on seventeenth-century Buddhist literature (1966, 8-9) that this preaching worked with a jātaka-based corpus.

The early works of Saraṇaṃkara themselves indicate that, in addition to the jātakas, other Buddhist works were available. Sārārthasaṅgrahaya, written at the invitation of King Narēndrasiṃha, clearly shows the influence of the Visuddhimagga, Milindapaṅha and Saddharmaratnāvaliya. Sārārthadīpanī, the first of the new generation of *sūtra sannayas*, written between 1739 and 1747, draws on the fifth-century Pāli aṭṭhakathā tradition for *paritta suttas*, either directly or as mediated through thirteenth-century works.

If eighteenth-century sources like the Saṃgharājasadhucariyāva are accurate in this regard, it appears that Saraṇaṃkara sought out Buddhist texts and teachers from various Buddhist temples as he began to write his own works and to train his students.[10] We have accounts of Sarṇaṃkara's Pāli studies with Levuke and Palkumburē Atthadassi, and know that Atthadassi was the chief student of one of the last upasampadā monks in the eighteenth century, Vaṭapulūvē, and that Atthadassi taught Levuke (Hēvāvasam 1966, 20). The situation in southern Sri Lanka appears to have been similar. Siṭināmaluvē Dhammajoti, a monk from Tangalle who became one of Saraṇaṃkara's first students, is reported to have travelled from temple to temple in the southern region, collecting available works in both Pāli and Sinhala before going to the Kandyan Kingdom to study with Saraṇaṃkara (Hēvāvasam 1966, 33). Abhayaratna describes a situation in which texts related to the tipiṭaka teachings were safeguarded, and in which particular works were considered to be particularly useful as baṇa pot (works of basic education for beginning monks) were copied and used, as were the jātakas (1991, 231).

---

[10] SSC (15-16).

All of this suggests that in the early part of the eighteenth century, Buddhist education was not absent, but that it depended greatly on local circumstances: educational opportunities depended on the student's commitment to seeking learning, the knowledge of nearby teachers, on the texts which those teachers had obtained through their own monastic lineages and on the texts which were favoured for preaching and ritual purposes.

Centralizing and Systematizing Monastic Education

In the 1740s, a new monastic group began to form under the leadership of Vēliviṭa Saraṇaṃkara. This group, called the Silvat Samāgama (the Disciplined Group), are said to have been attracted by the commitment to learning and monastic discipline showed by the novice Saraṇaṃkara. Saraṇaṃkara, who came from a prestigious up-country family with ties to the court of the Kandyan Kingdom, was born in 1698. In 1714 he became a novice monk under Suriyagoda Kitsirimevan Rājasundara, who had received upasampadā during the reign of King Vimaladharma Sūriya II, and had subsequently given up his upasampadā status to live as a gaṇinnānse (Hēvāvasam 1966, 19). After learning Pāli grammar from Levuke and Atthadassi, Saraṇaṃkara in turn taught his two chief followers, Siṭināmaluvē and Ilipängamuvē, and continued to study on his own. As these three travelled throughout the Kandy and Sat Koralē regions, they began to attract others to the Silvat Samāgama.

The fortunes of the Silvat Samāgama waxed and waned in response to competition from other monks affiliated with the two main temples in Kandy -- the Malvatu and Asgiriya Vihārayas -- and in accord with court politics. Eventually, Saraṇaṃkara received more consistent support from King Narēndrasiṃha, who sponsored the establishment of Niyamakanda as an educational centre. Saraṇaṃkara's fortunes grew further in the early years of Kīrti Śrī Rājasiṃha's reign. In 1753, with royal support, a group of monks was brought to the Kandyan Kingdom from Siyam to restart the practice of upasampadā. From 1764 onwards, independent upasampadā festivals were held at both the Malvatu and Asgiriya Vihārayas for monks affiliated with the new Siyam Nikāya, the monastic fraternity established in 1753 with the arrival of upasampadā from Siam. The growth of the Siyam Nikāya involved monks from the Kandy and Sat Koralē regions as well as from the south. The 1750s and 1760s saw the rise of new monastic lineages affiliated with the Siyam Nikāya, and an elaborate system of monastic administration which linked together monks from large parts of Sri Lanka.

The changing nature of Buddhist education in the eighteenth century, and the place of *sūtra sannaya* commentaries within this education, cannot be adequately understood without reference to the rise of the Silvat Samāgama and the formation of the Siyam Nikāya. Under Saraṇaṃkara's leadership, monks of the Silvat Samāgama began to study in new ways. This training, in turn, shaped the nature of monastic administration within the emerging Siyam Nikāya. Saraṇaṃkara's power and the authority of the Siyam Nikāya were due, to a significant extent, to the way in which these monks were able to identify themselves as, and be identified as, authoritative by virtue of their education. In addition, the educational system which developed under Saraṇaṃkara created and helped to sustain the strong linkages between the up-country, Sat Koralē and the southern temples, which began to make the Siyam Nikāya a large and influential monastic institution.

For the sake of convenience, it is possible to divide the emergence of this new monastic educational system into four stages. The first was the development of temple schools in places influenced by the Silvat Samāgama. The second was the establishment of Niyamakanda as an educational centre prior to the reintroduction of upasampadā from Siam. The establishment of a number of other educational centres in the up-country after 1753 marks the third stage, and the introduction of the new up-country educational system to temples in Sat Koralē and the southern areas under Dutch control forms the fourth.

According to Hēvāvasam (1966, 20), education under Saraṇaṃkara's leadership was characterized by four class divisions. The first class was for students without knowledge of the Sinhala alphabet, the second for students with some knowledge of the alphabet, and the third was for students who were already somewhat skilled at reading manuscripts. The first three classes included both lay and monastic students. The fourth class, restricted to novice monks, was devoted to a more detailed study of manuscripts for those who were inclined to take upasampadā. Abhayaratna (1991, 233; 242) states that the third level of education focused on subjects relating to exposition, and that baṇa daham pot were used to provide novice monks with an introduction to the dhamma.

The approach to learning established by Saraṇaṃkara was apparently intended to make students familiar with Sinhala and Pāli grammar (and in some cases also Sanskrit), to increase their understanding of both dhamma and vinaya, and to accustom them to expository discourse (Abhayaratna 1991, 241). *Sūtra sannayas* were appropriate for use in the third and fourth class. Extant manuscript evidence suggests that some *sūtra sannayas* were sometimes included with other basic texts in the baṇa daham pot used by novice monks but were

most often studied separately in order to become familiar with a single sutta or group of related *suttas*.

Several aspects of the mid-eighteenth-century educational context made the *sūtra sannayas* a particularly valuable part of the emerging educational system. The fact that Buddhist monastic education during the period immediately preceding Saraṇaṃkara was decentralized and unsystematic meant that the presence of teachers trained in Pāli and in the more sophisticated literary Sinhala at local temples was by no means guaranteed. During the first stage of the emergence of education influenced by Saraṇaṃkara, students studied first from the itinerant teachers of the Silvat Samāgama and were then forced to work independently. *Sūtra sannayas* were a natural pedagogical tool in this context, since these commentaries provided a copy of Pāli *suttas*, explained the narrative and grammatical contents of a Pāli *sutta*, and suggested patterns of exposition suitable for preaching. Even in the absence of a teacher, a student with a knowledge of the alphabet and a limited understanding of Pāli language could work alone.

In the second and third stages, when students studied at Niyamakanda and other educational centres later established in the up-country, *sūtra sannayas* appear to have served several purposes. The descriptions of study provided by the Saṃgharājasādhucariyāva suggest that the composition and study of *sūtra sannayas* provided a way for those skilled in Pāli to demonstrate that skill and to provide texts for the use of students. In the context of these educational centres, the study of *sūtra sannayas* written by these monastic teachers provided a natural way to deepen students' familiarity with Pāli grammar and with the contents of specific *suttas* used in preaching and ritual recitation.

In the fourth stage, when students trained in the up-country educational centres returned to southern and Sat Koralē temples to teach students there and develop their own student following,[11] the *sūtra sannayas* served an important purpose in bringing the grammatical and interpretive skills of up-country educators to the temples in other regions. The use of *sūtra sannayas* meant that even a monk who had spent a short period of time at up-country studies could bring the tools for further study and teaching with him when he left. The use of *sūtra sannayas* in this way helped to standardize the educational experience

[11] On which, for valuable details, see Hēvāvasam (1966).

of monastic students over a relatively large geographical area.[12]

Many monks did, in fact, spend short periods of time in the Kandy area. After the reintroduction of higher ordination from Siam in 1753 and the appointment of Saraṇaṃkara to the position of Saṃgharāja, or leader of the monastic community, monks from all parts of the island who sought full ordination were required to come to the capital of the Kandyan Kingdom, the hill town of Kandy, in order to receive higher ordination at the Malvatu and Asgiriya Vihārayas. Their stay in Kandy was not limited to the ordination ritual but included a stay, of perhaps two months,[13] at one of several newly established centres for monastic instruction in the Kandy region (Dewaraja 1988, 118-9; Malalgoda 1976, 65). These monks remained a part of the Kandyan educational environment even after their departure for home temples, by sending their brighter students to up-country educational centres when possible (Hēvāvasam 1966, 42-71), maintaining links with Kandy for the higher ordination of novice monks and receiving guidance from Saraṇaṃkara with regard to monastic education and discipline (Vācissara 1964, 211). Ties between Kandy, the Sat Koralē and the southern region strengthened significantly after 1753 despite unsettled political conditions.

It appears, from the accounts found within several works written during the eighteenth century by those affiliated with Saraṇaṃkara's monastic community, that the monks of the Silvat Samāgama, and later of the early Siyam Nikāya, emphasized the importance of Pāli study and trained preaching in monastic education. We do not yet have enough detailed information about monastic education in earlier periods of monastic reorganization to fully evaluate the novelty of these preoccupations. It is clear that skill in Pāli was a crucial

---

[12] This is not to say that everyone who encountered a *sūtra sannaya* encountered precisely the same text in the same way, since there were certain to be slight differences in redaction and interpretation. However, since *sūtra sannayas* were typically written by highly esteemed teachers, as the *Saṃgharājasādhucariyāva* indicates, it is likely that their contents would have been relatively stable and interpretation of them relatively conservative. The two manuscript copies of Saraṇaṃkara's *Sārārthadīpanī* at which I have looked (British Library OR 6600 (151) and Colombo Museum Library 1465), for instance, are virtually identical to the 1891 printed edition.

[13] According to the Vihārādhipati at Mādavela Rajamahavihāraya, 15 July, 1997.

marker of monastic leadership and expertise, as we see in contents of the Saṃgharājasadhucariyāva, where reading and reproducing Pāli commentarial literature, and the composition of Sinhala commentaries for Pāli texts, are repeated tropes in monastic biography.[14]

The Saṃgharājasadhucariyāva also contains consistent references Saraṇaṃkara's skill as a preacher, and to the ability of key monastic students to preach the dhamma. Saraṇaṃkara is described, for instance, as someone who "has many manuscripts written and expounded, has preaching studied and encourages preaching to the populace."[15] Another monk, Irivinnē Vipassi "lived in the Badhagamu monastery and was very skilled in writing the small letters used in writing memorization books appropriate to grammar and preaching."[16] Moreover, accounts of Saraṇaṃkara's students' skill in preaching suggest a sophisticated level of exposition ability possible only after considerable training. They were able to declare the meaning of the Pāli nikāyas, commentaries, etc. and to preach in a royal assembly relying on works like the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta and the Brahmajāla Sutta while providing various elaborate and special explanations for three nights running.[17]

Shifts in narrative emphasis between the Mahāvaṃsa, early chapters of the Cūlavaṃsa and the final chapters of the Cūlavaṃsa written by Buddharakkhita also point to the critical importance of preaching to the monks of Saraṇaṃkara's period. Looking at these works we find that, at the time of Saraṇaṃkara, instruction, rather than construction, is considered the crucial mode of devotional activity.

Using *Sūtra Sannayas*

Although *sūtra sannayas* were used to help monks learn to read Pāli *suttas* and to train monks as preachers, these commentaries were almost certainly not used directly as a text from which to preach. Although Somadasa (1987, ix) and Vācissara (1964, 19) suggest that *sūtra sannayas* were at least sometimes used directly, during two-seated preaching in which Pāli recitation and Sinhala

---

[14] SSC (37-53).

[15] SSC (22).

[16] SSC (51).

[17] SSC (55).

exposition proceeded in tandem, a loose examination of extant *sūtra sannaya* manuscripts makes this seem quite unlikely. The size of the script used in writing *sūtra sannayas* is consistently small enough to make them awkward as a preaching aid. This becomes even clearer when *sūtra sannaya* manuscripts are compared with *paritta* manuscripts, or "*pirit pot*." Many of these collections of Pāli *paritta suttas* are written in a strikingly large clear hand, large enough to serve as a reminder during the act of recitation itself.

Sūtra sannayas were written, read and copied as a guide to the comprehension of Pāli *suttas*. Their word-by-word or phrase-by-phrase translation of Pāli *suttas* helped to clarify Pāli meanings and structures, while additional commentarial detail helped to create an interpretative foundation from which monks preached. As two monks recently reminded me, one learns how to explain ideas to others by exploring their meaning in one's own studies.[18]

Let us look more closely at two *sūtra sannayas*, as examples of the genre, to see how they helped students develop an expository command of Pāli *suttas* and how Saraṇaṃkara and other teachers were able to use these commentaries while building new educational networks. Since composition of *sūtra sannayas* began again with Saraṇaṃkara's Sārārthadīpanī, a collection of *sūtra sannayas* on *suttas* from the *paritta* collection, I have chosen to use the *Mettā Sūtra Sannaya* and *Dhajagga Sūtra Sannaya* from Sārārthadīpanī.

The *Metta Sūtra Sannaya* begins with a lengthy origin story which explains the context in which the Buddha taught the Mettā Sutta. The sutta was preached, we are told, to show that a monk who cultivates mettā, or loving kindness, as a meditative technique deserves the support of the laity. The Buddha made this point in order to arrest an exodus of monks from the order, caused by a previous sermon in which the message of the Aggikkhandopama Sutta overwhelmed many of the listening monks and drove them to live as devout laymen. The story concludes with a reference to the benefits of cultivating loving kindness, thus reinforcing the importance of the sutta's contents.

After a full repetition of the origin story in Pāli, the sutta itself begins. The Buddha announces that there are eleven benefits of loving kindness and

---

[18] Śrī Narēndrārāma Rajamahavihārayādhipati, 30 June, 1997 and Mulkirigala Rajamahavihārayādhipati, 6 July, 1997.

proceeds to enumerate them, introducing the list with the words: "monks, there are eleven welcomed benefits of loving kindness -- mental liberation --when it is followed, developed, made much of, practised, made a foundation, when it is familiar and well undertaken" and concluding the list with a similar sentence: "monks, these are the eleven welcomed benefits of loving kindness -- mental liberation -- which is followed, developed, made much of, practised, made a foundation, when it is familiar and well undertaken."[19]

The commentary provided for these lines indicates the way in which the *sannaya's* narrative detail reinforces patterns of explanation and association through the repetition of phrasing and the consistent use of simile. Comment on both instances of "which has been practised," for instance, proceeds with identical phrasing: "which has been accomplished, as a plough is put down after use."[20] The commentary also maintains throughout the verbal association between mental freedom and freedom from the obstructions to liberation which are imaginatively described as enemies. Similes such as these help to animate the commentary.

As the sutta unfolds, the *sannaya's* amplification of the original Pāli becomes increasingly vivid. The comment on the benefits of "awaking happily" and "avoiding nightmares" first reproduces a brief Pāli commentarial passage and then expands this into a dramatic account in Sinhala reinforced by another Pāli commentarial passage which follows. The first Pāli commentarial passage says, "While others wake unhappily, rolling over, yawning and moaning, not waking thus one wakes steadily and happily, like a blossoming lotus."[21] To this the Sinhala commentary adds:

> If other people awake unhappily, tossing and constricting [their bodies] and feeling uneasy, [this] person awakes differently, comfortably, without movement, like an opening lotus... if [he] dreams he has appropriate dreams. [In the dream he] is worshipping devotional memorials or listening to religious instruction. While other beings have nightmares like being thrown down

---

19 SD (87).

20 SD (87-90).

21 SD (87).

> a mountain or being oppressed by beasts of prey or being surrounded by thieves, this person doesn't have such nightmares.[22]

Here the *sūtra sannaya* provides the details of cause and effect which can be used to help develop a preacher's exhortation.

The *Metta Sūtra Sannaya* then proceeds to comment densely upon two further benefits of loving kindness. After explaining the benefit of being "dear to people" the *sannaya* comments upon the next benefit of being "dear to non-humans."

> Or, if the person is dear to humans he is also dear to non-humans, like the elder monk Visakha. The story of the elder monk Visakha was put down in detail in the explanation of meditation through amity in the Visuddhimagga and has been included in the Maṅgalasūtrakathā of my Sārārthasaṇgrahaya. This should be understood by looking at it as it appears there.[23]

To explain the benefit of being "unharmed by poison, sword or fire" the *sannaya* provides a brief word gloss before turning to a Pāli commentary to provide illustrative examples:

> ... examine the commentarial section written for this... It is said that fire [doesn't affect] the body of one living according to loving kindness (like the laywoman Uttaraya) or poison [one] like the monk Cullasiva who preached the saṃyutta [nikāya, a section of the Pāli canon] or sword [one] like the novice Saṃkicca. [These things] don't have an effect, don't enter, don't disturb that person's body.[24]

---

22 *ibid.*

23 *ibid.*, (88).

24 *ibid.*, (88-89).

These passages from the *sūtra sannaya* help us to see that one of the ways in which *sūtra sannayas* were useful in educating preachers was their invocation of particular characters as illustrative examples. In some cases, as in the references to Uttaraya and Cullasiva, above, the preacher seems to have been expected to have further details about the illustrative character in mind as part of an established repertoire. In other cases, as with the reference to Visakha, the author of the *sūtra sannaya* provides explicit direction to the commentary's user about the way in which the character's story can, and should, be understood.

Within the broader context of a newly organized monastic community under Saraṇaṃkara's leadership, and the program of education associated with it, Saraṇaṃkara's reference to his own work, Sārārthasaṇgrahaya, is significant, for it helps us to see some of the subtle ways in which the new *sūtra sannaya* commentaries helped to shape and unify a community of monastic students under Saraṇaṃkara's guidance. Other *sūtra sannaya* composers, like those mentioned in the section from Saṃgharājasādhucariyāva mentioned above, participated in this process also by including their own guiding references in these commentaries.

The *Dhajagga Aūtra Sannaya* starts with the Pāli sutta directly, without an elaborate origin story. The Pāli sutta begins with the Buddha addressing a company of monks gathered in a monastery in Jeta's grove. He recounts an instance of divine battle in which Sakka, lord of the gods, addressed these gods living in the Tāvatiṃsa heaven saying,

> If, sirs, going into battle you feel fearful, or stiffen with dread, or your hair stands on end, then you should look at the top of my battle standard. Whatever hair-raising fear or stiffening with dread you might experience will disappear as you look at the top of my standard.[25]

The Sinhala commentary begins by providing a relatively simple word gloss and explanation of this passage. Soon, however, the *sannaya* intensifies the narrative

---

[25] *ibid.*, (109).

with a vivid excursus in which Sakka and his standard are described from the perspective of his watching subjects:

> The chariot of Sakka, king of the gods, was one hundred and fifty yojanas long. From the middle of the chariot to its far end was fifty yojanas. From the middle of the chariot to its front was fifty yojanas. The [central] box was fifty yojanas. Doubling that measurement they say you come up with three hundred yojanas. A white umbrella measuring three yojanas was raised up on top. A thousand horses were yoked [to the chariot] and that's not all regarding the rest of the accoutrements. Its standard was two hundred and fifty yojanas high. When the wind hit the standard it made a sound like that of the five types of instruments [as if saying], "look at this standard!" To those looking at that chariot our king arrived and stood in the midst of a retinue like an upright pillar. Fear disappeared [as they thought], "why should we fear?"[26]

Sakka's voice resumes the sutta's Pāli narrative with further instructions to his subjects in which he offers alternative sources of solace to those who do not (presumably cannot, perhaps because of their vantage point) look at the top of his standard. The symptoms of fear are guaranteed to disappear for those looking at the top of battle standards belonging to Pajāpati, Varuna and Isana. Once again, after a minimal word gloss on these lines of the Pāli sutta, the *sannaya* introduces a narrative aside which articulates the divine hierarchy of the Tavatiṃsa heaven.

> These three divine kings have complexion and longevity equal to that of the divine king Sakka's. Among them, the divine king Pajāpati holds the seat second to the divine king Sakka's. Varuna the divine king receives the third seat. The divine king Isana receives the fourth seat.

---

[26] *ibid.*, (110).

Thus should their personal power be shown.[27]

At this point the Buddha's voice resumes in the Pāli *sutta* as he sets the stage for a specifically Buddhist challenge to Sakka's power as a defense.

> If that hair-raising fear, or stiffening with dread which occurs to those looking at the top of the divine king Sakka's standard--or the top of the divine king Pajāpati's standard, or the top of the divine king Varuna's standard, or the top of the divine king Isana's standard--doesn't disappear, what is the reason? Monks, Sakka, lord of the gods, is not without passion, not without hatred, not without delusion. He has fled, afraid, tense, trembling.[28]

Once again Sārārthadīpanī's commentary moves beyond a limited gloss to the Pāli words quoted above in ways which explain the narrative movement of the sutta and, even more importantly, reinforce a specifically Buddhist explanation of Sakka's weakness.

> ... the point is: if fear [felt by those looking at Sakka's standard] has been held at bay it doesn't remain so for long if they are looking at the standard of a Sakka who is disposed to flee, shaking, because he has not destroyed the defilements [mental impurities which impede progress toward liberation]. After describing the way Sakka, king of the gods and one of the four divine kings praised here, shook with fear and fled what more could one say about the other three? Thus, by association with the statement that Sakka, king of the gods, trembled and fled I have indeed said that the remaining three were disposed to flee, trembling with fear. Or, it should be understood that [this] isn't stated separately since the trembling and flight

---

[27] *ibid.*, (112).

[28] *ibid.*

> of the other three who follow him [Sakka] is understood by saying that he shook with fear and fled. This is because Sakka, king of the gods, dominates the others.[29]

Here Sakka's failure to destroy the defilements further elucidates the Buddha's previous statement that Sakka is still bound by passion, hatred and delusion--a standard negative triad in Buddhist discourse.

The Buddha's first alternative to seeking refuge in Sakka and his companion gods is refuge in the Buddha himself, but the transposition is not straightforward. The scene changes and gods in battle are replaced by meditative monks. Sakka is also displaced indirectly after his frailty, in Buddhist terms, is shown by the section of sutta and commentary we have just examined.

> Monks, I speak thus. If, monks, you are fearful, overwhelmed by hair-raising fear when you are in the forest, at the foot of a tree or in an empty building, at that time you should remember me thus: he is fortunate, an arahat, perfectly enlightened, endowed with wisdom and virtue, in very good circumstances [Pāli: sugato], knower of the world, unrivalled, guide of people who must be trained, teacher to gods and men, Buddha, fortunate one.[30]

Sārārthadīpanī's commentary to these lines of the Pāli sutta deserves a close examination. The narrative detail provided for each epithet of the Buddha is elaborate and, taken together, provides something like a summa of a Buddha's enlightened state. This is an excellent example of the way in which the *sannaya's* provision of detail sustains patterns of association to be used in reflection on, exposition of, and engagement with, the teaching.

Look, for instance, at the *sannaya's* treatment of several epithets. Once again the canonical Pāli appears in capitalized text.

---

[29] *ibid.*, (112-13).

[30] *ibid.*, (113).

> ARHAT, an arahat; because he doesn't do improper things in private, because he is worthy of things like the four requisites, because he has destroyed the enemies, the defilements.... IN VERY GOOD CIRCUMSTANCES [sugato], called "sugato" because of speaking well and having gone well, and because of having gone to nirvana which is termed a good place, and because of having a good journey...GUIDE OF PEOPLE WHO MUST BE TRAINED, because of establishing malleable people in the refuges, moral conduct, etc. and training [them]; TEACHER FOR GODS AND MEN, because he gives instruction in the various appropriate ways with compassion for his world and other [worlds], for gods and men... FORTUNATE ONE [bhagavā], called "bhagavā" because he has destroyed all of the defilements such as passion and because he possesses merit accomplished through the perfections such as generosity and moral conduct.[31]

Creative etymology takes a central role in the commentary's elucidation of detail as we see in the comment on "arahat" and "sugato" in particular. Exegesis of "arahat" plays on the Pāli word for "private" [rahas] as well as the Pāli verb "arahati" (to be worthy of) and the Pāli noun "arī" (enemy) while that for "sugato" explores possible uses of the root "gam" (to go) for which the past participle is "gato" here combined with the prefix "su-"meaning "good." Note that the *sannaya's* explanation of "bhagavā" heightens the contrast between the Buddha and Sakka with the description of the Buddha as one who has destroyed the defilements such as passion, the cause of Sakka's weakness earlier in the sutta.

By providing elaborate detail for each of the Buddha's epithets the commentary also evokes aspects of Buddhist devotion which occur independently of the Dhajagga Sutta in Buddhist practice. This is a particularly striking example of the ways in which the contents of a *sūtra sannaya* echo and sustain broader patterns of association in Buddhist discourse. The epithets found in the Pāli sutta discussed above have a long history in meditation practice and are now

---

[31] *ibid.*, (113).

regularly chanted in devotional recollection of the Buddha and are known in that context as the 'iti pi so gathā' or the verses which explain the Buddha's nature.[32] There is evidence from the eighteenth or early nineteenth century that they were also used as protective verse.[33]

In the final portions of the sutta the Buddha exhorts the listening monks to recollect the teaching if they do not recollect him, and to recollect the monastic community if not the teaching. Any of these three refuges, declares the Buddha, will vanquish hair-raising fear and paralysis. As the Buddha announces the value of recollecting the teaching and the monastic community he declares the standard epithets appropriate to each refuge, epithets which, like the Buddha's epithets, are part of evotional recitation. Once again the commentary, with its detailed explanation of these epithets, participates in a complex of echoes and expository elaboration.

The conclusion of the *Dhajagga Sutta Sannaya* further reinforces the contrast between Sakka and the Buddha which has been gathering momentum as the sutta and its commentary progress. The Pāli sutta's section on recollection of the monastic community ends with a summary statement linking the efficacy of recollecting the monastic community to the character of the Buddha: "Monks, the hair-raising fear or paralysis which arises will disappear for those recollecting the monastic community. Why? The Buddha, monks, an arahat, perfectly enlightened, without passion, hatred and delusion, fearless, unparalyzed, courageous didn't flee." The commentary to these lines draws attention to the earlier characterization of Sakka as fearful and defiled through its re-articulation of the sutta word by word. And, in a subtle but powerful conclusion which unites the force of creative etymology and the developing contrast between Sakka and the Buddha as sources of refuge, the *sannaya* runs: "the Buddha said this; said this Dhajagga Pirit; further the 'sugato,' In Sakka's place, said..."[34] The Buddha has, in the course of the *sūtra sannaya*, redefined the terms of power, replaced Sakka as refuge and overtaken Sakka's place at the head of his own retinue.

In this *sūtra sannaya*, as in the *Metta Sūtra Sannaya*, the commentarial details provided in Sinhala enrich the sutta's narrative and provide natural points

---

32 See, for instance, Visuddhimagga p.7.

33 Jonathan Walters. Personal communication.

34 SD (113).

of elaboration for a preacher inclined to heighten the sutta's drama or to elaborate the Buddha's power. In doing so, the *Dhajagga Sūtra Sannaya* uses vivid imagery and word play which can become part of the student's own expository repertoire.

Textual Communities

In seeking to understand the role of *sūtra sannayas* within a changing monastic environment and a new system of Buddhist education, I have stressed the ways in which these commentaries helped students study Pāli language, and to develop the command of specific *suttas* necessary for their work as preachers. The fact that *sūtra sannayas* were used in these ways within an extensive and clearly structured educational system under Saraṇaṃkara and others associated with the new Siyam Nikāya suggests that *sūtra sannaya* commentaries had a significant impact on lay and monastic Buddhist communities in much of Sri Lanka. In order to describe this impact more clearly, I draw on the concept of a "textual community" developed by Brian Stock in his study of the impact of literate textuality on eleventh-century European culture.

There Stock uses the term "textual communities" to describe "groups of people whose social activities are centred around texts, or, more precisely, around a literate interpreter of them." Although texts, in Stock's view, need not be written nor their auditors literate, they exert a formative influence on the textual communities' behaviour and attitudes. In particular, he claims, a culture in which texts and the literate are accepted as authoritative and influential is characterized by a move toward what he calls "an intellectualism inseparable from the study of texts" (1983, esp. 522-4). I do not embrace Stock's view that an increasingly literate and textual culture is characterized by specific forms of rationality or the implication that text-centred activities necessarily dominate cultures in which texts and their interpreters are accorded authoritative value. Despite these reservations, however, Stock's terminology can be used in a more limited sense which helps to illuminate the effect of the emergence of *sūtra sannayas* on Buddhists in eighteenth-century Sri Lanka. For these purposes, I adapt the term "textual community" to mean a group of individuals united by their exposure, through reading and listening, to certain ideas and patterns of discourse which draw upon and are sustained by written textual sources.

This usage of the term textual community provides a useful way of looking at the interlocking processes of monastic education and the performance of preaching, both of which were informed by the use of *sūtra sannaya* commentaries initiated by Saraṇaṃkara and carried out by his students.

Monastic education, characterized by reading, listening, memorizing, composing and copying, gave students many opportunities to engage the contents of favourite Pāli *suttas* through *sūtra sannayas*. In doing so, these students accumulated a textual familiarity which included patterns of association between *suttas* and between *suttas* and other Buddhist texts, as well as strategies for the exposition of important *suttas* and key ideas contained within them.

Monastic students trained within the educational networks established by Saraṇaṃkara and sustained by the emergence of the Siyam Nikāya formed a textual community in the sense I outlined above. They were not the only textual community formed by and around the *sūtra sannaya* commentaries, however. Because the commentarial detail of *sūtra sannayas* fed into the act of Buddhist preaching, these commentaries played a pivotal role in the creation of a wider textual community of lay people and monastics, whose level of formal education varied widely but whose imaginative dispositions may have had much in common because of their shared experience of particular Pāli *suttas* and interpretations of them. The interlocking practices of education and preaching in eighteenth-century Sri Lanka created a situation in which complex combinations of oral and written culture helped to sustain certain "habits of thought,"[35] or dispositions to reflect on ideas and behaviours in particular ways, common to a range of readers and listeners, regardless of their educational level or status.

In developing the idea of shared habits of thought formed and sustained by a textual community and applying it to eighteenth-century (and later, but that is another story) Sri Lankan Buddhists, I do not mean to suggest that all members of this textual community thought alike, even about matters relating to morality and devotion. Rather, members of this new textual community shared a certain kind of narrative experience, and a language to be used in thinking about the topics found in Pāli *suttas*.

As Carruthers puts it in her description of a different set of readers and listeners,

> The Latin word textus comes from the verb meaning "to weave" and it is in the institutionalizing of a story through memoria that textualizing occurs. Literary works become institutionalized as they weave a community together by providing it with shared experience and a certain kind of language ... (1990, 12).

---

35 A phrase taken from D'Avray (1985).

Conclusion

Responding to evidence of changing textual preoccupations among Buddhist authors in eighteenth-century Sri Lanka, I have tried to show the way in which the renaissance of Sinhala commentaries on Pāli *suttas*, in the form of *sūtra sannayas*, was linked to broader changes in Buddhist monastic organization and education. Uniting a literary analysis of *sūtra sannayas* and a historical analysis of religious institutions, this study suggests some of the ways in which a new educational infrastructure shaped the Buddhist environment of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Sri Lanka.

REFERENCES

Abhayaratna, Adhikārī. *Śrī Laṃkāvē Sambhāvya Adhyāpanaya Saha Mahasagana*. Colombo: Nava Samagi, 1991.

Blackburn, Anne M. "When A Decline May Not Be Decline, and A Revival No Revival: Reconsidering Histories of Buddhism in Eighteenth-century Sri Lanka." Ms. 1997.

Bond, George. *The Word of the Buddha*. Colombo: M.D. Gunasena, 1982.

Carruthers, Mary J. *The Book of Memory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Cūlavaṃsa. Ed. Wilhelm Geiger. London: Pali Text Society, 1980.

D'Avray, D.L. *The Preaching of the Friars*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985.

De Silva, Chandra R. *Sri Lanka: A History*. Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1992.

Dewaraja, L.S. *The Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka 1707-1782*. Colombo: Lake House, 1988.

Godakumbura, C. E. *Sinhalese Literature*. Colombo: The Colombo Apothecaries Co, 1955.

Hēvāvasam, P.B. *Mātara Yūgayē Sāhityadharayan Hā Sāhitya Nibhandhana*. Colombo: Laṃkāṇdhūvē Mūdraṇālaya, 1966.

Knox, Robert. *A Historical Relation of Ceylon*. Dehiwala: Tisara Prakāsakayō, 1966.

Malalgoda, Kitsiri. *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750-1900*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.

Mirando, A.H. *Buddhism in Sri Lanka in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. Colombo: Tisara Prakāsakayō, 1985.

Ratnapala, Nandasena. *The Katikāvatas*. Munich: R. Kitzinger, 1971.

Śrī Dharmakīrti, Nivandama. *Siṃhala Sāhityayē Svarṇayugaya*. Colombo: Vidyālankāra Viśvavidyālaya, 1961.

Saṃgharājasadhucariyāva. Ed. Hēnpiṭagedara Piyananda. Colombo: Ratna Pot Prakāsakayō, 1969.

Saṃgharajavata. ed. Śrī Charles de Silva. Colombo: M.D. Gunasena. 1955.

Sannasgala, Punchibaṇḍāra. *Siṃhala Sāhitya Vaṃsaya*. Colombo: Lake House, 1964.

Sārārthadīpanī. ed. Beligallē Sobhita. Peliyagoda: Satya Samuccaya Press, 1891.

Somadasa, K.D. *Laṃkāvē Puskoḷa Pot Nāmāvaliya*. Colombo: Department of Cultural Affairs, 1959/1964.

---. *Catalogue of the Hugh Nevill Collection of Sinhalese Manuscripts*. Vol. I. London: British Library and Pali Text Society, 1987.

Sorata, W. *Śri Sūmaṇgalaśabdakoṣaya*. Colombo: Anula Press, 1963.

Stock, Brian. *The Implications of Literacy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

Vācissara, Koṭagama. *Saraṇaṃkara Saṃgharāja Samaya*. Private Publication: Don Adhwin et al, 1964.

Visuddhimagga. ed. C.A.F. Rhys Davids. London: Pali Text Society, 1975.

M. BLACKBURN

MAHĀYĀNA THERAVĀDA AND THE ORIGINS OF THE MAHĀVIHĀRA[1]

The reading of Sri Lankan Buddhist history during the Anurādhapura Period, which informs this essay, may seem a radical departure from what we thought we knew about that subject. On the basis of new interpretations of the extant evidence (*vaṃsas*, inscriptions and other archaeological remains, reports of the Chinese pilgrims), I maintain--at least for the sake of argument-- that the self-identity "Theravāda Buddhist", and also the self-identity "Mahāvihāran", were comparatively late developments in Buddhist history. Both had their origin only around the third or fourth century, A.D. I moreover maintain that the Theravāda was in its origin primarily a Mahāyāna or proto-Mahāyāna school, and that the Mahāvihāra's origin occurred in an explicit rejection of those dominant Mahāyāna teachings.

These surely *are* radical departures from the still-standard textbook portrayals of Theravāda as the original and exclusively Hīnayāna Buddhist school, and of the origin of the Mahāvihāra at the primordial moment (3rd century, B.C.) when King Devānampiyatissa was first "pleased" by Arahant Mahinda's explication of the Buddha's *dhamma*. But I suspect that readers who are familiar with the textual and epigraphic evidence, and with recent secondary scholarship on Anurādhapuran history and archaeology, will find the details of my argument so much in keeping with both as to appear mere summations of already-well-known facts.

The sense of departure comes from my having stepped back to see that, taken together, all these well-known facts render seriously problematic the very foundations of the standard account of ancient Sri Lankan Buddhist history. Even so, given that these foundations were laid by British Orientalist scholars of the early to mid-nineteenth century (especially Hon. George Turnour, Major Jonathan Forbes and Sir James Emerson Tennent) who derived them from sometimes uninformed readings of the Pāli *vaṃsas* and who lacked the wealth

---

[1] This essay is a revised version of a paper presented at the Ceylon Studies Seminar, the University of Peradeniya, April 10, 1997. I am grateful to the organizers of the seminar for the opportunity it presented to think in macro-scale terms about the implications of some of my recent studies. I would also like to express my gratitude to Whitman College for sabbatical leave in which to pursue the research and writing of this essay, and to the Graves Foundation for a teaching award which made it possible for me to spend the first half of 1997 in Sri Lanka.

of critical scholarship and archaeological and epigraphic evidence long since available, it is hardly remarkable that the standard account should appear so full of holes to late twentieth century scholars.[2] Rather, what I find remarkable is that this early first attempt at interpreting the evidence of Anurādhapuran history persists so vehemently in educated circles all over the world today, as though the limitations of those pioneering scholars--their uncritical gleaning of "historical facts" from the *vaṃsas*, their virtual ignorance of the external evidence--were hallowed Buddhist truths.

Lest I be misunderstood--for I stand in awe of the Mahāvihāra's phoenix-like rise to glory, and in gratitude for its preservation of the Pāli Canon--at the outset I should affirm my own belief that the *Nikāyas* and the *Vinaya* preserve the actual teachings of the Buddha and his earliest disciples, as closely as we are ever likely to know them. Though it is now clear that the texts we have today were edited to reflect the refined grammar and orthography of Pāli, even as late as the time of Buddhaghosa,[3] much more ancient manuscripts (of the 1st and 2nd centuries, A.D.) such as the Gāndhāri *Dharmapada* and the recently discovered Karoṣṭhi fragments of *Suttanipāta* and other portions of the *Suttapiṭaka* make it impossible to doubt that the Pāli Canon is faithful to truly ancient originals in some cruder, but comparable, vernacular Prakrit.[4] I also believe that many institutions of the Mahāvihāra, including the Sacred Bodhi Tree and the Thūpārāma, truly had their origin in the earliest stages of Sri Lankan Buddhist history. Archaeology and epigraphy fully agree with the

---

2 I have examined the history of the study of the Pāli *Vaṃsas* and have attempted to reconstruct the history of their original production in "Buddhist History: The Pāli *Vaṃsas* of Sri Lanka", forthcoming in Ronald Inden, ed., *Rethinking the Medieval* (Oxford University Press).

3 For a very useful discussion of the status of the Pāli Canon see Steven Collins, "The Very Idea of the Pāli Canon" in *The Journal of the Pali Text Society* 15 (1990): 89-126.

4 See John Brough, ed. *The Gāndhāri Dharmapada* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1962; London Oriental Series, volume 7). The Karoṣṭhi manuscripts, discovered in the last decade and recently purchased by the British Museum, appear to be the earliest Buddhist manuscripts now in existence. While editing has only just begun, some provocative samples were provided by Richard Salomon at the Annual Conference of the American Academy of Religion, New Orleans, November, 1996.

vaṃsas and commentaries on much of Mahāvihāran history.

But I want to argue that the Mahāvihāran authors of these *vaṃsas* and commentaries -- like all historians and commentators of all times and places -- were engaged in *interpreting* these ancient texts and monuments for particular reasons and according to particular ways of thinking which were current in fourth and fifth century Anurādhapura. In other words, the *vaṃsas* and commentaries represent fourth and fifth century *claims* about Buddhist and Anurādhapuran history. They should not be treated as transparent windows into the *actual* pasts about which these claims were made, although it is all too true that since the 19th century most of ancient Sri Lankan history has been written as a mere paraphrase of the Mahāvihāran texts. But proceeding as though the *vaṃsas* and commentaries had been written by 19th century German empiricists committed to some sort of "scientifically" objective narrative of the facts, rather than by medieval Buddhist monks who interpreted reality according to medieval Buddhist epistemology, is especially problematic because we know that at the time of their production, the Mahāvihāran accounts of history were fiercely debated and countered by chroniclers and commentators in the rival Abhayagiri and Jetavana *vihāras*.

Though these rival historical accounts and commentaries no longer exist to study in detail because of the ultimate triumph of the Mahāvihārans during the later medieval period, we can be certain that the rivals advocated very different interpretations of Buddhist and Anurādhapuran history. In their view, as evidenced by copper and gold manuscripts recovered from stupas at their respective monasteries,[5] the early teachings (*Śrāvakayāna*) represent merely the first stage in an unfolding *Buddhavacana*, producing ever-more-profound insights into reality in step with an unfolding Buddhist future. The true meaning of the ancient canon was to be understood in the light of the later revelations known collectively as the Great Vehicle (Mahāyāna) and as a literary genre, as the *Vetullavāda* or *Vaitūlya* or *Vaipūlya sūtras*.

---

[5] For a comprehensive consideration of Mahāyāna's once-strong presence in Sri Lanka, and its lasting impact in the hearts of Kandyan villagers into the present, see John C. Holt, *Buddha in the Crown: Avolokiteśvara in the Buddhist Traditions of Sri Lanka* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). For a particularly startling Mahāyāna manuscript find see S. Paranavitana, "Indikaṭusäya Copper Plaques," *Epigraphia Zeylanica III* (1928-33): 199-212.

Moreover, as we can be certain from later Mahāvihāran citations, the rivals maintained that the Abhayagiri and Jetavana *vihāras* existed first, and that the Mahāvihārans later broke off from them.[6] That claim is worth repeating: the rivals maintained that the Mahāvihāra was a late, break-away corruption of the earlier and more venerable teachings and practices preserved by the Abhayagiri and Jetavana/Dakkinārāma monks and nuns. The virulence with which *Vaṃsatthappakāsinī* refutes this rival historical construct would imply that some Anurādhapurans believed it viable even as late as the tenth century, A.D. Certainly at least the rivals themselves believed it; *Vaṃsatthappakāsinī* relates that they wrote it down and stored it (*likkitvā ṭhāpesum*--this could also mean the rivals erected inscriptions to this effect). And the overwhelming evidence of the ruins themselves,[7] not to mention the explicit statements of the Chinese pilgrims[8] and even of the later Mahāvihāran chroniclers,[9] is that for virtually all of Anurādhapuran history the Abhayagiri and Jetavana *vihāras* were grander and more favoured establishments than the Mahāvihāra. This would suggest that, more often than not kings and courtiers also supported the rivals' interpretations. The Mahāvihāran historical construct, which maintains that the full meaning of

---

6 G.P. Malalasekera, ed., *Vaṃsatthappakāsini* (London: P.T.S. 1935) I:175-76.

7 It was no mere coincidence that the attention of the archaeological excavation of Anurādhapura in the last quarter of the nineteenth century focused on the Abhayagiri; in the pre-excavation state of things its preeminence would still have been obvious. Even with so many of the splendours of the Abhayagiri now in museums in Colombo and London, the sheer immensity of the archaeological site there, not to mention the size of the stupa, belies its one-time glory.

8 See the accounts of Sri Lanka by Faxian and Xuanzang in Samuel Beal, tr., *Si Yu Ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981 [1884]).

9 Even a cursory reading of the medieval chronicle *Cūlavaṃsa* will confirm this assertion. In addition to a great preponderance of kings in the portion of the Anurādhapura Period it covers (3rd-10th c.,A.D.) giving more and better to the Mahāvihāra's rivals, these kings actually attacked the Mahāvihāra periodically. See for example Cv 39:15, 39:41-43, 41:31-32, 41:37-40. 41:96-99. 42:12, 42:43, 42:63-66, 45:29-31. etc. (citations to *Cūlavaṃsa* correspond to Wilhelm Geiger's Pāli Text Society edition of same).

the Buddha's revelation is contained in the ancient *Tipiṭaka*, to be explicated through commentaries rather than the composition of new *sūtras*, and which therefore gives historical primacy to the Mahāvihāra and treats the Abhayagiri and Jetavana monks as decadent splitters-- this Mahāvihāran narrative of "the facts" that we all know so well from modern history books was not merely contested during the Anurādhapura Period; it was the minority opinion.

It is possible to be much more specific about the contours of these ancient historical debates on the basis of the extant Mahāvihāran texts themselves and also the basis of certain presences and absences in the epigraphic and archaeological records. A longer, technical paper appearing in another publication spells this out in detail.[10] For the present, I hope it will suffice to look at three basic premises of the Mahāvihāran interpretation and discuss the evidence which calls them into question as "objective" records of "the facts". These basic premises are: (1) that the Theravāda tradition as such originated at the First Great Council (2) that the Sri Lankan Theravāda has always been an exclusively Hīnayāna ("Earlier Vehicle") school and (3) that the Mahāvihāra was the original and essential home of true Theravāda in Sri Lanka. I will deal with each of these three claims in a little detail, then at the end return to the more general discussion of this monastic rivalry and its implications for standard views of Anurādhapuran Buddhist history.

The Mahāvihāran commentaries and chronicles agree in repeating a basic history of the Theravāda tradition which has it originate in the mouth of the Buddha himself, get codified at the First Great Council, get re-affirmed in two subsequent Councils and get transmitted by Arahant Mahinda to the first Sri Lankan monks, at the Mahāvihāra.[11] But the problems with treating this narrative as an objective record of the facts far exceed the doubts raised by the numerous contradictory claims about the Buddha and his earliest followers, about the transmission of the True Dharma, and about the dissemination of the religion beyond Magadha, which are known to have existed among all the different

---

10 Jonathan S. Walters, "Mahāsena at the Mahāvihāra: Propriety, Property and the Politics of History in Medieval Anurādhapura," forthcoming in Daud Ali and Avril Powell, ed., *The Uses of the Past in South Asia* (Oxford University Press).

11 The relevant texts of the Anurādhapura Period are: *Dīpavaṃsa, Mahāvaṃsa, Samantappāsādikā, Vaṃsatthappakāsini and Mahābodhivaṃsa.*

Buddhists of ancient Asia.[12]

In addition, as historians we are confronted by the fact that there is no mention of "Theravāda" or "Sthaviravāda" as this separate Buddhist *nikāya* in any literary source prior to the early 4th century, A.D. composition of *Dīpavaṃsa*. The term is not found in its technical sense in any of the ancient canonical texts which we believe to have been codified at the First Great Council, nor for that matter even in the late canonical texts which self-admittedly postdate the Third Great Council. The term is also absent from the South Asian epigraphic record until the 3rd century, A.D., despite the fact that for three centuries prior to that date kings and other patrons had been making explicit donations to other well known groups such as Sarvāstivādins, Mahāsāmghikas and Sammitīyas. This epigraphic date of 3rd c., A.D. for the origin of the self-identity "Theravāda Buddhist" corresponds precisely to André Bareau's conclusion, based on an exhaustive study of the known doctrines of the 18 schools, that Theravāda doctrine emerged out of a Sri Lankan branch of the Vibhajyavāda school only in the third or fourth century, A.D.[13]

And when the term "Theravāda" finally does first appear in the epigraphic record, in the third century, A.D., it certainly does not affirm the Mahāvihāran version of things. Though the inscriptions in question were found in India, at Nāgārjunikoṇḍa, they are explicit that the "Theriyas" at that site were not Indian at all; they were Sri Lankan (Tambapannidīpaka). The implication that Theravāda was originally and exclusively a Sri Lankan *nikāya*, and not an Indian one, is explicit in the later lists of the 18 schools preserved in Northern Buddhist traditions, which describe the branches of the Theravāda as Mahāvihāravāsī, Abhayagirivihāravāsī, and Jetavanīya.[14] Rather than as an

---

12 I characterize these debates and set them in their larger pan-Buddhist context in "Finding Buddhists in Global History," forthcoming in Michael Adas, ed., *Global History III* (Temple University Press) and as a separate pamphlet in the American Historical Association's series on global history.

13 André Bareau, *Les Sectes Bouddhiques du Petit Véhicule* (Saigon: Ēcole Francaise D'Extreme Orient, 1955):169.

14 See for example, Andre Bareau, "Trois Traites 3: Le Compedium Descriptif des Divisions des Sectes dans le Cycle dela Formation des Schismes(*Samayabhedoparacanacakrenikāyabedhopadarcanasaṃgraha*) des Vinītadeva,"*Journal Asiatique* CCXLIV (1956): 192-200; Jiryo

Indian tradition which was later taken to Sri Lanka, the rest of the Buddhist world understood the Theravāda to be a Sri Lankan innovation which was later taken to India.

And not just to any place in India. The term "Theravāda" first emerged at Nāgārjunikoṇḍa, a site of extreme importance for the study of the origins of the Mahāyāna.[15] In addition to numerous Buddhist tales which connect this site with Nāgārjuna himself, as well as other important Bodhisattvas such as Avalokiteśvara and Śrīmālā Devī, there is clear epigraphic evidence that this was a site devoted to the vanguard proto-Māhāyāna revelations of the day, being propounded there by Aparaśailas, Pūrvaśailas, Bahuśrūtīyas, Mahiśāsakas and other radical groups.[16] The very presence of these "Theriyas" at the site suggests that they were what the Chinese pilgrims would later call the "Māhāyāna Theravādins" of Sri Lanka. Let me repeat that one too: in the ancient Buddhist world the phrase "Mahāyāna Theravāda"--which sounds so inappropriate to modern ears--was so ordinary as to require no further comment at all.

The Chinese knew that the Abhayagirivihāra was the richest, most favoured and most populated monastery in the kingdom, a cosmopolitan center where Hīnayāna *and* Mahāyāna scriptures from all over India were studied. Faxian specifically mentions that his long-term hosts at the Abhayagiri gave him

---

Matsuda, "Origin and Doctrines of Early Indian Buddhist Schools" in *Asia Major* II (Lipsiae, 1925) 1-78.

15 For relevant epigraphs see D.C. Sircar and A.N. Lahiri, "Footprint Slab Inscription from Nagarjunikonda," *Epigraphia Indica* 33:247-50 and J. Ph. Vogel, "Prakrit Inscriptions from a Buddhist Site at Nagarjunikonda," *Epigraphia Indica* 20:22-23. I have discussed these references to Sri Lankans and the epithets used for them in *Rethinking Buddhist Missions* (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Chicago, 1992) II:302-306.

16 These four are, together with the Sri Lankan Theriyas, actually named in the inscriptions. For legends associating the site with Nāgārjuna and the origins of Mādhyāmaka see Nalinaksha Dutt, "Notes on the Nāgārjunikoṇḍa Inscriptions," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 7,3 (September, 1931) esp. pp. 634-639. On Nāgārjunikoṇḍa as the site where *Śrīmālāsīṃhanādasūtra* was composed see Alex and Hikedo Wayman, tr., *The Lion's Roar of Queen Śrīmālā* (New York and London: Columbia University of Chicago, 1992) II:302-306.

texts in Buddhist Sanskrit (Fan), and the great Buddhologist Bernard Faure once told me that according to their colophons and the Chinese imperial bibliographies a sizable portion of the extant Mahāyāna *sūtras* in the Chinese *Tripiṭaka* was originally obtained in Sri Lanka.[17] The presence and even dominance of these Mahāyāna Theravādins over their rivals at the Mahāvihāra, whom Hsüan-tsang tellingly describes as "opposed to the Great Vehicle and adher[ing] to the Lesser Vehicle,"[18] is manifest in the archaeological and epigraphic records of the Abhayagiri's splendour.

Thus the Mahāvihāran claim that Theravāda is originally and exclusively a Hīnayāna school was certainly not universally believed in the ancient Buddhist world, nor probably was it believed by much of anyone except by the Mahāvihārans themselves. Even in Sri Lanka, even at the end of the Anurādhapura Period, this claim must have seemed absurd; the prominent contemporary displays of Sri Lankan Theravāda identity included huge Bodhisattva statues all over the Island--think of Buduruwegala!--and Mahāyana inscriptions and a lavish, cosmopolitan Abhayagiri, which Leslie Gunawardana has shown us sponsored pan-Buddhist dialogues, sent students to Nālandā University and even established a branch vihāra in Java![19]

Indeed, this claim of the Mahāvihārans--that they preserved from the beginning an original and exclusively Earlier Vehicle Theravāda--was belied by more than the sheer presence, if not the dominance of Mahāyāna (and some evidence suggests even Tantrayāna) Theravādins throughout the history of

---

17 This was an off-hand comment, in response to a question I raised at a seminar in Chicago a decade ago; I do not hold Prof. Faure to this view. A study of the role Sri Lanka plays in Mahāyāna literary history would be of great service to the field. Of course the most famous example is the *Lankāvatārasūtra*, supposedly preached atop Śrī Pāda. Prof. B. Karunatilleke pointed out, when I delivered an earlier version of this paper, that some legends make Padmasambhavā, Bodhisattva founder of Tibet's Tantric traditions, a Sri Lankan monk!

18 Beal, *Si Yu Ki*, 1:247.

19 See R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough: Monasticism and Economic Interest in Early Medieval Sri Lanka* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1979) esp. pp. 250-55.

Anurādhapura.[20] More important, there are strong reasons to suspect that the identity "Mahāvihāran" itself--the very existence of "the" Mahāvihāra--was a late development which *post*-dated the rise of the Mahāyāna. This might be obvious even upon first glance--if on a pan-Buddhist scale the hallmark of Mahāvihāran Theravāda has been its staunch rejection of all Mahāyāna teachings, then how could this self-identity have existed prior to the Mahāyāna itself?

But this sort of question-begging is by no means our only basis for questioning the Mahāvihāran construct of its own history. Rather, we are confronted with the fact that, like the term "Theravāda", so the term "Mahāvihāra", in its technical sense, is absent in the literary and epigraphic record until a very late date.

In the canonical texts, the term *mahāvihāra* denotes only its non-technical sense of "big monastery." Even in Buddhaghosa's commentaries, the term is sometimes used quite generically. At one point Buddhaghosa glosses the term *mahāvihāra* as "large monasteries which held 12,000 bhikkhus, the same as the Abhayagiri, Cetiyagiri and Cittalapabbata *vihāras*."[21] The term was so generic that it could even be applied to major rivals! In the early Brāhmī inscriptions the term is never found, which makes us wonder how "the" Mahāvihāra could have existed at that time.[22] In the later Brāhmī inscriptions

---

[20] John Holt (*Buddha in the Crown*) has discussed the evidence of Tantric practices in Sri Lanka. The sort of "Theravāda Tantrique" which Francois Bizothas identified in Southeast Asia also has strong remnants in rural Sri Lankan healing practices (involving the use of *pirits, mantras, yantras*, talismans, altered states of consciousness, manipulation of supernatural beings, secret lineages of teacher-student transmission, forms of initiation, etc.) Indeed, Roger Jackson has pointed to Tantric themes even in the "official" Theravāda liturgical text, the *Jinapañjaraya.*

[21] W. Stede, ed., *Sumangala-vilāsinī, Buddhaghosa's Commentary on the Dīgha-nikāya* Pt. 2 (London: Luzac & Co., 1971) p. 478 (*Mahāpadānasuttavaṇṇanā*).

[22] I make this statement on the basis of S. Paranavitana's *Inscriptions of Ceylon, Volume One: Early Brāmi Inscriptions* (Colombo, 1970). These early inscriptions, mostly carved on caves, date from about the 2nd c., B.C. to about the 1st c., A.D. They stand in stark contrast to the specifications of recipients that characterize the Later Brāhmī

we find numerous specific references to "Abhayagirivihāra" and "Dakkhinārāma" (a group which also [according to the *vaṃsas*, later] occupied the Jetavanavihāra) but only one reference to "Mahāvihāra," and that in a fragmentary inscription which primarily refers to the rivals and in which "Mahāvihāra" may just be a synonym for one or both of them.[23] Those earliest known Theravādins at Nāgārjunikoṇḍa similarly refer to themselves as "residents of the Mahāvihāra" even though they clearly did not belong to "the" Mahāvihāra as we now know it.

"The" Mahāvihāra is unambiguously named, for the first time, in *Dīpavaṃsa*, the fourth century, A.D. literary source which not coincidentally also contains the first literary reference to "the" Theravāda as an exclusively Hīnayāna school. In *Dīpavaṃsa*, there is no ambiguity; the terms Theravāda and Mahāvihāra denote precisely what we take them to mean today. This fact corresponds nicely with all the above-mentioned evidence suggesting that the terms took on these technical meanings around the third or fourth century, A.D. The question then becomes, what happened around the time of *Dīpavaṃsa* to produce a Mahāvihāran self-identity based strictly upon an Earlier Vehicle interpretation of the Theravāda legacy? If the historical construct propounded by *Dīpavaṃsa* and later Mahāvihāran sources is not a transparent window into an

---

Inscriptions of the 1st to about the 5th c., A.D. Compare Paranavitana, *Inscriptions of Ceylon, Volume Two Part I: Late Brāhmī Inscriptions* (Moratuwa, 1983) and the following note. This source is hereafter cited as "ICILI" followed by page number.

[23] Thus, unambiguous donation to the Abhayagiri were made by Amaṇḍagāmaṇi (19-29, A.D.; cf IC II,i:46) and Gajabāhu I (114-136;cf IC II, 1:88) as well as by ministers or generals of Mahallaka Nāga (136-43;IC II,1:109) and Bhātika Tissa II (143-67;IC II,1:113). Gajabāhu also made a donation to the Dakkhiṇārāma (which would become the Jetavana division; UC II,1:87) as did several officials of an unidentified king around the beginning of the 3rd century (*Epigraphia Zeylanica* VII:99-106). The sole mention of "mahāvihāra" in the Later Brāmī Inscriptions which is taken to refer to "the" Mahāvihāra belongs to a minister of Bhātika Tissa II (IC II,1:116-17). For a comprehensive study of the evidence available for determining which regional monasteries were affiliated with which disciplinary orders, and similar conclusions about the importance of the Abhayagiri, see Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough*, esp pp. 8-21,36.

actual past, then when and why did it come into existence?

My answer is the same that all the Anurādhapuran historians apparently gave to this question: the crucial moment in Mahāvihāran and Hīnayāna Theravāda history was the reign of King Mahāsena (274-301, A.D.) I certainly do not need to inform the readers of this journal that *Dīpavaṃsa*, *Mahāvaṃsa* and *Vaṃsatthappakāsinī* all end their narratives of Sri Lankan Buddhist history with this critical reign, even though we know from later sources that chronicling proceeded right throughout the Anurādhapura Period.[24] This odd fact has been dismissed by Wilhelm Geiger and others as an accident of the dislocations which Mahāsena is said to have caused "the" Mahāvihārans. Because they had to vacate the Mahāvihāra for nine years, it has been asserted, there must have been some break in the chronicling tradition.[25] But this surely does not explain why fully seven centuries later the Mahāvihārans were still narrating all of history as a mere preface to the reign of Mahāsena.

---

[24] The view that the chronologies and other details in the *vaṃsas* are mere fictions has long-since been disparaged, and is falsified constantly in practice by the sometimes uncanny correspondences between the Mahāvihāran histories and the external epigraphic record in Sri Lanka and on the Indian mainland, such as the details of the ascendance of the Pallava king Narendravarmasingha (636, A.D.). Compare Cv XLVII with E. Hultzsch, "Kasakudi," *South Indian Inscriptions* II,4(1913): 353-61. Despite the fact that the status of the Mahāvihāran chronologies still engenders considerable professional debate on a pan-Buddhist scale (as with the date of the Buddha, e.g., Heinz Bechert, "The Date of the Buddha - an Open Question of Ancient Indian History," in H. Bechert, ed., *The Dating of the Historical Buddha* [Gottingen Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991]1: 234-36), in the case of Sri Lanka the 13th century authors of *Cūlavaṃsa* must have had access to records more or less contemporaneous with events described throughout the medieval history of Anurādhapura.

[25] See Wilhelm Geiger, *The Dīpavaṃsa and Mahāvaṃsa and their Historical Development in Ceylon*, tr. Ethel M. Coomaraswamy (Colombo H.C. Cottle, Government Printer, 1908) p.64;cf. Regina T. Clifford, "The *Dhammadīpa* Tradition of Sri Lanka: Three Models within the Sinhalese Chronicles," in Bardwell I. Smith, ed., *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka* (Philadelphia: Animus, 1977) pp. 40-41.

In other work on the *vaṃsas* I have argued that *Dīpavaṃsa* was in fact composed just after the reign of Mahāsena.[26] Though the king himself was already dead, the memory of his reign was still fresh. *Dīpavaṃsa* maddeningly omits to give any details of Mahāsena's reign because its audience is expected already to know them. Rather, its entire account of Mahāsena is devoted to an almost ranting attack upon certain powerful men nicknamed Dumitta (for Sanghamitra) and Pāpa Sona, who are said to have misled the king with lies about the true Dhamma and Vinaya, which *Dīpavaṃsa* refutes in minute detail.[27] These men were "agitated, like putrid corpses covered in black flies, disguised as monks but no genuine monks," "shameless rogues", "ivory whores," "immoral men dressed in delusion" who "secretly connived" to corrupt the king "for the sake of material gain".[28]

The *Dīpavaṃsa*, which self-consciously represents itself as the story of "the" Mahāvihāra and "the" Theravāda of the Earlier Vehicle, was thus a polemical tract written just after the reign of Mahāsena by a group of Buddhists who were still smarting from whatever it is he did. This accounts quite nicely for the claim by *Cūlavaṃsa* that just after the death of Mahāsena his son and successor Kitti Siri Meghavaṇṇa approached the Mahāvihārans, listened to their report "from the beginning" of the damage done by his father Mahāsena, then affirmed their existence by processing a statue of Arahant Mahinda to the Mahāvihāra and building it up.[29] This report "from the beginning" might very well have been *Dīpavaṃsa* itself.

This then would explain why *Dīpavaṃsa* ends with the reign of Mahāsena. But the reign of Mahāsena was already well beyond living memory by the time *Mahāvaṃsa* was composed (last half of the fifth century, A.D.), and was truly ancient history when *Vaṃsatthappakāsinī* was written in the tenth

---

26 "Mahāsena at the Mahāvihāra," forthcoming and "Buddhist History: The Pāli Vaṃsas of Sri Lanka," forthcoming.

27 The specific issues of contention were: the legality of ivory fans (negated by the Mahāvihārans) and the legality of calculating the age for higher ordination from conception rather than from birth (affirmed by the Mahāvihārans).

28 Dīpavaṃsa (Oldenberg's edition)22: 66-76. These are my translations; the phrases are not in the original order.

29 Cv 37: 53-90.

century, A.D.[30] The reign of Mahāsena continued to be a watershed in Anurādhapuran history for the entire Anurādhapura Period. Historians continued to discuss and debate it because it continued to have relevance for their 5th or 10th century worlds. Careful exegesis of the *Mahāvaṃsa* and *Vaṃsatthappakāsinī* accounts of Mahāsena's reign--the final chapter in those works--shows them to be refutations of a complex series of arguments which were apparently launched by the rivals, including (1) a portrayal of Mahāsena and his Mahāyāna activities as paradigmatic of outstanding Theravāda Buddhist kingship (2) an attack on the Mahāvihāran *vinaya* (monastic legal code) as late and corrupt (3) a denial of the integrity of the Mahāvihāran *sīmā* (liturgical boundary) and (4) a claim to particular tracts of land in Anurādhapura which the Mahāvihārans also claimed.[31] It is clear from certain statements in *Vaṃsatthappakāsinī* that in arguing these points the rivals were even mustering the *Mahāvaṃsa* as evidence! In its explicit cursing to hell of the proponents of these arguments, *Vaṃsatthappakāsinī* reveals its own polemical reasons for choosing to "comment" on the ancient chronicle.[32]

The fact that *Mahāvaṃsa* and *Vaṃsatthappakāsinī* were written for their own times should warn us against taking their narratives of Mahāsena's reign--our only narratives of Mahāsena's reign--at face value. The very fact of their being polemical indicates that there were other perspectives in the air, perspectives which were persuasive enough in their own rights to require such elaborate refutation. The later chronicles are not the accounts of eye-witnesses trying to be "objective", they are reconstructions made long after the fact. The eye-witnesses to Mahāsena's reign were too angry and threatened to simply tell us what actually happened.

Fortunately, there is a piece of epigraphic evidence which helps us to make sense of the historical context in which *Dīpavaṃsa* was written. This is a badly defaced inscription which Dr. Paranavitana has shown to belong to the time of Mahāsena, and which was discovered in what Paranavitana identified as

---

30 Arguments for the specific dating of these texts (Dpv, ca. 302, A.D.; Mhv,ca.460 A.D.; VAP, ca.920's A.D. and 963, A.D.) are provided in my "Buddhist History: The *Pāli Vaṃsas* of Sri Lanka," forthcoming.

31 This oversimplifies a very complex argument about the accounts in these texts of Mahāsena's reign, spelled out at length in my "Mahāsena at the Mahāvihāra," forthcoming.

32 *Vaṃsatthappakāsinī* (Malalasekera's edition)II: 683-84.

the Jetavana ruins.[33] In this inscription, an unnamed king censures the monks of the five residences (*paca-maha-avasa* = *pañca-mahā-āvāsa*) for certain transgressions (*pawe*) which were apparently described at length in the original. They are ordered to study and copy *Vaitūlya* (that is *Mahāyāna*) scriptures, and to recognize the superiority of the Abhayagirivihāra.

As Paranavitana argues, I think rightly, here "the five residences" together constitute what we now call "the" Mahāvihāra. This correspondence is clear in medieval Sinhala sources[34] as well as in the nature of the inscription itself, which attacked Buddhists holding the sort of view that came to characterize "the" Mahāvihāra and, according to "the" Mahāvihārans, that was the true essence of *all* Theravāda. What is startling about this document is that the errant monks are not referred to as "Mahāvihārans" at all; they are simply "the monks of the five residences." In this document, the epithet "Great Monastery" (*mahāvihāra*) is applied only to the Abhayagirivihāra, where the *Vaitūlya sūtras* are preached!

Thus I suggest the following scenario: as is clear from the epigraphic evidence, too, up to the time of Mahāsena there was no "Mahāvihāra" except the Abhayagirivihāra. Theravāda was one of the new radical schools of the day, which was experimenting with the same shift to Mahāyāna and Tantrayāna forms of thought and practice, and the same rush to carve out a separate self-identity

---

[33] S. Paranavitana, "A Fragmentary Inscription from Jetavanārāma now in the Colombo Museum," *Epigraphia Zeylanica* IV:274ff.

[34] On the Five Great Residences, and the problems caused by the fact that the constitution of the list of five changed over time, see Paranavitana, "A Fragmentary Inscription from Jetavanārāma." pp. 278-79. I agree with Paranavitana's general position that the term must be taken as referring to the monks of "the" Mahāvihāra, especially given the *Mahāvaṃsa* and *Nikāyasangrahāwa* association of the five with the Mahāvihāra during the time of Mahāsena's elder brother and foe, Jeṭṭhatissa, and their predecessor Goṭhābhaya, who suppressed the Mahāyāna, respectively. I would add that the later texts (such as Rasavāhinī and Suddharmālankāray which include the Jetavana and Abhayagiri in the list of the five can be understood as the products of a time when the consolidation of the Sri Lankan Sangha under the Mahāvihāra umbrella, and the abandonment of Anurādhapura, made it seem perfectly natural that the term would refer to the five largest monasteries of the late Anurādhapura Period.

within the changing Buddhist world, which were occurring within similar schools across Asia. Though the Earlier Vehicle continued to be studied, it was supplemented with ever-new and no doubt profound revelations ascribed to the Buddha himself and transmitted in the *Vaitūlya sūtras*. These were eagerly embraced by the main representatives of the Theravāda at that time, and for the rest of the history of Anurādhapura, who were headquartered at the Abhayagirivihāra.

During the reign of Mahāsena, and according to the *vaṃsas* during the reigns of his father and elder brother, a rebellion against this dominant order occurred. Certain monks and nuns, living in the comparatively old monasteries to the south of the city, attacked the vanguard trends we now call Mahāyāna. They rejected as inauthentic the new *sūtras*, and advocated stricter adherence to the teachings and practices of the ancient *suttas* and vinaya. But Mahāsena, under the tutelage of Sanghamitta, was a proponent of the vanguard Mahāyāna teachings. Indeed, the very inscription in question is carved on Andhran marble which was quarried for the construction of Nāgārjunikoṇḍa and carved in the precise Nāgārjunikoṇḍan style.

In whatever fashion, these monks in the five residences offended Mahāsena by rejecting his Mahāyāna views and his cosmopolitan connections. They were censured and forced to endure the humiliation of copying the very *sūtras* they so abhorred. When Mahāsena died and they were given the opportunity to make their case--to Kitti Siri Meghavaṇṇa--they constructed an historical narrative that was to have profound implications for the rest of Buddhist history, not only in Sri Lanka but even in the entire world.

This historical narrative, however significant, was actually quite simple. Constituting themselves as "the" Mahāvihārans, these monks and nuns argued that precisely because their monasteries were so ancient, and precisely because they defended the integrity and preservation of the most ancient texts, they ought to have a separate existence of their own. Though beginning with Siri Meghavaṇṇa himself--who brought the Tooth Relic to the Abhayagirivihāra--most later kings were more avid patrons of the Abhayagiri and Jetavana rivals, at the same time no later king ever again attempted to eradicate this "opposition to the Great Vehicle" altogether, as Mahāsena had tried to effect. Rather, for the rest of Anurādhapuran history, all three subgroups of the Theravāda, including the Mahāvihārans, were allowed their place and generally encouraged to prosper. It is after all part of Mahāyānist ecumenicalism that the Lesser Vehicle had and even has its usefulness--even if the Buddha did preach it to the *śrāvakas* as a mere preparation for the higher revelations of the Great Vehicle.

Dīpavaṃsa thus won the existence of an Earlier Vehicle Theravāda at a time when it must have appeared that Theravāda would become an exclusively Mahāyāna school. This was a remarkable achievement, made on the basis of what even today is an extremely persuasive case. No one could have denied, nor could deny today, many of the basic premises of the Mahāvihāran construct; their monasteries really did contain many of the oldest monuments in the kingdom, their canonical texts were universally agreed to be extremely ancient ones upon which all Sri Lankan monasticism had originally been based, and the rivals were only too happy to boast of their Mahāyāna cosmopolitanism. And as the painstaking research of Oldenberg, Geiger, Malalasekera and Adikaram, among others, makes most certain, the Mahāvihāran history really was based upon ancient sources which could be consulted right throughout the Anurādhapura Period. How else could we explain the detailed correspondences between the *vaṃsas* and the ancient epigraphic record, down to the names of specific temples which specific kings built? The stylistic faults of the *Dīpavaṃsa* are largely the result of its meticulous adherence to the original sources which it hastily strung together as proof-texts of its own threatened position.

But as I have already tried to make clear, there were simultaneously premises in the Mahāvihāran case which were anything but obvious and undeniable. Everyone agreed that the monuments in "the" Mahāvihāra were very old, but only the Mahāvihārans took this to imply that they themselves were so old. The rivals pointed out that the Mahāvihārans had their origin in a rebellion against the dominant religious society of the comparatively recent past, and attacked their claim to exist at all when they denied the legality of the *sīmā* by which the five residences were supposedly united into a single "Mahāvihāra". Everyone agreed that the texts of the Pāli Canon were extremely ancient, but only the Mahāvihārans took this to imply that the Pāli Canon alone was therefore worthy of study and commentary. The rivals maintained that precisely because it was so old, it was also old fashioned, worthy of study primarily by those who had not yet realized the real pith of what the Buddha was trying to teach to this world with so much dust in its eyes. Everyone agreed that the Abhayagiri was a rich, cosmopolitan community sporting the vanguard Mahāyāna teachings of the day, but only the Mahāvihārans saw this as a shameful degeneration of the True Dhamma. For the rivals, the True Dharma did not stop with the ancient canon but embraced it and superseded it, ever unfolding in new revelations appropriate to the ever-changing reality within which progress on the path is made.

So persuasive were these rival views that successions of kings in Anurādhapura favoured the rivals over the would-be champions of Earlier

Vehicle exclusivity. And why wouldn't they? The Abhayagiri was devoted to knowing and mastering the latest vanguard trends in a sophisticated, global Buddhist world. The Abhayagiri connected Anurādhapura with Indian universities, Chinese imperial courts, Javanese trading communities--and brought Indian scholars, Chinese ambassadors and Javanese traders to Anurādhapura. The Abhayagiri made Sri Lankan Theravāda--Mahāyāna Theravāda--a real player in the bigger cosmopolis of the day, dominated by Bodhisattva kings trying to transform all of Asia according to the Mahāyāna revelation of universal Buddhahood.

And the Abhayagiri--so far as we know--never denied the relative value of the Lesser Vehicle. They sported their own Lesser Vehicle canon, probably not much different from the Pāli Canon except in minor details. In fact the Chinese knew that the Abhayagiri disseminated its own Lesser Vehicle canon throughout Asia.[35] This made the Mahāvihāran case even harder to argue at the time, for whatever gem of wisdom they discovered in the Pāli canon could easily be assimilated into the ecumenical Mahāyāna vision, whereas any objection that other parts of this ecumenical vision strayed from the earlier teachings could easily be dismissed as proof that Lesser Vehicle adherents really just don't understand the Buddha's Great Message after all.

Still, many of us can find in our own minds the persuasiveness of the Mahāvihāran case. If we agree with the Mahāvihārans that it is hypocrisy to deem "Thera-vāda" anything other than what was taught by the Elders at the Great Councils, then we cannot help but follow them to the conclusion that true Theravāda is essentially and exclusively an Earlier Vehicle school. If we agree with them that the way to update a text is to invent an exegesis or an etymology rather than to compose new words for the Buddha himself, then we cannot help but follow them to the conclusion that the Mahāyāna revelations should be rejected as recent fabrications. If we agree with the Mahāvihārans that oldness itself is something good, something true, something worthy of veneration, then we cannot help but follow them to the conclusion that the Mahāvihāra and its traditions are most deserving of praise and adherence.

Indeed, the Mahāvihāran case finally did prove persuasive, not only for Sri Lanka but also for much of Southeast Asia and even southern China. Though the final victory of the Mahāvihārans over their rivals did not occur even in Sri Lanka until after the 12th century, if at all, at least officially Theravāda was exclusively an Earlier Vehicle school from the end of the Anurādhapura Period

---

[35] Beal, *Si Yu Ki*, 1:247.

right up to the present. So successful was their ultimate victory over the rivals that today only the Mahāvihāran version remains to be studied directly. So skillful was their use of historical sources that they continue to convince scholars to this day that history happened just the way the Mahāvihārans say it happened.

But however persuasive I do find the Mahāvihāran championing of the Buddha's own teachings as the teachings to study, and of the Buddha's own practices as the practices to employ, I am no longer persuaded by the Mahāvihāran historical construct as such. This of course makes no ultimate difference on the level of belief and praxis--whether they called it Theravāda or not, the Elders at the First Council proclaimed a Dhamma which has been preserved in the world, thanks to the Mahāvihāra Theravādins. But it makes a big difference when we set out to study the religious history of Sri Lanka.

By way of conclusion, then, let me return to the larger picture of Theravāda history. It should now be clear why I am so troubled by the scholarly practice of simply paraphrasing the *Mahāvaṃsa* as though it were some 19th century German encyclopedia of facts. This goes way beyond charges of "bias". The entire basis of Mahāviharan historiography was challenged throughout the Anurādhapura Period by much-admired competing perspectives. To treat it as a straightforward narration of facts is to miss the rich history of their own times which texts like the *vaṃsas* can help us recover, a history of Buddhist debate about the past and its meaning for the present. It is moreover to whitewash earlier history according to the later Mahāvihāran construct--history is still being written by the winners--obscuring so much of Anurādhapura's one-time glory from our view.

In the Mahāvihāran version of things, articulated for the first time by *Dīpavaṃsa*, Theravāda history is "like a great banyon tree; nothing added, nothing lacking." The teachings of the Buddha himself are the roots of the tree, and its strong trunk is the unbroken Theravāda tradition passed down in direct succession through the Three Great Councils to the monks of the ancient Mahāvihāra, and through them to the Mahāvihāran monks of the present. All other Buddhists are like thorns that have grown upon that strong trunk, thorns which arose both in India and in Sri Lanka, at the Abhayagiri and Jetavana vihāras.[36] These Sri Lankan moments of the not-Theravāda are mere

---

[36] *Dipavaṃsa* 5:51-2. Note that Dpv omits the final clause, about the thorns that grew up in Sri Lanka. Pleading for the very survival of their monastery, the residents of the five great residences were hardly in a position to challenge the Abhayagiri, which Dpv praises as "beautiful"

aberrations in an otherwise strong and straight tree. This image was codified in medieval texts like *Nikāyasaṃgrahawa* that portrayed all of Sri Lankan history as a history of protecting the true Theravāda from occasional Mahāyāna and Tantrayāna heresies. And here we can easily recognize our own modern construct: Anurādhapuran history is a pure trajectory of original Hīnāyāna Theravāda which gets periodically polluted by some not-Theravāda then purified by the *katikāvatas* of some powerful king, such that it still is (or at least should be) today what it was at the very beginning.

But as I have indicated, key aspects of this construct plainly do not conform to the extant evidence. The Theravāda as such had its late origin in the Mahāyāna, both because the earliest, most favoured and most internationally famous Theravādins were Mahāyāna Theravādins and also because even the Hīnayāna Theravāda of the Mahāvihāra was produced after and in response to the Mahāyāna revelations. To take up a Mahāyāna metaphor; rather than a thorn on the Theravāda, the Mahāyāna teachings and practices of the Abhayagiri and Jetavana vihāras were long considered the flowers at the ends of the branches on the tree which we call Buddhist history. Surely that root--the trunk, the Lesser Vehicle--had to be there. So did all the branches, the eighteen schools which through commentaries and *Abhidharma* traditions supplemented the canon in Hīnayāna ways. But the trunk and the branches only existed, as it were, in order to ultimately make possible the flowers--the expression of the tree's real beauty, and the means by which it grows and spreads into the ever-changing future. In this vision, the Mahāvihārans were like over-zealous gardeners, trying to pluck the tree bare in some foolish belief that only the trunk matters and that a tree is altogether better off without branches or flowers at all.

If as historians we are committed to understanding development and change as it occurs over time, then I would suggest that this latter model, of different branches, *all* of them covered in flowers, growing out of a common, if somewhat gnarled trunk, better fits the extant evidence than does the theory of Mahāvihāran stasis and unanimity. In light of these considerations, I want to conclude by suggesting a basic, tripartite periodization of Theravāda history which emerges in my own study of the hard evidence.

Given the silence in the early epigraphs, it would appear that there was not any marked sectarian consciousness at all--Mahāvihāran or otherwise--during

---

and "supreme". The final clause is added only by *Mahāvaṃsa* (5:13), which was composed in a rare period of comparative strength for the Mahāvihāra.

about the first four centuries after Arahant Mahinda. We could thus term the first stage of Sri Lankan Buddhist history "The Period of Non-Sectarianism". The second stage would be "The Rise of the Abhayagirivihāra" or "The Period of the Mahāyāna Theravāda", which I would date from about the 2nd century A.D. right up to the tenth century, A.D. The third stage would be "The Triumph of the Mahāvihāra" or "The Period of the Hīnayāna Theravāda", which I would date from the tenth century to the present.

During the Period of Non-Sectarianism various Indian Buddhist traditions came to Sri Lanka and were entrenched here. During the Period of the Mahāyāna Theravāda, Theravāda identity was forged and the separate Theravādin *nikāyas* came into existence, with the Mahāvihāra a late and lesser third. In this period Mahāyāna Theravādins were seen by Buddhists in the rest of Asia as the true representatives of Sri Lankan Theravāda, and they took their Mahāyāna Theravāda to other parts of the globe. Though they too arose during the second stage, only during the third stage did Hīnayāna Theravādins finally succeed in gaining hegemony over their rivals. They were henceforth seen by Buddhists in the rest of Asia as the true representatives of the Sri Lankan Theravāda, and only then did they too take their Hīnayāna Theravāda to the far reaches of the globe.

JONATHAN S. WALTERS

LITERATURE AS A RESOURCE IN THE SRI LANKAN ELT CLASSROOM

The use of literature as a resource in language teaching has had more than its fair share of debate and discussion during the last two decades, not without, however, varying degrees of controversy and ambivalence on the part of both teachers and curriculum planners. Stern (1991) makes an observation that holds true even today--that teachers are discouraged by a lack of sufficient resources to aid them in presenting literature in the language classroom, a lack of preparation in the area of literature teaching in ESL and the absence of clear-cut objectives defining the role of literature in ESL/EFL. This is particularly the case in the Sri Lankan context, in which an examination of ELT programs which include a literature component will reveal a wide spectrum of methodologies, resulting from a paucity of well-defined guidelines and techniques of introducing literature into the Sri Lankan ELT environment. This paper is an attempt to suggest an appropriate methodology with its attendant objectives and content, as well as criteria, for the selection of suitable literary texts.

A prerequisite of attempting to define the role of literature in ELT is an understanding of what constitutes literature itself, since one could argue that realia often used in the language classroom, such as notices, reports, announcements, newspaper advertisements etc. can also be considered to be literary texts, if literature is assumed to be creativity expressed through language. In the literature of language teaching, such definitions are sparse. Brumfit and Carter's (1986) collection of essays on literature and language teaching yields the following. Carter (1986) states that the question of what is specifically literary about certain texts is complex and problematic, and that in terms of actual words there is certainly no qualitative distinction between literary and non-literary texts, the difference lying in language use; Vincent (1986) defines works of literature as "works of art, distinguished by their sophistication, subtlety and complexity" (p. 208); and McKay (1986) observes that literature is characterised by its structural complexity and unique use of language.

All these definitions acknowledge the complexity of literature and two mention its distinctive use of language. None, however, provide us with a concrete, workable definition which may be used to identify a text as literature, preferring instead, to revert to abstract descriptions. Since literature itself seems to defy definition, a point of focus can perhaps be found in the language of literature, often termed literary language, from which to proceed. Brumfit and Carter (1986) believe that there is no such thing as literary language, asserting that they find it impossible to isolate any single or special property of language which is exclusive to a literary work. However, they do not deny that language

is used in ways which can be distinguished as literary, and go on to state that the language of literature is that which has undergone a certain measure of artistic distortion. Littlewood (1986) claims that, at the simplest level, literature is the productive use of a limited number of linguistic structures in order to achieve communication, and that the main core of the linguistic system is the same, whether it is used for "spoken gossip" (p. 208) or written literature. This implies once again that there is no qualitative difference between the language of spoken discourse and that of literature at this level. However, at the second or stylistic level, Littlewood asserts that differences do appear, literature drawing on all available styles to present a representation of life.

A more recent definition from Lazar (1993) claims that while there is no literary language that we can isolate, one of the hallmarks of literature is that it feeds creatively on every possible style and register, and that it has become the one form of discourse in which any use of language is permissible. She goes on to isolate several features of literary language, such as similes, metaphors, assonance, alliteration, repetition of words or phrases, unusual syntactic patterns, etc. which she states occur in a higher incidence in literature when compared with ordinary discourse.

The consensus appears to be that language can be identified as "literary" according to the degree exhibited of certain characteristics, whether these are artistic distortion, stylistic devices or figures of speech. Since the language of the realia mentioned previously usually lacks these features, such texts will be considered to be non-literary from a purely linguistic aspect for the purposes of the present discussion. From the point of view of the applied linguist and the language teacher, this shift of focus from a definition of literature itself to what constitutes the language of literature is fortunate, since the comprehension and use of language is the primary concern of ELT pedagogy.

An examination of the arguments put forward in support of the inclusion of literary texts in the language classroom reveals a dual perspective. The content based arguments are that all literature deals with fundamental human issues and is therefore both enduring and very close to the students' own thoughts and feelings (Collie and Slater 1987), a view that fails to address the issue of a student in an EFL environment to whom the target language culture is alien, and to whom therefore the target language literature would present problems of identification; that literature deepens the students' understanding of the country where the target language is spoken (Collie and Slater 1987; Lazar 1993), a view that is refuted by Brumfit and Carter (1986); that literature enables the reader to examine "universal" human experience within the context

of a specific setting and the consciousness of a particular people, learning about prejudices, taboos etc. (Stern 1991), an objective that appears more appropriate to sociology or anthropology, or even sociolinguistics, rather than ELT; and that literature is highly valued by students, who experience a sense of achievement through studying it (Lazar 1993).

The principal language based arguments are more relevant to the context of ELT. Brumfit and Carter (1986) point out that the study of literature introduces students to the creative use of language. In the Sri Lankan ELT classroom this could be exploited to assist students in inferring meaning from realia encountered in the linguistic environment outside the classroom, and prove to be a valuable aid in the teaching of life skills. Stern (1991) points out that a single literary text can become the central focus of an ELT unit incorporating all four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, a point that will be discussed in more detail later in this paper. Brumfit and Carter (1986) observe that literature encourages students to infer meaning from the text by interacting with it, and Lazar (1993) states that literature helps in developing students' interpretative and critical abilities, by inferring meaning at multiple levels, in stimulating the imagination and in increasing emotional awareness, resulting in greater confidence in exploring their own ideas and emotions in English, two arguments of substantial significance in the areas of reading and writing. Collie and Slater (1987) assert that students can gain familiarity with the many features of written English through literature, and a similar view is expressed by Brumfit and Carter (1986) when they state that literary texts provide examples of language resources being used to the full. Bearing in mind that the primary concerns of ELT are linguistic, it is the arguments based on the language of literature that should form the basis of text selection and methodology.

It has already been stated that literary texts contain multiple levels of meaning. Inferring each of these requires the reader to engage in a process of decoding ideas encoded by a writer into the system of communication we call language. This process of comprehension is primarily psycholinguistic, involving the reader in an interactive dialogue with the text. Since the quality and parameters of this dialogue differ according to the individual reader, there can be no 'final' reading of any text. However, inappropriate responses are possible, arising from misunderstandings of the code (Brumfit and Carter 1986), and obviously these are to be avoided.

Difficulty in inferring meaning from a literary text can be due to a variety of reasons where the learner of English as a second language is concerned. Principal among these are grammatical and syntactic difficulty, word-

stock or vocabulary, stylistic difficulty and specific cultural assumptions. Grammatical and syntactic difficulty results from the linguistic liberties taken by creative writers--the feature referred to as artistic distortion earlier in this paper. Instances of such distortion are changes in the word order, omission of words, sentence fragmentation, lack of punctuation etc. The importance of the comprehensibility of the linguistic structures of a text to a second language learner is asserted by Littlewood (1986) when he says, "The linguistic structures are, of course, the gateway or barrier to other levels [of meaning], and it is fruitless to expect pupils to appreciate literary works for which they are not linguistically ready" (p. 181). Difficulty in word-stock or vocabulary could be twofold. First, the vocabulary of the text could be too advanced for the student, and secondly, there could be items that are unfamiliar due to cultural specificity. This is especially true in the case of literature written outside the ELT environment by native speakers of the target language, but also true of some of the literature written in English in Sri Lanka, a point which should be kept in mind when selecting a text. Stylistic variety can be encountered in the formal written register of a literary text, as well as in the variety of styles often found within a single text, such as an informative or descriptive style for narration, a conversational style for dialogue, a regional dialect for authenticity, or a poetic style for heightened effect (Littlewood 1986). If a student is not familiar with any of these styles in the first language, difficulty in comprehension in the target language could be the result.

The presence of cultural references and assumptions in any work of literature is an indisputable fact. The importance of these assumptions in the ELT classroom lies in the barrier they form between the student and the meaning of the text. McKay (1986) states, "An interaction with a literary text depends on a reader's familiarity with the cultural assumptions in it." (p. 181). Vincent (1986) agrees when she says that a reader must bring to the text linguistic, conceptual and cultural understanding of a high order. These assertions can be clarified further from the perspective of schema theory in language pedagogy. Research in this area has shown that comprehending a text is an interactive process between the reader's background knowledge and the text itself, indicating the importance of knowledge that goes beyond mere linguistic knowledge in a psycholinguistic model of reading (Carrell and Eisterhold 1987). One of the fundamental tenets of schema theory then is that any text, either written or spoken, does not by itself carry meaning, and that the process of interpretation is guided by the principle that every input is mapped by the reader against some existing schemata, i.e., previously acquired background knowledge (Carrell and Eisterhold 1987).

The background knowledge that second language readers bring to a text is often culture specific (Carrell and Eisterhold 1987) i.e., accumulated through their own life experiences, and through whatever reading they have done in the past. In the case of most students in Sri Lanka's education system at present this reading is likely to have been done in their first language, i.e., Sinhala or Tamil. Therefore their knowledge or schemata of the target language (English) culture is negligible. Carrell and Eisterhold (1987) cite studies that showed that a reader's failure to activate an appropriate schema against which a text can be given a consistent interpretation, resulting in non-comprehension, is due to either the writer not providing sufficient clues to activate the readers' schemata, or the readers themselves not possessing the appropriate schema anticipated by the writer. Further, a study conducted at the University of Wisconsin showed that reading comprehension is a function of cultural background knowledge and that if readers possess schemata assumed by the writer, they understand the text better (Lazar 1993).

This is borne out further by what was experienced in the University of Colombo's Intensive Course in English conducted for new entrants to the Faculties of Arts and Management and Finance in January / February 1996. Extracts from literature by two Sri Lankan authors, Chandani Lokuge and Romesh Gunesekera, were prepared as reading passages, with pre-reading activities and predictive questions, followed by the text, which was in turn followed by post-reading activities of comprehension questions and vocabulary work. The students following this course were divided into three levels of proficiency, with Level 1 being the lowest level and Level 3 the highest. When these literary passages were done as a reading unit in a Level 3 class, a marked difference in the students' response was perceived. Lokuge's story, titled "A Woman in the Night,"[1] elicited interested discussion, as well as identification from the students, while Gunesekera's story, titled "A House in the Country,"[2] left them unmoved, and in some cases even puzzled and bemused.[3]

There are many possible reasons for this difference of response. Lokuge's story is about a woman, constantly abused by her alcoholic husband,

---

1 C. Lokuge, *Moth and Other Stories*, Sydney: Dangeroo Press, 1994, pp. 72-74.

2 Romesh Gunasekera, *Monkfish Moon*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992, pp. 11-25.

3 O.M. Samarakkody. Personal Interview, 3 March 1997.

and finally thrown out of her house, who stands at a bus halt at night, alone and penniless, with nowhere to go, and now completely vulnerable. The narrative style is fairly straightforward, shifting between descriptions of the environment and the situation and the woman's thoughts. Perhaps the only complexity is the additional presence of the narrator, who is first presented in the story through the third person and is then shifted to the first person in a somewhat dramatic twist. Metaphorical concepts and lexical items such as "slim feet in indifferent slippers", "rainbow hues vanishing to a black and white world of brutal truth", "slurred" "obscene", "humiliation", "soothing", "phantom", nauseating", "distorted", etc. that would probably be unfamiliar to most second language students are to be found in the text, but none of these are so abstract or so distanced from the students' own experience that they would be unable to comprehend them either by guessing or with the instructor's guidance and explanations. Perhaps most importantly, the battered, abused wife of an alcoholic, struggling to care for her children against impossible odds, jobless and helpless in a society which shows only indifference to her plight, and whose life finally ends in tragedy is a concept that is unfortunately very close to the Sri Lankan social experience, and can therefore be identified with easily--perhaps even too easily by the student.

Gunesekera's story, however, is somewhat different in these aspects. First, it begins in England, the narrator being a single Sri Lankan male resident in London, who decides to resign his job, sell his flat and return to Sri Lanka to take up residence in a house left to him by his uncle. On arrival in Colombo, he meets Siri, a carpenter, and the story proceeds to depict his growing and changing relationship with this man against a backdrop of civil unrest. The Instructor responsible for teaching this reading passage stated that she felt that one of the principal difficulties the students had was in identifying with the narrator and his situation.[4] She observed that to the students, the concept of giving up a house and a job in England in order to settle in Sri Lanka was a reversal of expected behaviour which they found difficult to relate to; the difficulty experienced by the narrator in trying to redefine the power relations of his relationship with Siri was alien to them, probably because they had no similar circumstances against which this dilemma could be mapped; and many of the larger issues, such as the insurrection, the shifting social fabric and the sense of alienation the narrator feels in his own country were perhaps too understated or too abstract for the students to grasp. The issues in Lokuge's story are not by any means more limiting, but they are stated overtly, and thus

---

[4] I am indebted to Minoli Samarakkody for her perceptive observations and comments on the response of her students to these two texts.

the student is able to respond to them more directly. We could conclude, therefore, that the type of analysis required by a reader in fully appreciating the subtle nuances of Gunesekera's story is unfortunately quite rare in most Sri Lankan ELT classrooms.

To state the obvious, the literature that would best match a reader's schemata would be the literature of the reader's own culture. However, literature in English is not always available in an ESL/EFL environment. Thus, in countries such as Japan, Korea or China, the language teacher is forced to look elsewhere for literary material, and has no choice but to use American or British texts which are often far removed from the students' own culture and experience. However, in Sri Lanka we have a literary tradition spanning several decades which has produced a literature in English in a variety of styles and genres by Sri Lankan writers which can be introduced as a valuable resource into the ELT classroom. At this point I wish to state that the argument for using Sri Lankan literature in English is based on purely linguistic and cultural factors, and not on a qualitative judgement. In other words, for those who maintain that Sri Lankan writing in English lacks technique, versatility or is thematically limited, I would say that these factors are perhaps valid in a classroom where it is taught, discussed or disseminated as literature. In the ELT classroom, the criteria for selection are, once again, those discussed above--grammatical and syntactic suitability, appropriateness of vocabulary and style, and most importantly, ingrained cultural assumptions. In other words, the content of a literary work is important insofar as it aids one of the four skills of reading, writing, listening or speech.

In selecting a literary text for the purposes of ELT, the students' linguistic proficiency must be carefully assessed by the teacher in order to make sure that the grammar and the syntax of the text is not beyond the students' reach. The grammatical structures the students are familiar with as well their target proficiency should be taken into consideration here. Reinforcement of structures could be effected by drawing the students' attention to the way in which a writer has used a particular structure in a text. Structures not yet taught will invariably appear in unsimplified texts. These could be explained briefly in order not to obstruct comprehension, and could also be used by the teacher as comprehensible input.

The appropriateness of style and genre is a consideration if the teacher is unable to identify the particular style or styles of a literary work, for without such an identification, methodology becomes meaningless. In general, a descriptive narrative style is safer to adhere to, rather than a heavily poetic one,

as a work which abounds in metaphors, idioms etc. could once again be fairly strongly linked to the target language culture. In the case of a specific genre, it is useful to seek a link with the students' first language. For instance, in order to activate the appropriate schemata, English ballads and balladeers can be likened to *viridu* singers and their compositions in the Sinhala oral tradition.

Research to identify second language reading difficulties and self-reports of second language students identify vocabulary as the main reading problem for second/foreign language learners (Stern 1991). The vocabulary of a literary work could be problematic in two ways. The students could be unfamiliar with a particular lexical item, which can be overcome by strategies such as guessing the meaning from the context, doing a morphological analysis of the word in question, or using a dictionary; or the students could be unfamiliar with a concept due to the cultural assumptions discussed earlier. It must be kept in mind that problems in inferring meaning from individual lexical items may not be as pervasive as problems related to the absence of appropriate generalised information assumed by the writer, and possessed by the reader sharing the writer's own cultural background (Carrell and Eisterhold 1987); so here again an understanding of the limitations of the students' schemata is important.

Historically the teaching of English literature in ESL/EFL environments has been dominated by two traditions, the British and the Continental (Stern 1991). The British tradition assumes literature to have a special educational function as a logical development of literacy, while in the Continental tradition literature is studied as evidence of a distinctly foreign civilisation or culture, which is integrally related to civilisation studies; moreover, both traditions are dominated by academic, teacher-oriented instruction (Stern 1991). Maximising the potential of literature in language teaching, i.e., as an aid to help students master both grammar and vocabulary as well as the four language skills of reading, writing, speech and listening entails an integrated approach to literature. Stern (1991) describes this approach as one which is integrated also in the sense that a single literary work can combine all the language skills with one another, along with awareness of the target language culture (if desired) as well as increased literary understanding and appreciation. Activities focusing on each area can build upon and complement one another, contextualising all aspects of language learning. Since works of literature suitable to be included in an ELT curriculum are not always easy to find, the obvious economy of such an integrated approach using just one literary selection to teach a variety of skills

is a further advantage for the second language teacher.[5]

When designing ELT materials there are four principal literary genres -- the novel, the short story, the play and the poem -- to choose from. For shorter Intensive or ESP/EAP courses the novel is not very appropriate because of the particular time constraints of these courses, and also because sustained interest and regular attendance is necessary on the part of the students for the successful completion of a long literary work; in many ELT courses in this country, the last two factors cannot always be guaranteed. The play, unless it consists of a single act, poses similar problems. This is not to say that these two genres cannot be considered as resources in language teaching -- in fact Lazar (1993) lists and describes several excellent activities that can be designed around a novel (pp. 77-86) and a play (pp. 152-161) -- but rather, to point out that the short story and the poem are more practical in terms of brevity and conciseness. However, extracts from both novels and plays and even from short stories if they are of more than average length can be used successfully in the ELT classroom. The stories by Lokuge and Gunesekera, for instance, were adapted to suit the requirements of an Intensive Course in English, as mentioned earlier, and would not have required more than two or three hours of classroom work.

The final sections of this paper will describe and illustrate how a piece of literature can be used in a language class to further the four language skills, based on the integrated method. Although the literary work selected for this purpose is a poem, similar activities can be designed to suit the novel, short story and play as well. The integrated method can be used at all levels of ELT. Adaptation to the different levels would simply require a different choice of activity, a different approach to a particular activity, or more classroom work in a particular skill area. For example, with elementary or lower intermediate groups, more time should be spent on the pre-reading stage, with a fairly extensive pre-reading vocabulary list provided. When assessing comprehension, literal questions are preferable to inference questions at this level. Writing activities could be controlled or guided, with models provided by the teacher. Speech activities could consist of dialogue preparation leading up to role-plays, rather than debates or panel discussions which would probably be beyond the students' linguistic ability. Most importantly, the teacher should make sure that the text itself is suited to the students' proficiency. The poem used in this paper is best done with advanced students who are already familiar with the principal tenses in English, the construction of the passive and the infinitive form of the

---

[5] For activities in each of the four language skills, see Stern (1991) pp. 332-343.

English verb.

In the poem *Menika*[6] by Yasmine Gooneratne given below, the main character is a woman from a rural village, employed as a domestic, presumably in a house in the city. Menika has been abused by her husband since the earliest days of her marriage, but she continues to live with him for the sake of her daughters. Since this character will not be an unfamiliar figure to most Sri Lankan second language students her situation in life does not have to be explained in detail at the pre-reading stage. However, a brief discussion, as described below, could be done. The theme of the poem can be used as the springboard of interesting classroom discussions and activities on social issues, values and beliefs in Sri Lanka, all of which would be invaluable in creating an interactive language learning atmosphere.

The activities described below are tied to the skills of reading, writing and speech. The reading activities are grouped into three stages -- pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading. The goal of the first, or pre-reading stage is to activate schemata and to motivate students to read the text (Dubin and Bycina 1991). Asking students to read only the title and guess who/what the poem is about targets an important step in the reading process at this stage--that of prediction. The pre-reading stage should also provide whatever language preparation the teacher feels is necessary to enable the students to read and understand the text without being hampered by unfamiliar vocabulary or syntactic structures. Vocabulary work should be done as a discussion with the teacher providing guidance in strategies such as using the context of the word or analysing its morphology in order to guess its meaning.

The while-reading stage is aimed at helping students to understand the content and rhetorical structure or context of the text (Dubin and Bycina 1991). Questions given here could be a combination of literal questions which address the explicit level of understanding, inference questions which address the implicit level of understanding, and applied questions which necessitate relating new ideas to previous knowledge or experiences (Dubin and Bycina 1991). If the teacher feels that it is necessary to do so, these questions can be explained to the students so that they know what to look for when reading the text. An oral class discussion should follow as a comprehension check; alternatively, the questions

---

[6] Yasmine Gooneratne, "Menika" *An Anthology of Modern Writing from Sri Lanka*, ed. R. Obeysekera and C. Fernando. Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1981, pp. 100-101.

could be used as a writing exercise with the teacher providing feedback and correction. Another effective exercise which can be used at this stage is to have students enter information from the text into a graph, flow-chart or other diagram. Apart from supporting reading comprehension, this activity helps to improve the transfer of information across skill areas.

Finally, the post-reading questions should follow once the teacher is certain that the main points of the text have been understood. This third stage is concerned with reviewing the content, working on bottom-up skills such as grammar, vocabulary and discourse features, and whenever possible, to consolidate reading by relating new information to the learner's knowledge, interests and opinions (Dubin and Bycina 1991). Many of the devices introduced at the second stage can be used here as well. Questions requiring the students' personal opinion on the content of the text, the writer's attitude, the characters' behaviour etc. can be included here, on the assumption that at the post-reading stage, the students would have grasped the essence of the text. Dubin and Bycina (1991) recommend pair work or group work at this stage, prior to involving the entire class in a discussion; it must be pointed out, however, that all the activities described below have a certain degree of flexibility that is very advantageous, in that they can be done singly, in pairs, or as group work at the teacher's discretion.

Proposed Lesson Unit

Skill : Reading

Pre-Reading

Help students guess the meanings of the following words from the context by activating schemata of stoning rice, preparing curry paste, pounding flour etc. (vocabulary work)

deft-handed	swirling	reclaiming	cummin
kneading	pestle	mortar	

While-Reading

1. What is the setting of this poem? (literal / inference question)

2. Who is Menika? (inference question)

3. What does Menika look like? (literal question, scanning)

Menika

Deft-handed, swirling rice-grains in clear water,
pouring the white stream from pot to pot
She said:
I would like to go back to the village next week
There is a court case
I am reclaiming my children, two daughters, from their father
He has another woman
Neat-handed, kneading coriander and cummin
on the smooth stone
She said:
My father made the marriage
There were good fields and much fine property
My father inspected the fields, my brother went with him
They all agreed it was a good match
two weeks after the marriage he brought her back to the house
The pestle rising, falling in her practised hands
the grain in the mortar crumbling to powder
She said:
We lived eighteen years in that house
My children with me in one room, she with him in the other
One day a relation of his came in, asking for a measure of rice
I did not think to refuse it
That night he came home drunk, and said I was giving away
the household goods.
Spreading the grain in the sun to dry
She said:
When he beat me before the neighbours I sent for my father
He came and took me away
When we signed the register at the Police Station
The Sergeant said: What a man is this!
To make such a shameful to-do over a measure of rice!
She looks after my children well, they tell me
But they are daughters, can I allow them to become women
and far away from me?
On the day of the court case, her skin smoothly powdered,
a crimson sari knotted at her neat waist, her hair
combed into shining coils on her slender neck
She said:
he is a good man
There is no fault in him.

Post-Reading

1. Can you guess the author's attitude towards Menika? Why/why not? (focus on objectivity in writing)

2. Discuss the characters of Menika, her father and her husband. (inference)

3. Would Menika have wanted her children back if they were sons? Why/why not? (inference / personal opinion)

4. Why do you think Menika calls her husband "a good man" at the end of the poem? (personal opinion)

5. Do you agree with what Menika says and does in this situation? (personal opinion)

6. Can you think of a different ending for this story? If you were Menika, what would you do? (personal opinion)

Skill : Grammar

1. Underline all the Past Tense verbs and the Present Continuous Tense verbs in the first verse of this poem. Discuss with your teacher why the poet changes from the Present Continuous Tense to the Past Tense in the same verse. Now do the same for the second, third, and fourth verses as well.

2. How many Future Tense verbs can you find? Underline them and discuss them with your teacher.

3. Write down all the adjectives you can find in this poem.

4. Now write down all the adverbs that are derived from these adjectives. Note that not every adjective can be changed like this. Discuss the ones that cannot be changed with your teacher.

Skill : Writing

1. Write brief character sketches of Menika, her father, and her husband. (reinforcement of post reading activity)

2. Write a letter from Menika's father to another relative describing this situation. You should imagine Menika's father's point of view. (guided or free writing activity)

Skill : Speech

1. Organise a classroom panel discussion with the following characters :

   Menika, her father, her husband, her husband's mistress, and the Police Sergeant.

2. Have a class debate on the topic "Marriages Arranged by Third Parties / Husbands and Brothers Are not Successful."

Although the precise procedures for conducting the activities listed above have not been described, the skeleton given should be sufficient to convey the idea of how an integrated skills lesson unit can be designed around a piece of literature. It is by no means suggested that these are the only activities that can be used with this particular poem. Creativity is an important factor in second language teaching, and it is hoped that the activities given above can be used as a starting point to develop others that are equally effective.

Bibliography

Brumfit, C.J., and R.A. Carter, ed. *Literature and Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Carell, Patricia L., and Joan C. Eisterhold, "Schema Theory and ESL Reading Pedagogy." *Methodology in TESOL: A Book of Readings*. Ed. Michael H. Long and Jack C. Richards. Newbury House, 1987, pp. 218-232.

Carter, Ronald. "Linguistic Models, Language and Literariness: Study Strategies in the Teaching of Literature to Foreign Students." *Literature and Language*. Ed. C.J. Brumfit and R.A. Carter. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986. pp. 110-132.

Collie, J., and S. Slater. *Literature in the Language Classroom* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Dubin, F., and David Bycina, "Academic Reading and the ESL/EFL Teacher." *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language*. Ed. Marianne Celce-Murcia. Massachusetts: Heinle and Heinle, 1991. pp. 195-215.

Lazar, G. *Literature and Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Littlewood, William T. "Literature in the School Foreign-language Course." *Literature and Language Teaching*. Ed. C.J. Brumfit and R.A. Carter. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, pp. 177-183.

McKay, Sandra. "Literature in the Language Classroom." *Literature and Language Teaching*. Ed. C.J. Brumfit and R.A. Carter. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, pp. 208-215.

Stern, Susan L. "An Integrated Approach to Literature in ESL/EFL." *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language*. Ed. Marianne Celce-Murcia. Massachusetts: Heinle and Heinle, 1991, pp.328-346.

Vincent, Monica. "Simple Text and Reading Text Part I: Some General Issues." *Literature and Language Teaching*. Ed. C.J. Brumfit and R.A. Carter. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, pp. 208-215.

THE CRITIQUE OF NATURALISM IN PĀLĪ BUDDHISM AND DEWEYAN PRAGMATISM

In 1934, the American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey explained the main thesis of his Terry Lectures at Yale University (later published as *A Common Faith*) in the following way:

> Today there are many who hold that nothing worthy of being called religious is possible apart from the supernatural....[but]....I shall develop another conception of the nature of the religious phase of experience, one that separates it from the supernatural and the things that have grown up about it. I shall try to show that these derivations are encumbrances and that what is genuinely religious will undergo an emancipation when it is relieved from them.... When the vital factors attain the religious force that has been drafted into supernatural religions, the resulting reinforcement will be incalculable.[1]

There have been many attacks on supernaturalism, especially in the last three hundred years with the rise of the modern physical sciences. A prominent example that comes easily to mind is the withering attack of the eighteenth century philosopher David Hume. What makes Dewey's attack on supernaturalism distinctive, however, is the fact that, unlike Hume (and the numerous other critics of supernaturalist religion), Dewey did not reject religious experience and religious meaning. In fact, Dewey's efforts in *A Common Faith*, and in his more substantial works like *Art as Experience* and *Experience and Nature*, may be seen as attempts to reconstruct religious meaning without its traditional supernatural foundations. Avoiding both extremes (supernaturalism, on the one hand, and reductive forms of materialism that dismiss everything religious, on the other hand), Dewey attempted to chart a middle way.[2] This is precisely what the Buddha had attempted to do more than two millennia before Dewey. And among all the numerous world religions, only Buddhism in the tradition of the Pāḷi Nikāyas has taken the same middle path, explicitly eschewing supernatural foundations and at the same time rejecting reductive materialism at the other extreme. So while both the Buddha and Dewey rejected supernaturalism as a foundation for religious experience, they emphatically did

---

1 John Dewey, *A Common Faith*, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1934) pp. 1, 2, 50.

2 *Ibid.*,, p. 1.

not reject religious experience. This fact alone holds tantalizing prospects for the comparative study of Pāḷi Buddhism and Deweyan pragmatism.

It is an interesting point--but hardly controversial--to note the absence of supernatural foundations in the religious paths espoused by the Buddha and Dewey. The quote above from Dewey's *A Common Faith* is sufficient to substantiate the claim in regard to Dewey's philosophy of religion. But that supernatural foundations are not essential to Pāḷi Buddhism is equally evident. None of the essential elements in Pāḷi Buddhism refer to a supernatural agent or reality. These include the Four Noble Truths, the doctrine of dependent arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), the doctrine no-self (*anatta*), the cultivation of moral conduct (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (paññā). Even the supersensory powers (*abhiññā*) do not reveal a supernatural reality. The Pāḷi Nikāyas make it abundantly clear that the essence of the path is the cultivation of moral habits and insight. Through this cultivation, a person is radically transformed and achieves religious freedom (*nibbāna*). In this quest for religious meaning, a Buddhist expects no external help from gods or other supernatural beings. There is no supplication of a creator-God; no salvation by the saving grace of an *avatār*.

All this so far is commonplace to the student of Pāḷi Buddhism and Deweyan pragmatism. However, I want to explore a stronger and thereby more controversial claim which is that both the Buddha and Dewey held that dependence on supernatural agencies or realities is not merely inessential, but poses a serious obstacle to the achievement of religious meaning. I will show that both traditions develop the critique of supernaturalism around the same major themes--even though the methods of argumentation employed to make a similar point often differ in substantial (and interesting) ways.

Before taking up the critique of supernaturalism, it is necessary to identify two points that situate this inquiry in wider contexts. First, the present study is preliminary to a comparative study of the *naturalistic* reconstruction of religious experience in Pāḷi Buddhism and Deweyan pragmatism. In this essay, I shall focus on the negative, "deconstructive," or critical phase of the comparative study (i.e., the rejection of supernatural foundations). Except for some brief comments along the way, the study of the naturalistic reconstruction, which is an immense topic, must be left for another occasion. Second, the timeliness of studies that relate Dewey and Pāḷi Buddhism is worth a brief comment. In the past twenty years, Deweyan pragmatism has had a resurgence in the West and is arguably the most influential philosophical tradition in Western intellectual circles at present.

I. Some Preliminaries: Defining Key Terms

As the meaning and reference of the terms "supernaturalism" and "naturalism" are crucial to this study, a few words about the definition of these terms is required. So what is "supernatural?" Etymologically, of course, "supernatural" refers to agents or realities that are "above" or "outside" the natural world. Supernaturalism typically refers to agents, entities or realities that have some or all of the following attributes: eternal, immaterial, unchanging, having mysterious powers, atemporal, non-spatial. What is most important to realize, however, is that the supernatural is *discontinuous* with the natural (causal, spatial and temporal) order. That is, the supernatural represents a break, a gap or a rupture in nature--it falls totally, or in part, outside the natural world. Examples of the supernatural in world religions are easily found. In Christianity, God, angels, the soul, heaven, hell and the devil qualify as supernatural. In the Brahmanical (Hindu) tradition, God (*Īśvara*), Brahmā, the gods (*devas*), the impersonal world-ground (*Brahman*), and the eternal self (*ātman*) are all conceived as supernatural agencies or realities that are essential to the religious endeavor.

The term "naturalism" has many meanings, but as it is used here (in contrast to supernaturalism) it means that there is no break of continuity between religious meanings and the natural world (which is comprised of physical, biological and psychological processes).[3] What is excluded by naturalism--but which is the cornerstone of supernaturalism--is the explanation of changes that occur in the world by a totally new force, entity or reality that is outside the natural world. Moreover, "naturalism" means that even higher order phenomena (e.g., consciousness, language, art) are emergent from and continuous with other parts of the natural world, without being reducible to material or physical processes. For example, music is emergent from natural processes (strings creating vibrations in the air), but its meaning (which is still natural) is not explicable simply in terms of the physics of vibrating air. Hence "naturalism" stands as a middle position between supernaturalism and reductive materialism (physicalism).[4]

---

[3] The term "naturalism" as used here receives a brief but helpful discussion in Dewey's *Logic: the Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1938) pp. 18-19.

[4] "Reductive materialism" (also called "physicalism") is the position that all phenomena are ultimately physical matter controlled by physical forces. "Materialism" implies that all higher order phenomena are

II. The Critique of Supernaturalism: Key Themes Shared by Pāḷi Buddhism and Deweyan Pragmatism.

From a study of the *nikāyas* of the *Sutta Piṭaka* and the later works of John Dewey, I have found that both traditions share the following eight themes which criticize supernaturalism as an obstacle to the religious life.

(1) supernaturalism is the source of the false dualism that views religious experience as radically distinct from other modes of experience--with the effect that religious experience becomes irrelevant to, and divorced from, life generally.

Supernaturalism implies the existence of a realm or being that is significantly more perfect than the human world or human beings. For supernaturalist religions, such a realm or being serves as a standard of religious value. Typically, knowledge of or communion with the supernatural becomes the goal of religious life. But the subject of religious awe and veneration must be elevated to such an extent that it can have none of the taint or limitations associated with mundane existence. These differences have led supernaturalists to posit that religious meaning requires a realm that is completely separated from the natural order. According to supernaturalist traditions, therefore, religion's distinctive experience must refer to a non-natural source.

Both Dewey and the Buddha grant that there are extraordinary differences that distinguish the kinds of experience and the ideals of religious life from those of other modes of living. But both traditions also hold that any difference is one of degree, not a difference in kind. Dewey referred explicitly to this dualistic aspect of supernaturalism in several of his major writings. The degree of perfection claimed for the supernatural exaggerates the discontinuity of the religious and the mundane creating an unbridgeable gulf. As Dewey puts it, "it is of the nature of a religion based on the supernatural to draw a line between the religious and the secular and profane" and this has the negative effect of shutting "religious values up within a particular compartment."[5] Hence, the claim to radical separation of the human and the religious has the profoundly negative effect of making the supernatural altogether irrelevant to human life. What is "'... absolutely' stable and unchangeable would be out of

---

nothing but processes on the atomic or molecular levels, hence the term is often qualified as "eliminative" materialism.

[5] Dewey, *A Common Faith*, p. 66.

the range of the principle of action and reaction, of resistance and leverage as well as of friction. Here it would have no applicability, no potentiality of use as measure and control of other events."[6] The "eternal," Dewey said, denotes something that is entirely irrelevant to temporal existence.[7] As Dewey concludes in *Experience and Nature*:

> ...an ideal realm that has no roots in existence has no efficacy nor relevancy. It is a light which is darkness, for shining in the void it illumines nothing and cannot reveal even itself. It gives no instruction, for it cannot be translated into the meaning and import of what actually happens, and hence it is barren; it cannot mitigate the bleakness of existence nor modify its brutalities. It thus abnegates itself in abjuring footing in natural events, and ceases to be ideal, to become whimsical fantasy or linguistic sophistication.[8]

Dewey expands on this criticism in *A Common Faith*, where he laments the fact that this radical separation of the mundane and the religious guarantees the failure of religious meaning to become pervasive of life in all respects. Religious experience is not a completely distinct kind of experience; it is continuous with and emergent from normal kinds of experience. He continues: "...'religious' as a quality of experience signifies something that may belong to all these experiences. It is the polar opposite of some type of experience that can exist by itself."[9] In *Art as Experience*, Dewey connects religious experience with art and aesthetic experience,[10] and art in turn is shown to be emergent from the biological rhythms of the human organism.

---

6 Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover Publications, 2nd ed., 1958) p. 71.

7 *ibid.*, p. 148.

8 *ibid.*, p. 146.

9 Dewey, *A Common Faith*, pp. 11-12.

10 See John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, published as Volume 10 of *The Later Works of John Dewey*, 1925-1953 (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987) p. 199.

Both Dewey and the Buddha, in fact, offer a detailed description of experience at the mundane levels, showing how meaning (religious meaning) is latent in and emergent from such experiences. In the Pāḷi Nikāyas, the Buddha describes the gradual transformation of experience from that of the suffering worldling to the highest levels of religious meaning represented by the life of the *arahant*--all the while maintaining the continuity of emancipation and normal modes of experience. The Buddha appears to have assumed that a radically dualistic view of religious and mundane experience would make the religious path impossible, as such would imply an unbridgeable breach on the path to religious freedom.

Because of this radical split between the "highest truth" and the mundane, supernaturalism has a lamentable social impact. Supernaturalism gives rise to a class of people who claim special powers, who claim a special relation and a special access to religious reality. This point opens up very large social issues that deserve treatment in another study. Let it suffice here to say that neither the Buddha nor Dewey countenanced class distinctions in society generally, let alone based on religious access to the supernatural. For example, in the *Soṇadaṇḍa-sutta,* when the Buddha was asked about what makes one a Brahman, he said it has nothing to do with being born from a certain family background, beings versed in the scriptures and rites--the traditional view of the essential traits of being a Brahman. Rather, the Buddha tells Soṇadaṇḍa that one can be declared a Brahman only if one is "virtuous and wise."[11] And in the *Aggaññ a-sutta*, the Buddha ridicules the idea that Brahmans have a special relation to God (Brahmā) based on their claim to being born of his mouth. But Brahmans are born to Brahman mothers in the usual way, the Buddha points out. Hence, the Brahman's arrogant assertion of a special relationship to the divine is shown, in his own terms, to defile the very *Brahmā* he should venerate.[12]

Dewey, the consummate democrat in matters religious as well as political, argued that the supernatural has been a major factor in the emergence

---

[11] *Dīgha-nikāya* 1.123. References to the *Dīgha-nikāya* are to the editions published by the Pali Text Society, ed. T.W. Rhys Davids and J.E. Carpenter, 3 vols., (London: PTS, 1890-1911).

[12] *taggha vo Vāseṭṭhā brāhmaṇā porāṇaṃ assarantā evam āhaṃsu. dissanti kho pana Vāseṭṭhā brāhmaṇānaṃ brāhmaṇiyo gabbhiniyo pi vijāyamānāpi, te ca brāhmaṇā yonijā va samānā evam āhaṃsu. te brāhmānaň c' eva abbhācikkhanti musā ca bhāsanti bahuňaṃ ca apuňň pasavanti. (Dīgha-nikāya* 3.81-82.)

of institutionalized social forms, which have, aside from their political and economic functions, obscured religious experience. Dewey argued that because of the claims regarding special powers and access to religious reality, religions now prevent "the religious quality of experience from coming to consciousness and finding the expression that is appropriate to present conditions, intellectual and moral."[13] The institutionalization of religious meaning, and the consequent divorce of the religious from daily life, is the effect of the split between religious and mundane experience wrought by supernaturalism. Dewey writes, "the religious function in experience can be emancipated only through surrender of the whole notion of special truths that are religious by their own nature, together with the idea of peculiar avenues of access to such truths."[14] Hence the word "common" in the title of the book *A Common Faith* refers to Dewey's hope for a religious faith that is "widely accessible and more generously shared" and one that "shall not be confined to sect, class, or race."[15]

(2) supernaturalism is based on speculative and dogmatic views that are unverifiable and thereby lead to anxiety and vexation.

Supernaturalism typically requires belief in such things as an unseen and unknown God (gods), an unseen and unknown self (soul) and a whole host of other beings and places that have no direct empirical verification. All this makes supernaturalism a highly speculative view that is open to attack on epistemological grounds. Neither Dewey nor the Buddha missed the opportunity to criticize supernaturalism on epistemological grounds; both are justly famous for their attacks on speculative and dogmatic views. In numerous places the Pali Nikāyas record the Buddha's critique of the cosmological and eschatological theories of the *Brāhmaṇas* and the early Upaniṣads for epistemological reasons.

Revelation of the Ultimate Reality or God to the seers is a favorite claim of the Vedas and Upaniṣads. In famous passages of the *Caṅkī-sutta*, the Buddha criticized both the initial revelation and the tradition that was begun by

---

13 Dewey, *A Common Faith*, p. 9.

14 *Ibid.*, p.33.

15 *ibid.*, p. 87.

passing down the claims of revelatory knowledge.[16] Here the Buddha says that "even if I hear of something on the profoundest revelation (*svānussutaṃ*), that may be empty, hollow and false." The Buddha adds that this is not the proper way to "safeguard" truth.

The authority of "seers" also comes in for severe criticism in the *Tevijja-sutta*. Regarding the authority of tradition, the Buddha criticized those Brahmans who held a view of the supernatural that was based on "knowing and seeing" but in fact their teachers and the teachers of the teachers (going back many generations) had not themselves "known and seen" for themselves the supernatural reality they taught.[17] None could claim a "direct vision of *Brahmā*" (*Brahmā sakkhidiṭṭho*).[18] And yet "they claim to teach a path to the companionship of Him whom they have not seen or known."[19]

Even going to the gods provides no better answers to metaphysical questions, as the *Kevaddha-sutta* makes clear. In this *sutta* a monk is depicted as looking for an answer to the question "where do the four elements cease without remainder?" but finds out that the gods at each level do not know the answer.[20] Finally, the question is put to *Brahmā*, the highest, most powerful and sublime of all the gods, the purported creator of the universe. And after a somewhat humorous exchange between the monk and *Brahmā,* in which the bluster of *Brahmā's* claims to power are shown to be beside the point, *Brahmā* takes the monk aside and admits his ignorance regarding the question. He sends the monk back to the Buddha for an answer (no doubt indicating the religious precedence of the Buddha over even the highest among the gods). Having approached the Buddha regarding his question, the monk is told by the Buddha

---

16 *Majjhima-nikāya* 2.170. References to the *Majjhima-nikāya* are to the editions published by the Pali Text Society, ed. V. Trenckner and R. Chalmers, 3 vols., (London: PTS, 1887-1901).

17 "This is the straight path, this is the direct way which makes for salvation and leads him who acts according to it to a state of companionship with *Brahmā*" (*Dīgha-nikāya* 1.241).

18 *Dīgha-nikāya* 1.241.

19 *Te...yaṃ na jānanti yaṃ na passanti tassa sahavyatāya maggaṃ desessanti. (Dīgha- nikāya* 1.241).

20 *Dīgha-nikāya* 1.215-223.

that the question is improperly formed because of its metaphysical nature (the kind of speculation the Buddha was at great pains to avoid). In typical fashion, the Buddha reformulates the question by changing the point of the question from one of metaphysics to that of ethics--where do the four elements cease to be an obstacle to the achievement of religious liberation?[21] This allegory shows the impropriety of depending on "divine knowledge" and metaphysical speculation in seeking the religious path.

In a well-known analogy, the Buddha compares the claims to knowledge of the supernatural to a man who claims to be deeply in love with a certain beauty queen, but when questioned further cannot say what her name is, what family or village she comes from, nor even what she looks like.[22] The point of this and the other stories is not merely to show up the ignorance of those who claim to know supernatural reality, but to show just how harmful this could be to the person involved. As David Kalupahana remarks:

> The search for mystery, the hidden something (*kiñci*), is looked upon as a major cause of anxiety and frustration (*dukkha*). Therefore the one who does not look for any mystery (*akiñcana*), and who perceives things "as they have come to be" (*yathābhūta*), is said to enjoy peace of mind that elevates him intellectually as well as morally.[23]

The Buddhist path, it is claimed, is personally verifiable in this life (*diṭṭho dhamme viditvā*).[24] Only by keeping religious meaning tethered to what is verifiable and avoiding the speculative and mysterious nature of the supernatural can one avoid the trap of "wrong views" and come to "right understanding" (*sammādiṭṭhi*).

As empiricists, the Buddha and Dewey took a "fallibilist" view of human knowledge. Hence it is not altogether surprising that supernatural agencies and

---

21 *ibid.*, 1.223

22 *Majjhima-nikāya* 2.32-33.

23 David Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992) p. 59.

24 *Sutta-nipāta* 1053. Reference is to the Pali Text Society edition, ed H. Smith (London: PTS, 1913).

phenomena would be considered unwarranted speculation in both traditions. The Buddha rejected numerous speculative theories in the *Brahmajāla-sutta*. And in the *Aggivacchagotta-sutta*, the Buddha left undeclared (*avyākata*) a number of questions for which answers were not forthcoming by empirical methods and for which any attempted speculation would not conduce to happiness, but only vexation and anxiety.[25] This is the reason both the Buddha and Dewey rejected the supernatural on epistemological grounds: such claims to knowledge become serious obstacles to religious development because they arise in and reinforce minds defiled by avarice, hatred and delusion, thus preventing the person from cultivating the moral and intellectual habits that are the genuine route to religious meaning. And because of such limitations in human knowledge (especially regarding speculative questions), Dewey warned against taking atheism too far. In criticizing what he termed "aggressive atheism," Dewey was concerned that his position would not be construed as claiming certain knowledge that there are no gods or God. "Aggressive atheism" commits the same mistake as the theism--it makes a speculative claim that is not empirically warranted.

(3) belief in supernatural agents or realities can be traced to the false sense of security that derives from supernaturalism's promise of permanence and them misinterpretation of the relatively permanent in experience as eternal.

Both the Buddha and Dewey describe human existence as precarious and unstable. In terms quite familiar to Buddhists, Dewey wrote that "the world is a scene of risk; it is uncertain, unstable, uncannily unstable. Its dangers are irregular, inconstant, not be counted upon as to their times and seasons."[26] Because humans live with little security regarding the meanings and values they so desperately seek, it is little wonder that supernaturalism's promise of security through attachment to a permanent being or realm is so attractive. This grasping for security in a changing world accounts for the "the hypnotic influence exercised by the conception of the eternal."[27]

From the Buddhist point of view, the precarious nature of the world and human life is the source of the most notorious of supernaturalist doctrines, the belief in a permanent or eternal self (*ātman*). The Buddha's numerous

---

[25] *Majjhima-nikāya* 1.484-487.

[26] Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, p. 41.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 27.

arguments against views that claim a supernatural self are collectively referred to as the "*anatta* doctrine."[28] The essence of these arguments is that the postulation of a permanent or eternal self has no empirical justification whatsoever, but in fact derives from the crude ego grasping after personal security in light of suffering and death.

Another source of the belief in a permanent, supernatural reality, according to Buddhist tradition, is the confused identification of what is perceived as relatively more permanent with the truly permanent and eternal. In an unusual account in the *Brahmajāla-sutta*, it is suggested that god *Brahmā* holds the false view that he is the eternal creator of the universe based on the mere fact that he shows up at a certain level of existence before other beings.[29] Those beings who show up after him confirm his conceited opinion and pass the view on to humans to be taught as religious truth (a clear reference to the Brahmanical traditions).

(4) supernaturalism contradicts the causal (naturalistic) explanation of phenomena at the heart of the Buddhist and Deweyan conception of reality.

Pāḷi Buddhism and Deweyan pragmatism both analyze reality as a causal order of phenomena. In Dewey's terminology, causality is a "generic trait of existence." There is no room in either tradition for the intervention of either a supernatural deity or a supernatural self.

In regard to Pāḷi Buddhist analysis of the universe, A.K. Warder has written:

> Its evolution is natural evolution according to laws of causation, natural laws. It has not been created by God, and if God (*Brahmā*) so called, thinks He is God and has created living beings He is in reality only an ordinary person suffering from

---

28 The Buddha's attacks on the supernaturalist (eternalist) view of the self recur throughout the *Sutta piṭaka*. Representative passages can be found in the *Brahmajlā-sutta*, the *Poṭṭhapāda-sutta*, the Mahānidāna-sutta and the *Khandha-saṃyutta*.

29 *Dīgha-nikāya* 1.18-19.

a delusion.[30]

Belief in, or dependence on, a metaphysical supernaturalism contradicts the central insight and teaching of the Buddha: dependent arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). And it is particularly important to recall that the doctrine of dependent arising is not simply the Buddha's description of existence, of the arising of suffering, but is more crucially the essence of the prescription for achieving religious liberation through taking control over those causal factors that give rise to suffering. The causal analysis of the world and the self is just what provides the opportunity (the way into the causal nexus of events) to take hold over those factors which produce suffering, to change them by putting them on a course towards freedom and happiness. As K.N. Jayatilleke notes, "the knowledge and insight of emancipation (*vimuttiñ-āṇadassana-*) is considered to be a natural, causal occurrence.[31] Hence, the Buddha's recipe for religious transformation falls entirely within the causal framework--this, in fact, was his revolutionary idea. But supernaturalism plays havoc with the causal understanding of phenomena--as noted in the definition above, supernaturalism indicates a rupture or break in nature and as such makes nonsense of the causal order. Therefore, from the Buddha's point of view, supernaturalism is a very dangerous view indeed.

Dewey agreed completely with the Buddhist view of this matter. "This human situation falls wholly within nature," wrote Dewey.[32] And since "man is within nature, not a little god outside, and is within as a mode of energy inseparably connected with other modes, interaction is the one unescapable trait of every human concern..."[33] Mastery or control over the human situation is therefore one with taking control of causal processes, which means intervening between the beginning and the end of such processes. Hence, the development of meaning in human life "depends upon seeing and using these specifiable

---

[30] A.K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1970) p. 152.

[31] K.N. Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1963) p. 421.

[32] Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, p. 421.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 434.

things as links functionally significant in a process."[34] Supernaturalism, as has been noted above, forces the abandonment of causal analysis and with it goes the chance to take control of our situation.

Given the naturalistic interpretation of the Pāḷi Buddhist doctrine discussed to this point, it must surely have occurred to the reader that the status of a number of prominent beings in the Pāḷi Canon has been ignored; namely, the *devas*, *Brahmā*, *Māra*, etc. This topic is a very large and controversial one, but to give a short answer, let it be said that the Buddha apparently did admit the *devas* and other such beings into his scheme of the universe, but they are, as Warder also argues, "natural" (not supernatural) because they fall within the realm of change and are subject to the laws of causality.[35] Even the claim of *Brahmā* to be the creator of the universe is shown in the *Brahmajāla-sutta* to be based on fallacious reasoning. So, insofar as the Buddha accepts the existence of the *devas* etc., he stretched the concept of what is "natural," but did not recognize the break in the causal order essential to what is properly termed "supernatural." Moreover, should one be surprised that the Buddha held that the universe is far richer than the one presented to us by the reductive materialism of modern science?

(5) supernaturalism makes knowing or dogmatic belief in supernatural reality (i.e., metaphysics) the key to religious development--but the ethical transformation of the person, which is only instrumentally related to metaphysics, is the key to religious development.

Throughout his philosophical works, Dewey criticized the idea that human beings are essentially "knowers." Knowing is but one kind--and an untypical one at that--of experience. Experience is far richer than cognition. Dewey made a career out of showing how we human beings inhabit the world primarily through emotions, feelings, imagination, habits--all non-cognitive elements of experience. But the supernaturalist typically makes cognitive assent to propositions that have metaphysical import (such as "God exists." or "Jesus is God and Saviour.") the essential factor in religious life. Dewey, however, held that cognitive assent alone is superficial or meaningless unless it is the sign

---

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 295.

[35] In reference to the status of the *devas* and *Brahmā*, Warder writes: "They may exist, but they are as subject to the laws of nature as men are." *Indian Buddhism*, p. 155.

of the transformation of the person at deeper levels of his or her being. He offered that "religious qualities and values if they are real at all are not bound up with any single item of intellectual assent, not even that of the existence of the God of theism..."[36] What is demanded in genuine religious experience, according to Dewey, is a transformation that is pervasive, "pertains to our being in its entirety," involves "a change in will," which through imagination "harmonizes the self" toward a "reconstruction in the direction of the good." This makes religious experience not cognitive assent to the supernatural or mystical, but an ethical transformation of the person that is both "natural and moral."

The Buddha likewise understood religious experience as a matter of personal transformation at both cognitive and noncognitive levels. The essence of the Buddhist path is the abandoning of unwholesome mental states and the development of wholesome mental states. It is primarily ethical, not metaphysical. As Warder puts it: "standards of conduct in Buddhism have nothing to do with theology."[37] And for this reason, the Buddha took the metaphysical terminology of the Brahmanical tradition and turned those concepts into standards of ethical conduct and religious achievement. For example, in the *Kandaraka-sutta*, the Buddha refers to *Brahmā* as a level religious attainment rather than a supernatural being: "He who neither torments himself nor another, who is here and now allayed, gone out, became cool, an experience of bliss, lives with a self become *Brahmā*."[38] "*Brahmā*" is probably best translated in these contexts as "highest" or "supreme" in the ethical sense-- supernormal perhaps, but not supernatural. In the *Tevijja-sutta*, the Buddha, asked to describe the Upaniṣadic notion of "union with *Brahmā*" reconstructs the metaphysical concept as an religious and ethical one--"union with *Brahmā*" refers to loving kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditha*) and equanimity (*upekhā*), that is, the so-called four "*Brahma vihāras*."[39] Everywhere in the Pāḷi Canon we find the Buddha substituting *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* for attachment to the supernatural.

---

[36] Dewey, *A Common Faith*, p. 32.

[37] Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, p. 155.

[38] *Majjhima-nikāya* 1.342.

[39] *Dīgha-nikāya* 1.241.

(6) supernaturalism undermines moral and religious development--it makes a person overly dependent on external agencies, pessimistic and fatalistic regarding the human capacity to develop religious meaning.

In *A Common Faith*, Dewey gave his most scathing attack on the impact of supernaturalism on religious meaning in the following remarks:

> Men have never fully used the powers they possess to advance the good in life, because they have waited upon some power external to themselves and to nature to do the work they are responsible for doing. Dependence upon an external power is the counterpart of surrender of human endeavor.[40]

He laid the blame squarely on supernaturalism:

> Belief in the supernatural as a necessary power for apprehension of the ideal and for practical attachment to it has for its counterpart a pessimistic belief in the corruption and impotency of natural means. This is axiomatic in Christian dogma.[41]

Dewey's words need little explanation. Supernaturalism has sapped our human ability to take care of matters for ourselves; it has made us unduly pessimistic about our nature.

The Buddha took care to make sure his disciples did not fall into the trap of dependency ... on the supernatural or anything else. His parting remarks to the bhikkhus was his exhortation that they "should live as lights for yourselves, as a refuge for yourselves, taking no other refuge."[42] In the context of the time, the Buddha's remarks were surely a response to the *Upaniṣadic* tradition wherein salvation through knowledge is not due to one's own efforts, but dependent on the grace or intervention of *Ātman* or God. This view gained plausibility among the sages of the Upaniṣads because the emergence of this profound knowledge was deemed inexplicable and mysterious. On the Buddha's

---

[40] Dewey, *A Common Faith*, p. 46.

[41] *Ibid.*, p.46.

[42] *tasmāt ih' Ānanda attadīpā viharatha attasaraṇā anaññasaraṇa... (Dīgha-nikāya* 2.100.)

account, there is no mystery in the suggested training of the person in moral conduct, concentration and wisdom.

Theism, as a particular form of supernaturalism, has special problems that are worth noting. From the Buddhist point of view, the existence of Creator God (*issara-kāraṇa-vādi*) implies that man is not responsible for his actions. In a famous passage in the *Jātakas*, it is written that: "If God designs the life of the entire world--the glory and the misery, the good and the evil acts--man is but an instrument of his will and God (alone) is responsible."[43] Similarly, in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, it is argued that "if everything is created by a supreme God (*issaranimmāṇa hetu*), then the responsibility for the wickedness of people is his--and recluseship, or any action, would be useless and futile."[44]

Gunapala Dharmasiri has summed up this point nicely: When one thinks about the grounds on which the Buddha criticized theism one can see that he was not merely arguing against the existence of God. He had much more in mind. He meant that the idea of an omniscient creator God was essentially harmful for the facts of morality in the world. The ideas of morality and morally responsible beings could not, according to him, at all be made meaningful in a world created by an omniscient creator God.[45]

(7) supernaturalism promises a way that is too "easy," forsaking the effort required to cultivate religious meanings in experience.

In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey remarked that "there are a multitude of recipes for obtaining a vicarious possession of the stable and final without getting involved in the labor and pain of intellectual effort attending regulation of the conditions upon which these fruits depend.[46] Dewey knew well that the

---

[43] *issaro sabbalokassa sace kappeti jīvitaṃ iddhivyāsanabhāvañca kammaṃ kalyāna pāpakaṃ niddesakāri puriso issaro tena lippati. (Jātaka*, vol. V, ed. V. Fausboll, (London: PTS 1891, p. 238.)

[44] *Aṇguttara-nikāya* 1.174. References to the *Aṇguttara-nikāya* are to the editions published by the Pali Text Society, ed. R. Morris and E. Hardy, 6 vols., (London: PTS, 1885-1910).

[45] Gunapala Dharmasiri, *A Buddhist Critique of the Christian Concept of God* (Singapore: The Buddhist Research Society, 2nd ed., n.d.) p. 69.

[46] Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, p. 56.

impetus to supernaturalism was the difficulty of efforts required to create religious meaning. Promises of shortcuts are sure to be attractive to the majority of humankind. But these should be avoided for the following reason:

> Belief in a sudden and complete transmutation through conversion and in the objective efficacy of prayer, is too easy a way out of difficulties. It leaves matters in general just about as they were before; that is, sufficiently bad so that there is additional support for the idea that only supernatural aid can better them.[47]

Supernaturalism promises religious achievement "by means of dogma and cult, rather than in regulation of the events of life by understanding of actual conditions."[48] But this way is too "easy" and is unlikely to achieve the desired results, despite the short term benefits that derive from the sense of security. Put bluntly, one cannot hope for any religious meaning that one does not make for oneself--there are no shortcuts. This is a harsh, but honest, truth.

The Buddha denounced the supplication of gods through ritual and sacrifice as detrimental. In the *Kūṭadanta-sutta*, the Buddha explains that the perfect sacrifice is not the propitiation of the gods, but that the truly perfect sacrifice consists in the keeping of the moral precepts, attaining concentration, and the destroying of the defilements (*āsavas*) through wisdom. Here the Buddha emphasizes the hard work involved in cultivating moral habits--a process that must be accomplished by the individual without outside help.

> **(8) supernaturalism denigrates the application of a rational intelligence to the development of religious meaning--for intelligent methods, it substitutes a groundless "faith".**

Supernaturalist religions are bound to conceive "faith" as the holding of belief in a supernatural reality without empirical evidence--a groundless faith. But such faith is usually antagonistic towards the application of rational intelligence to religious life. Dewey wrote that

> ...there is such a thing as faith in intelligence becoming religious in quality--a fact that perhaps explains the efforts of some

---

47 Dewey, *A Common Faith*, p. 47.

48 Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, p. 55.

> religionists to disparage the possibilities of intelligence as a force. They properly feel such faith to be a dangerous rival.[49]

Both Dewey and the Buddha reconstruct faith as confidence in and commitment to realizing religious levels of meaning in human experience. It is a commitment or resolve to complete the process of personal transformation. As Jayatilleke says, "This rational faith which is a product of critical examination and partial verification is apparently contrasted with the 'baseless faith' (*amūlikā saddhā*, M II. 170) which the brahmins have towards the Vedas and which the Buddha shows does not bear critical examination."[50] It is a faith in possibilities, without guarantees.

On the positive side, Dewey asserted that "if human desire and endeavor were enlisted in behalf of natural ends, conditions would be bettered."[51] Of course, Dewey does not claim to know how far intelligence may and will develop in respect to religious meaning. But he asserts this much: "... one thing I think I do know. The needed understanding will not develop unless we strive for it. The assumption that only supernatural agencies can give control is a sure method of retarding this effort."[52] Thus, in the end, the objection to supernaturalism--from both a Buddhist and Deweyan point of view--is that it stands in the way of an effective application of human intelligence (individually and collectively) to the development of religious meaning.

JOHN HOLDER JR.

---

[49] Dewey, *A Common Faith*, p. 26.

[50] *op.cit.*, p. 393.

[51] Dewey, *A Common Faith*, p. 46.

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 76.

SELF AND SUICIDE IN PIRANDELLO

Among the most important European novelists and dramatists of the twentieth century, Luigi Pirandello should be of especial interest to Buddhists. Winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1936, he is best known for plays such as *Six Characters in Search of an Author, Henry IV* and *To Find Oneself,* as well as for his major novels: *The Late Mattia Pascal, The Notebooks of Serafino Gubbio* and *One, No One and One Hundred Thousand.* Each of these works challenges conventional notions of personal identity and its attributes; to date, however, readers have not explored the similarities between Pirandello's thought and Buddhism. While it is well-known that our author spent some three years (1889-1891) studying at the University of Bonn, Pirandello scholars have not taken into account the fact that at the time Germany was the European centre for the research into oriental philosophies.[1] It might be assumed that a young student of philology from a small town in Sicily, eager to broaden his intellectual horizon, would have been fascinated by the possibility of discovering a new world beyond the limited vistas offered by a traditional Italian education at that time--and would therefore have seized the opportunity to read the translations that had aroused such interest in intellectual centres of contemporary Germany. Further, there is hard evidence that, even to the end of his life, Pirandello's personal library contained copies of the ancient Indian epic, the *Mahābhārata,* and of Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*.[2] Our supposition that he had some direct knowledge of Buddhist doctrine is also based on the fact that he referred to *kāmaloka,* thus using the technical term found in Pali, the language in which the Buddha's discourses were written.

---

1 For example, Professor Max Müller began the project of his multi-volume translations of oriental philosophers, entitled *The Sacred Books of the East,* in 1875; Karl E. Neumann published the first comprehensive translations of the Buddha's discourses into a European tongue in 1891; and one of the early standard analyses of Buddhist doctrine, Herman Oldenberg's *Buddha: Sein Leben, seine Lehre, sein Gemeinde* (1881), was reprinted several times and translated into English, Russian and French.

2 As cited in Alfredo Barbina, *La biblioteca di Luigi Pirandello* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1980), pp. 153 and 159. For a discussion of Schopenhauer's influences on Pirandello, see Chapter 3, "Influssi tedeschi su Pirandello" in Mathias Adank, *Luigi Pirandello e i suoi rapporti col mondo tedesco* (Aarau: Drucker-eigenossenschaf, 1948).

Pirandello is renowned as a master at dramatising the ambiguity of personal existence, but of course he was not the first to discover it. Therefore, if we are to understand the matter fully, it seems to me that we ought to take Buddhist philosophy into consideration, since the Buddha was the first in recorded history to deny the assumption of a stable "self", basing his entire doctrine on that denial. In place of "self" he found *paṭiccasamuppāda,* or "dependent origination", which offers an explanation of the discontent inherent in "samsāric" existence.

The work in which *kāmaloka* is found is *Il fu Mattia Pascal,* where it is used with its authentic meaning as "realm of desire" (in Chapter X, for which see below). This essay seeks to provide an alternative reading of the novel, which I believe lends to it even greater seriousness and a more fundamental relevance to the human condition. But if it truly has "a universal meaning" as Pirandello contends in the "Avvertenza sugli scrupoli della fantasia" (p. 252), then the manoeuvres of its protagonist Mattia or his alter-ego Adriano cannot merely represent aberrant attempts to dodge social responsibilities, as has often been contended; instead, they must dramatise the latent impulse within all of us to *cling to what we take to be ourselves.* As we shall find through an explanation of fundamental Buddhist doctrine, clinging *(upādāna)* is far more pervasive and insidious than what is normally understood by the phrase "smania di vivere".[3] It is this will to live that renders *Il fu Mattia Pascal* tragic, in literary terms, rather than comic.

---

[3] "Craving to live": in the Buddha's language, *bhavatanha,* and in Arthur Schopenhauer's, *Wille zum leben.* As a serious reader of Schopenhauer, Pirandello would have undoubtedly come across several references to Buddhism, such as: "If I wished to take the results of my philosophy as the standard of truth, I should have to concede to Buddhism pre-eminence over the others. In any case, it must be a pleasure to me to see my doctrine in such close agreement with a religion that the majority of men on earth hold as their own, for this numbers far more followers than any other." *The World as Will and Representation,* vol. II, Chapter XVII. Further, in *Parerga and Paralipomena,* vol. II, (190) 247; § 115 he writes: "The purpose of the Buddha Sakya-muni ... was ... to free the exalted teaching itself ... and to make its pure intrinsic worth accessible and intelligible ... In this he was marvellously successful, and his religion is therefore the most excellent on earth ...." (Translation by E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974).

The very first words of the novel speculate on the classic Pirandellian theme, the elusive nature of the ego and the personality: "Una delle poche cose, anzi forse la sola ch'io sapessi di certo era questa: che mi chiamavo Mattia Pascal" -- "One of the few things that I knew, or perhaps the only one that I knew for sure, was this: that my name was Mattia Pascal".[4] However, as the story progresses, the protagonist finds that his identity cannot be stated so categorically. A combination of changes brought about both by fate and by his own devise make it impossible for him to determine who or what constitutes his "real self".

The early chapters of the novel recount Mattia's early life, spent in his home town, Miragno. His youth consists of a series of escapades and practical jokes, until all at once he is jolted into maturity: he learns that the executor of his father's estate has embezzled most of the family holdings; he is compelled to marry Romilda, his pregnant girlfriend; and the careless attitude of his life to that point has left him with few opportunities and a family to support. His reputation for irresponsible behaviour makes it impossible to find any job other than that of librarian's assistant in a provincial town where no one reads.

To that point Mattia had always lived without a care in mind, but he must begin to reflect seriously in Chapter V, where he notes that his maturity, like that of fruit brought to market, has been accelerated by bruising. For our purposes, we may say that for the first time he is compelled to confront the pervasive element of *dukkha*, or suffering in existence. His fortunes deteriorate even further after his enforced marriage: his wife does not love him, his mother-in-law is a witch, and his low-wage job is both tedious and futile. Worse, he is soon devastated by the nearly simultaneous deaths of his beloved mother and infant daughter. Suddenly without them, cut off literally and figuratively from any meaningful past or future, he sees nothing left to live for. He can no longer endure life as he knows it:

> After one of the customary scenes with my mother-in-law and my wife, which by now, oppressed and disheartened by the recent double calamity, gave rise to an intolerable disgust, I could no longer put up with the boredom, or rather the loathsomeness of living this way; miserable, with neither the probability nor hope of things getting any better ... without any recompense, even the slightest, for the bitterness, the squalor,

---

[4] All translations mine, unless otherwise noted.

the horrible desolation into which I had fallen.[5]

It is at this point that the tragedy of Mattia Pascal begins, only in part because of the suffering he endures. For it is here that he decides to embark on the mission that will change him forever: on the spot he decides to flee Miragno and the wretched life he had led. Thus, even before he commits his first "suicide", he is resolved to find a way out of a shoddy existence characterised by boredom and pain. If we examine the definition of tragedy offered by Oscar Mandel, which gives a high priority to purpose, then the reasons for assigning him such a role will be clearer:

> A work of art is tragic if it substantiates the following situation: *A protagonist who commands our earnest good will is impelled in a given world by a purpose, or undertakes an action, of a certain seriousness and magnitude; and by that very purpose or action, subject to that same given world, necessarily and inevitably meets with grave spiritual or physical suffering.*[6]

The spectacle of suffering, as we know, does much to create our good will towards a character, and by this stage Mattia has endured the loss of the financial security that encouraged his adolescent idleness, as well as the breakdown of his family. But while suffering is a crucial element in the definition, by itself it is not sufficient to constitute tragedy. According to Mandel, the catastrophe must stem from the inevitable failure of the tragic purpose: "Tragedy is always ironic, but it is not because an action *eventually* leads to the opposite of its intention, but because that opposite is grafted into the action from the very beginning."[7]

---

[5] Dopo una delle solite scene con mia suocera e mia moglie, che ora, oppresso e fiaccato com'ero dalla doppia recente sciagura, mi cagionavano un disgusto intollerabile; non sapendo più resistere alla noja, anzi allo schifo di vivere a quel modo; miserabile, senza né probabilità né speranza di miglioramento, ... senza alcun compenso, anche minimo, all'amarezza, allo squallore, all'orribile desolazione in cui ero piombato; per una risoluzione, quasi improvvisa, ero fuggito dal paese ... (p. 88).

[6] Oscar Mandel, *A Definition of Tragedy* (New York: New York University Press, 1961), p. 20.

[7] Ibid., p. 24.

Up to the point where Mattia flees Miragno, we may say there has been no real "action" in the novel; like many, during his youth, he accomplishes little, without foreseeing the consequences of his ways. Suddenly, life intervenes with its ennui and suffering, he looks back with regret, and rather than go "on and on like that until he dies", he absconds to Monte Carlo. At first his action is precipitated solely by the desire to escape the domestic hell of life with Romilda and her mother; hence, after he is blessed by a run of good luck at the casino he entertains the notion of returning home.

But his plans take on far greater dimensions after astounding news reaches him in Chapter VII. While on the train, Mattia buys a newspaper and reads an account of his own death: a body found in a mill-race had been identified as his own. After he recovers from the initial shock, it occurs to him that since everyone he knows believes him to be dead, he does not have to return home to resume his previous life. Instead, he can start an utterly different one. Thus, he can continue his pilgrimage, not just in better circumstances, but as a completely *new man* :

> I had to acquire a new attitude towards life, without taking the slightest account of the disastrous experiences of the late Mattia Pascal.
>
> It was up to me: I could be and I had to be the architect of my new destiny, to the extent that Fortune would allow me.
>
> "And first of all," I said to myself, "I shall guard my freedom: I shall go as I please through byways that are smooth and ever new ... Little by little I shall improve myself; I shall transform myself with stimulating and patient study, so that, in the end, I may say that I had not only lived two lives, but that I had been two men."[8]

---

[8] Io dovevo acquistare un nuovo sentimento della vita, senza avvalermi neppur minimamente della sciagurata esperienza del fu Mattia Pascal. Stava a me: potevo e dovevo esser *l'artefice* del mio nuovo destino, nella misura che la Fortuna aveva voluto concedermi. "E innanzi tutto," dicevo a me stesso, "avrò cura di questa mia libertà: me la condurrò a spasso per vie piane e sempre nuove ... Mi darò a poco a poco una nuova educazione; mi trasformerò con amoroso e paziente studio, sicché, alla fine, io possa dire non solo di aver vissuto due vite, ma d'esser stato due uomini" (p. 114, italics mine).

What could be a more "serious purpose" than this: the total re-formation of one's life, of one's character? Mattia is determined to take advantage of his rare opportunity, to start anew with the proverbial clean slate. And in this new identity *he* will take charge of his destiny, in absolute freedom, setting out for new lands, unencumbered by the errors of the past; he alone will be the artificer of his "self". Significantly, the very first thing he does is to choose a new name for himself -- "Adriano Meis" -- which he compiles from a conversation he overhears on the train. It very much indeed resembles a new "incarnation" for him, with the exhilaration that accompanies every new birth: the possibilities seem endless, and thus his resolution to live not only a more pleasurable existence, but also a better one, seems quite feasible. This time, it will be different.

Life is indeed different as Adriano, but not better. Freedom and independence do not relieve him of frustration and suffering, and as time passes he finds that he is neither as free nor independent as he had thought. Ultimately Mattia fails in his mission, but *not* simply because he makes a bad job of it. From our standpoint, the reasons for Mattia's failure is not so readily apparent as traditional readings suggest. By definition, as soon as he undertakes the quest to become a different person, his failure is inevitable. The implications are stunning: why must his resolution *necessarily* lead to disillusionment?

The reasons are deeply imbedded in the very nature of identity, of "being" itself. According to Buddhism, chief among them is *taṇhā,* which is normally translated as "hunger" or "craving"; but much of the time the craving is so subtle that we are often unaware of it. *Taṇhā,* we may recall, has three distinct aspects to it: *kāmataṇhā,* the desire for pleasure and comfort; *bhavataṇhā,* the desire to be, to continue personal existence; and *vibhavataṇhā,* the desire for "unbeing", the undoing of present circumstances. *Taṇhā* is a more profound phenomenon than what is normally understood by our English renderings. In order to comprehend it fully, we must see it principally in terms of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* nexus, and how it holds a central position in the establishment and continuation of *samsāra.*[9] According to *paṭiccasamuppāda,* being and death are inextricably linked to craving: they are all conascent. The formula runs as follows:

---

[9] Literally, the "running on and on" of existence. We must keep in mind that in Buddhist thought the ultimate goal is to put an *end* to existence, not merely to make it "better". See note 38, below.

> With ignorance, [there arise] the determinations, with determinations, consciousness; with consciousness, the senses; with the senses, contact; with contact, feeling; with feeling, craving; with craving, grasping, ["holding onto experience"]; with grasping, being; with being, birth; with birth, aging-and-death, sorrow-lamentation-suffering-grief-and despair come into being.[10]

The doctrine of dependent origination is difficult to fathom, not solely because of the language: it offers, in fact, an entirely different notion of causality.[11] The term *paccayā* expresses the mutual dependence or "co-arising" of all the links in the chain, almost as if they were one and the same. Therefore, if one is present, all will be present; similarly, to eliminate any one link in the chain is to eliminate them all, since none of them can exist independently of the others. We will restrict most of our observations to the elements of *avijjā, saṅkhārā, nāmarūpa, bhava and taṇhā:* ignorance, determination, name-and-form, being and craving.

Usually we understand craving in only one of its aspects, as *kāmataṇhā* or the desire for pleasure. This desire includes not just the erotic, but also those freedom, comfort, and so on which Adriano mentions at the beginning of Chapter VIII. For the Buddhist, then, pleasure is pleasure, and desire is desire -- wanting a beautiful woman is not substantially different from wanting a beautiful panorama or some other sensual pleasure considered "more refined". The drive of *kāmataṇhā* is so latent in us that it is extremely difficult to perceive, let alone abandon, and it becomes even more subtle when it operates in conjunction with the other two aspects of *taṇhā*. For craving is the very

---

[10] avijjāpaccayā saṅkharā, saṅkhārāpaccayā viññaṇam, viññaṇapaccayā nāmarūpam, nāmarūpapaccayā saḷāyatanam, saḷāyatanapaccayā phasso, phassapaccayā vedanā, vedanāpaccayā taṇhā, taṇhāpaccayā upādānam, upādānapaccayā bhavo, bhavapaccayā jāti, jātipaccayā jaramarana sokaparidevadukkhadomanass'upāyāsā sambhavanti (Mahātaṅhāsamkhaya-sutta, Majjhimanikāya 38).

[11] The importance of this formula cannot be overstated. As we find in the Mahāhatthipadopamasutta (Majjhimanikāya 28): *yo paticcasamuppadam passati so dhammam passati; yo dhammam passati so paṭiccasamuppādam passati:* "He who sees dependent origination sees the truth; he who sees the truth sees dependent origination."

foundation of existence, as Schopenhauer contends:

> Therefore what is always to be found in every animal consciousness ... in fact what is always its foundation, is the immediate awareness of a *longing,* and of its alternate satisfaction and non-satisfaction ... Thus we know that the animal *wills,* and indeed *what* it wills, namely existence, well-being, life, and propagation.[12]

Thus whenever there is *kāmataṇhā,* the craving for sensual pleasures, there are also *bhavataṇhā* and *vibhavataṇhā,* or craving for being and also craving for "unbeing" (we hasten to say that the latter is not necessarily a death-wish). That is, when we crave pleasure, we also crave the continuance of *attā,* or our (imagined) "self" in a pleasant state.[13] The gratification of a sensation or experience reinforces desire and consequently the ego-conceit, as the "I" tries to hold on to the pleasurable as long as possible:

> In the process of "grasping" there is ... [a] "projection" of desire ... whereby the split in experience widens into a definite gap between a subject and an object. "Becoming" or "existence" is the make-believe attempt to bridge this gap, which, however, remains forever unbridged, for the material on which it relies is perpetually crumbling underneath. Yet it somehow props up the concept of an ego--the conceit "I am" *(asmimāna)* ... The ego now finds itself "born" into a world of likes and dislikes, subject to decay-and-death, sorrow,

---

12 Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation,* translated by E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1966): II, 204, Chapter XIX. The similarity between Schopenhauer's *Wille zum Leben* and the concept of *taṇhā* was recognised as early as 1903 by Professor Alessandro Costa. See *Il Buddha e la sua dottrina,* (Torino: Fratelli Bocca Editori), p. 83.

13 As Pirandello rightly observed, the self is an illusion, but nevertheless "it is if you think it is". [Hence the title of our author's 1918 drama, *Cosíé (se vi pare)*]. This may be applied to *sakkāyādiṭṭhi:* the adherence to the view of personhood. The mirage of a fixed identity is "real" as long as one (mistakenly) sees it is there.

lamentation, pain, grief and despair.[14]

Both the "I" and the clinging *(upādāna)* will continue as long as the experience is felt as pleasure. As Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda notes, desire engenders the ego-conceit. In the context of dhamma language, this means birth, being, and consequently, *dukkha*. Further, explains Lama Anagarika Govinda, because it is "intentional", this birth has far more implications than the physical exit from the womb:

> "Birth" *(jāti)* in the Buddhist sense is not merely a particular single movement in each life ... but the "conception", the "conceiving" that is called forth continually through the senses, which effects the appearance or manifestation ... of existence ... the seizing of the sense-domains ... the continuous materialization and new karmic entanglement.[15]

This "birth-in-experience" is subject to change, impermanence: in Pāli, *anicca*. The first characteristic of existence is stated by the Buddha as *sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā*. or, "All determinations are impermanent". His statement regarding *anicca* does not simply mean that, as everyone knows, people grow old and things eventually wear out; more importantly, it means that the process of ego-construction based on pleasurable sensation is ever-changing. It is this mutability, along with *dukkha,* that undermines the whole notion of selfhood: being, and its continuance, are found to be dependent on the vicissitudes of pleasure and satisfaction.[16]

---

[14] Bhikku Ñanananda, *The Magic of the Mind* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1974), p. 33.

[15] *The Psychological Attitude of Early Buddhist Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991), p. 50.

[16] "The *puthujjana* is first and foremost after feeling and perceiving pleasure. But this pleasurableness (or pleasure) he perceives is **always** something ... in association with the false perception of a permanent subject, which he refers to as 'I' and 'my self'. It is the root-structure of his experience. And this root-structure is the ready-made means (the *fait accompli*) within which he constantly finds the perception of pleasurableness." R.G. de S. Wettimuny, *The Buddha's Teaching and the Ambiguity of Existence* (Colombo: Gunasena & Co., 1978), p. 185.

What happens when the pleasure dissipates or disappears -- as it must, sooner or later? The subject will then of course not crave the furtherance of the present experience, which is what brought about the *asmimāna* in the first place. The experience of "I", based on what the it is going through at the moment, becomes unsatisfactory or even painful, and thus, *sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā,* "All determinations are unsatisfactory". The trouble is that because of the law of *anicca,* any experience, no matter how pleasant, will eventually change, and become unpleasant. At this point, one yearns for "death", or the end of immediate existence now tedious or painful, and this is what we may understand by *vibhavataṇhā,* the craving for "unbeing". In sum, when we experience pleasure, we crave "being", and when we are frustrated, "unbeing" -- the latter as a continuation of existence, but not of the unsatisfactory manifestation we are undergoing at the moment.

Therefore, conventional or "samsāric" existence may be viewed as merely an incessant alternation of birth-and-death, based on sensations. What most take for granted as a constant, substantial self is really a shifting mirage that appears with the onset of desire or aversion. Or, to use Ñaṇananda's image, the personality is a bridge constructed on an ever-crumbling foundation. Adriano perceives its inconsistency at the beginning of Chapter XV: "As day is different from night, so perhaps are we one thing by day, another by night, and a very wretched thing, alas, in both."[17] Thus follows the third characteristic of phenomena, *sabbe dhammā anattā* : "All things are not-self." The persona to which we cling, it turns out, is not a stable reality, but a slippery ambiguity.

With this understanding of the Buddha's analysis of *taṇhā* and its metaphors, we can truly grasp the tragic purpose of *Il fu Mattia Pascal,* and why it is, in many respects, uncomfortable to read. It not only subverts conventional notions of identity, as most readings suggest, but as we shall see, it also calls into question the entire mechanism by which we think and act. For most of the narrative the protagonist, like every *puthujjana* (or, to use an existentialist term, *l'homme moyen sensuel),* longs for fundamental change in his existence. This he hopes to achieve by constructing a new being *on the death of the previous one.* In the context of narrative fiction, there is no better way to communicate this tension between *bhavataṇhā* and *vibhavataṇhā* than

---

[17] Com' altro è il giorno, altro la notte, così forse una cosa siamo noi di giorno, altra di notte: miserabilissima cosa, ahimè, così di notte come di giorno.

with the series of "suicides" that Mattia contemplates or commits whenever there is no other way out of *dukkha*, dissatisfaction, suffering. Even his devil-may-care attitude at the Monte Carlo casino is based on the premise that if he loses every centime, there is always an alternative: "there was no lack of trees -- sturdy ones -- in the garden around the gambling house. At the end of the reckoning, I could be hung cheaply enough from one of them, using the belt of my trousers; I would make quite a sight."[18]

This is only the first in a series of references to death and suicide that pervade the novel, and often the option is seen as desirable, as the only way out of the oppression of life. Later, in Chapter VI, Mattia finds that one of the other gamblers has availed himself of that very alternative, accomplished with a gun instead of a belt. Then, he reads of the suicide of the man who drowned himself in the mill-race. In Chapter X he learns that Silvia Caporale, another tenant in the same Roman household where he rents a room, has twice tried to kill herself.

Of course most of us, when we crave "unbeing", do not really want to undergo physical death: that is, we do not want to be annihilated. As Adriano's landlord Anselmo Paleari says, what we do crave is *another* life, an improved "I" in better circumstances, which is neither conservation nor extinction. This is precisely the case of Mattia/Adriano and why *he always survives his suicides*. When desperate, he contemplates death with a fair amount of sang-froid, but he is squeamish when it comes to its grim reality. The recollection of the bloody corpse he saw outside the casino unnerves him, and when he reads the newspaper account of the Miragno drowning, he is similarly haunted by the repugnant image of his own body "in an advanced state of putrefaction". What he really wants is to escape the suffering of the "I" that comprises Mattia: the life made miserable by an ugly wife and a shrewish mother-in-law, "a different nightmare, just not as bloody", not existence *per se;* and his apparent suicide, plus new-found financial independence and plenty of time in which to pursue his aspirations, allow him the opportunity to act out everyone's fantasy: the chance to start all over again.

---

18 ... non difettavano alberi -- solidi -- nel giardino attorno alla bisca. In fin de' conti, magari mi sarei appeso economicamente a qualcuno di essi, con la cintola dei calzoni, e ci avrei fatto anche una bella figura (p. 90).

At first, given the unique circumstance that befalls him, it does seem altogether possible for him to create a new life and a new man. And yet the whole project, which by now appears believable and realisable, collapses within a relatively short time. As we noted earlier, the question is why it *must* fail. Mandel gives us a clue: "The overthrow of the protagonist appears inevitable in the original configuration; that is, at the very time of the tragic action."[19]

What is it about the original configuration that dooms Mattia's mission at the outset? To state it concisely, *any escape from being via unbeing is impossible*.[20] If this observation sounds curious, consider once again what we noted about the phenomenon of *taṇhā*. Being and desire are inseparable. Every instance of one reinforces the other, so every craving for different or greater pleasure reinforces being. It naturally follows that *vibhavataṇhā* reinforces the very being one is trying to abandon.[21] Thus, as Adriano, he cannot so easily eradicate his previous existence as Mattia Pascal, and he recognises this to some extent even while constructing his new identity, which must be based on deconstruction, or "unbeing". He has to look and act in a certain way in order not to look and act like his former self. In the midst of his "re-birth", his previous incarnation survives:

> "Adriano Meis! Lucky man! It is too bad that you have to wear your hair that way ... If it were not for that errant eye of his, of that imbecile, then all in all you would not look too bad. If that other guy had not worn his hair so short, you would not now be obliged to wear it so long; and it is certainly not to your

---

19 Mandel, op. cit., p. 33.

20 *ye va pana keci ... vibhavena bhavassa nissaranamano-hamsu sabbe te anissata bhavasmati vadāmi.* "I say that those ... who think that there is an escape from being through unbeing do not escape from being." Udana, Nandavagga: 10.

21 "Every attempt towards 'unbeing' *(vibhava)* directly involves the confirmation or assertion of 'being' ... Trying to get away from 'being' through 'unbeing' is only remaining tied to 'being' further--like the dog that is tied to the post with a leash, in attempting to release itself from the post, only keeps runnning round and round the post." Wettimuny, pp. 137-138.

liking, I know, that you now go around beardless as a priest."[22]

Thus, the new man Adriano celebrates is not as new as he believes. As long as he is subject to *tanha,* do what he will, he cannot escape his old "self", represented by the errant eye. Similarly, after the faked suicide of Chapter XVI, the same eye, once corrected, remains an unwanted reminder of Adriano when he decides to return to Miragno. Even after cutting his hair and re-growing his beard he notes, "I still seemed to see something of Adriano Meis in my features."

That "I" pursues him as long as he pursues pleasure, and thereby perpetuates the dilemma of being/unbeing. As we have noted, the nature of pleasure is ephemeral. At first, Adriano delights in a life lived here today, elsewhere tomorrow. But in the very next Chapter, the same sensation is no longer felt as a pleasurable one; the "journey" of Chapter VIII quickly becomes a "vagabondage" at the beginning of Chapter IX. At first he exults, "Alone! alone! alone! master of myself! without having to answer to anyone!" Two pages later, he sighs, "Deep down I was already a little tired of roaming around, always alone and silent. *Instinctively* I began to feel the need for some company."

I have added the italics because, as we have seen, such a change in perception from pleasure to unpleasure is latent, instinctive; so too is the urge to escape from it via more pleasure. Even after experiencing at first-hand the mutability of the reactions on which pleasure is founded, he is seduced nevertheless into its insidious network all over again. This is because he, like most of us, does not know any better: "He, touched by unpleasurable feeling, delights in sensual pleasure. And why? The uninstructed *puthujjana* does not know an escape from unpleasurable feeling other than sensual pleasure."[23]

---

22 "Adriano Meis! Uomo felice! Peccato che debba esser conciato così ... Se non fosse per quest'occhio *di lui,* di quell 'imbecille, non saresti poi, alla fin fine, tanto brutto ... Se quell'altro non avesse portato i capelli così corti, tu non saresti ora obbligato a portarli così lunghi: e non certo per tuo gusto, lo so, vai ora sbarbato come un prete" (pp. 122-123).

23 so dukkhāya vedanāya puṭṭho samāno kāmasukham abhinandati. taṃ kissa hetu. na hi ... pajānāti assutavā puthujjano aññatrā kāmasukhā dukkhāya vedanāya nissaranaṃ. (Saṃyuttanikāya vol. IV, vedanāsaṃyutta 6).

After a period of relative freedom, represented by peregrinations throughout Europe and the absence of relationships and attachments, he is bored with it all, and wants to end his existence as a "foreigner to life". Therefore, he ceases his travels and settles in Rome. But this "rebirth" leads him to establish a new persona and to involve himself in a new set of "karmic entanglement", which, despite his best intentions, necessarily incurs sorrow and death. Thus the irony at the end of Chapter IX, which concludes with the asseveration "In sum, I had to live, live, live."[24]

In the opening pages of the following chapter, Adriano begins to understand that this craving to "live, live, live" in fact renders him as good as dead:

> Who knows how many in Miragno were saying:
>
> Lucky him! No matter how he did it, he solved his problem.
>
> And meanwhile, I had not resolved anything. I now kept finding myself with Anselmo Palieri's books in my hands, and those books were teaching me that the dead, the really dead, especially the suicides, were themselves in my very condition,

---

[24] Joseph Masson shows why Adriano's words are ominous: "La douleur de base, ce sont les éléments même[s] de mon existence, tels que les conçoivent les bouddhistes, en tant qu'ils sont essentiellement précaires et unis fortuitement dans une illusion d'Ego; le souci de cet Ego à maintenir et à promouvoir, en une entreprise erronée et désespérée dès l'abord, est la plus profonde des douleurs, car on doit bien constater la faillite du désir radical: vouloir vivre et survivre. D'où la conclusion: 'Qui prend plaisir dans les *khanda* prend plaisir dans la douleur; et qui prend plaisir dans la douleur n'en sera pas délivré.'" [The very elements of my existence constitute fundamental suffering, as the Buddhists conceive them, in so far as they are essentially precarious and fortuitously united in an illusion of Ego; the preoccupation of this Ego to maintain and advance in an enterprise erroneous and desperate from the start is the most acute of all suffering, because one must observe the bankrupt nature of innate desire: the will to live and survive. Hence the conclusion: 'He who delights in the khanda delights in suffering, and he who delights in suffering will never be free of it."] *Le Bouddhisme*, (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1975), pp. 59-60.

> in the "shells" of *Kāmaloka,* whom Mr Leadbeater, author of *The Astral Plane* ... depicts as excited by every sort of human appetite, which they cannot satisfy, stripped as they are of their physical body and yet unaware that they have lost it.[25]

In Pāli, the term *kāmaloka* means the world of desire, of sensual pleasure, the world of *kāmataṇha*. Those who inhabit that realm are depicted in Buddhist mythology as the so-called "petas" or hungry ghosts. As Bhikkhu Buddhadāsa points out, they really represent ourselves in the state of craving.[26] So indeed, by employing the Buddhist term and the references to rebirth, Pirandello warns us that Adriano has not solved anything, since the issues of longing and dissatisfaction have not been put to rest.[27] If Mattia/Adriano cannot conceive of himself as either dead or alive once and for all, it is because, as we see in the *bhavataṇhā/vibhavataṇhā* dilemma, the apparent opposites are actually part and parcel of each other. Whereas before, as Mattia, he was alive and longing for death, now he is dead, afraid of dying, and longing for life:

---

25 Chi sa quanti, a Miragno, dicevano -- "Beato lui, alla fine! Comunque sia, ha risolto il problema." E non avevo risolto nulla, io, intanto. Mi trovavo ora coi libri d'Anselmo Paleari tra le mani, e questi libri m'insegnavano che i morti, quelli veri, si trovavano nella mia identica condizione, nei "gusci" del *Kāmaloka,* specialmente i suicidi, che il signor Leadbeater, autore del *Plan Astral* ... raffigura eccitati da ogni sorta d'appetiti umani, a cui non possono soddisfare, sprovvisti come sono del corpo carnale, ch'essi però ignorano d'aver perduto (pp. 140-141).

26 "The term *hungry ghost* (peta) in everyday language refers to a creature supposed to have a tiny mouth and an enormous belly. He can never manage to eat enough and so is chronically hungry ... The hungry ghosts of dhamma language are purely mental states ... Anyone suffering from too intense a craving ... can be said to have been born a hungry ghost here and now. It is not something that happens only after death." Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, *Me and Mine* (Albany: Suny Press, 1989), p. 134.

27 Giovanni Macchia has shown the connection between thought, desire and creation of being in Leadbeater and its influence on Pirandello. See his article "Pirandello e gli spiriti," *Il corriere della sera,* 18 luglio 1972, p. 3.

> Not that I really believed I was dead: it would not have been a great harm, since dying is the hard part, and once dead, I don't believe that one can retain the sad desire to return to life. I became aware all of a sudden that I had to die again, for real: this was the problem! After my suicide, I had naturally seen nothing before me other than life. And here, now, Signor Anselmo Paleari continually put the shadow of death before me.[28]

Despite what he says, Adriano does have the "sad desire to return to life", one which becomes more ardent as he becomes more comfortable as a tenant in Paleari's household, and especially as he becomes romantically involved with Adriana, his landlord's daughter.[29] He himself recognises this in Chapter XIII: "I felt myself already caught in the clutches of life ...". This desire gets him into trouble with the surly Terenzio Papiano, his rival for Adriana's hand. Adriano fully realises that he is in danger, but nevertheless cannot take the reasonable course of action and leave the house. Later, in Chapter XV, when contemplating the implications of the kiss he gave to Adriana -- "the kiss of a dead man" -- he laments, "Look: those cords had already retied themselves; and life -- for all that I had been on guard against it -- life had dragged me back with its irresistible force: a life which was no longer mine." Of course it is not life *per se* that is irresistible, but rather the desire for it and its sensual pleasures, what Schopenhauer called the will-to-live. And Mattia's return to life -- in the guise of Adriano -- means inevitably another death, the shadow that Palieri continually puts in front of him. Pirandello will relentlessly exploit this dilemma throughout the rest of the novel.

---

[28] Non che credessi veramente di esser morto: non sarebbe stato un gran male, giacché il forte è morire, e, appena morti, non credo che si possa avere il tristo desiderio di ritornare in vita. Mi accorsi tutt'a un tratto che dovevo proprio morire ancora: ecco il male! ... Dopo il mio suicidio ... *io naturalmente non avevo veduto più altro, innanzi a me, che la vita.* Ed ecco qua, ora: il signor Anselmo Paleari mi metteva innanzi di continuo l'ombra della morte (Chapter X, p. 141; italics mine).

[29] Adriano's desire is sad, especially from our standpoint, since it will lead to further "births and deaths."

This is how Adriano falls into "the clutches" of life: when he arrives in Rome he really has no ego, but soon his desire for Adriana creates and reinforces the persona of Adriano. For a long time he speaks of nothing specific, and lives in generalities and equivocations precisely to avoid establishing a discernible identity. It is when he engages in conversation "for her alone" that he assumes a discrete "I". Only because of Adriana does he actually feel like a new person:

> I understood ... that despite my odd appearance she could love me. I didn't say it even to myself, but from that evening on the bed I slept on in that house seemed softer; the objects surrounding me more delicate; the air I breathed more gentle; the sky above more blue and the sun more resplendent.[30]

Furthermore, it is at this point that the similarity of the two names acquires significance. It is not simply a matter of seeking his other half, but of craving for self-identification. It is because of Adriana that he truly becomes himself, or as we might say in Pāli, *Adrianapaccayā Adrianaṃ:* "With Adriana as a condition, Adriano is." At this point his persona becomes "real", not just a series of evasions and fictions, and acquires a life of its own; and it is Adriana who sustains that persona. Because of her he is no longer "padrone di sé", master of himself; no longer the man who was resolved to be circumspect in his every move, leaving nothing to chance. His attachment eventually leads to a loss of composure and lapse from reason. He courts the vulnerable Adriana even though his love is "begotten by despair upon impossibility". Without a true identity, he can never hope to marry her; yet, driven by his emotions, he continues to woo her : "I lost my self-control ... I openly began using all my strength against Adriana's shyness; I closed my eyes and abandoned myself without any longer reflecting on my feelings."

The pervasive and complex phenomenon of *taṇhā* thus leads Adriano onto a merry-go-round of "being" and "unbeing". He himself sets in motion, but at the same time he becomes carried away by it, always towards sorrow and disaster. The Buddhist perspective shows that the inevitability, the tragedy, lies

---

[30] Compresi ... che, nonostante quel mio strambo aspetto, ella avrebbe potuto amarmi. Non lo dissi neanche a me stesso; ma, da quella sera in poi, mi sembrò più soffice il letto ch'io occupavo in quella casa, più gentili gli oggetti che mi circondavano, più lieve l'aria che respiravo, più azzuro il cielo, più splendido il sole (p. 155).

in the very act of *self-creation,* which is conascent with desire and destined to ruin. The tragic ending is, in Mandel's words, "grafted on" to the beginning, the process represented by the link in the *paṭiccasamuppāda* chain known as *saṅkhāra.*

We met with the term *saṅkhāra* before, when we noted the characteristics of existence. There we translated it as "determination", as it can mean "something that conditions something else" and as such it includes the notions of what causes, creates or constructs another thing, and that constructed thing is *saṅkhāta.* Now let us consider once again the doctrine that all determinations are impermanent, unsatisfactory, leading to suffering, and not-self.

What are the implications in terms of the novel? The narrative makes it clear that Adriano is in fact *a constructed thing.* As we noted above, his very name is put together, drawn out of the argument overheard on the journey from Alenga to Torino. From then on, he is both the architect and the artifice of a "self" that does not really exist. As he puts it on page 114, "I would be able to mould myself to my own satisfaction." Several other similar references to self-fabrication follow. Here is a typical example from Chapter VIII: "I followed boys through the streets and parks ... taking note of their expressions, so that by degrees I put together the youth of Adriano Meis. I succeeded so well that in the end the composite seemed almost real."[31]

This implies a number of things about the nature of identity. First of all--and most importantly--what appears to be totally self-constructed is also in large part other-constructed. We tend to think that we are the sole determiners of what we are, that our idiosyncrasies are simply a matter of choice, but in fact the choice is determined by the "building materials" available to us. Adriano appropriates his own "reality" from features and behaviour observed in others. Even though they all add up, as he observes, to "a walking invention", they are *felt* to be his own, eventually assuming a separate entity in his consciousness. This sum of parts erroneously taken to be a whole is, in fact, a more "realistic" version of Frankenstein, an assemblage sewn together by desire and bound by suffering, as we find in the Aṅguttaranikāya III, 61: *sukhā vedanā eko anto,*

---

[31] E seguiva per le vie e nei giardini i ragazzetti ... e raccoglievo le loro espressioni, per *comporne a poco a poco* l'infanzia di Adriano Meis. Vi riuscii così bene, che essa alla fine *assunse nella mia mente una consistenza quasi reale* (p. 121, italics mine).

dukkhā vedanā dutiyo anto ... taṇhā sibbanī; tanha hi naṃ sibbati tassa tass'eva bhavessa abhinibbattiyā. "Pleasure is at the one end, suffering is at the other end ... and craving is the seamstress, for craving is just what sews one to this ever-becoming birth." Hence, the depiction of himself as "quel mostro", in Caporale's words, becomes especially evocative.

This is exactly what the Buddha meant when he said that all things were void of self. He did not contend that we simply do not exist; in fact, he vigorously denied any affinity with nihilism. Identity cannot be asserted or denied: as Pirandello says to Dr. Fileno in the short story *La tragedia d'un personaggio,* "We are and we are not, dear doctor!" With the doctrine of *anattā* in mind, we can see that the "self" is very much like Adriano's shadow:

> But that shadow had a heart, and could not love; that shadow had money, and anyone could take it away from him; it had a head, but only in order to realise that it was the head of a shadow, and not the shadow of a head. That is what it was like.
>
> Thus, I felt it as something living, and I felt sadness for it, as if a horse and the wheels of a carriage and the feet of passers-by had really crushed it.[32]

Adriano's shadow is a product of will and desire, which itself wills and desires; and that volition sustains its existence. For this reason, as well as that of its close association with death, the shadow is a perfect metaphor for the "self": an elusive coincidence that we "determine" but cannot control. Therefore, when Adriano makes up his mind to kill "that mad, absurd fiction" it is not as simple as it sounds: it is not a matter of doing away with nothing, but rather one of eliminating the latent urge to *be.* Pirandello later takes up the same issue of using "fictions" in our vain attempt to create a fixed form out of the endless movement of life:

---

[32] Ma aveva un cuore, quell'ombra, e non poteva amare; aveva denari, quell'ombra, e ciascuno poteva rubarglieli; aveva una testa, ma per pensare e comprendere ch'era la testa di un'ombra, e non l'ombra d'una testa. Proprio così! Allora la sentii come cosa viva, e sentii dolore per essa, come il cavallo e le ruote del carro e i piedi de'viandanti ne avessero veramente fatto strazio (Chapter XVI, p. 207).

> The concepts, the ideals to which we would like to keep ourselves consistent, all the fictions we create, the conditions, the state in which we try to establish ourselves, are the forms in which we seek to arrest, to harness the continuous flux within us. But deep down, below the embankments and beyond the limits we impose as we make up our conscience and construe our personality, the obscure flux continues.[33]

Is there any alternative to *saṅkhāra*, to creating recurrent fictions? We are back to the essential question: can the issue be resolved via unbeing? At this point Adriano still thinks so: "There was no other escape for me!" So he decides that the only way to resolve his problems in Rome is to feign another suicide and return to Miragno. In still another instance of *vibhavataṇhā*, he imagines that he will be better off by returning to the way things were before. Yet his exultation at the thought of reassuming the identity of Mattia Pascal strikes even him as ironic: "And yet, I recalled the other journey, the one from Alenga to Turin: then, in the same way, I had considered myself happy. What madness! 'Freedom!' I used to say ...". And in both instances, he uses the words "quell'imbecille" -- that imbecile -- to refer to a "previous incarnation". But while he may be persisting foolishly in a fruitless course of action, essentially he is simply behaving like every *puthujjana*: as long as he is driven by desire, he will continue "seeking delight here and there" (*tatra tatra abhinandini*). As we have argued, the impulses that plague him are latent in, or bound up with, existence itself. This is why his tragedy is that of all those of us who are caught in the snares of *taṇhā* : "Everyone, everyone, just like me would surely have considered it a stroke of luck to be able to free himself ... from a sorrowful and miserable existence like mine."[34]

---

[33] Le forme, in cui cerchiamo d'arrestare, di fissare in noi questo flusso continuo, sono i concetti, sono gli ideali a cui vorremmo serbarci coerenti, tutte le finzioni che ci creiamo, le condizioni, lo stato in cui tendiamo a stabilirci. Ma dentro di noi stessi ... il flusso continua, indistinto, sotto gli argini, oltre i limiti che noi imponiamo, componendoci una coscienza, costruendoci una personalità. *L'umorismo* Part II, chapter V.

[34] Tutti, tutti, come me avrebbero stimato certo una fortuna potersi liberare ... d'un'egra e misera esistenza come quella mia (p. 199).

On his return to Miragno, our protagonist discovers once more that his reincarnation will not go according to plan. The same aspirations and anticipations delude him, for what he imagines to be a constant experience, fixed in time, changes -- in fact, it does not even last until his arrival. When he did away with his alter ego he assumed that the previous set of conditions which defined the old Mattia Pascal would be intact; he thinks that he can take over from where he left off, as if nothing had happened. Or rather, not as if nothing had changed, but as if those conditions that once combined to form his identity (*saṅkhāra*) had not changed. However, he returns to his home town to find that no one recognises him, and that Romilda is already remarried to Pomino, his childhood friend. Mattia, of course, views his reappearance in town as something extraordinary indeed. But excluding Romilda and her new husband, to whose marriage his reincarnation could pose a threat, no one cares. Hence, he finds that his existence is also dependent on contingencies such as being recognised by others. If one is not acknowledged, where is one's identity? This is why our "self" is undermined when others do not take us for "what we are":

> Nobody recognized me because nobody thought about me any more ... And I, who had imagined an outburst, a great fuss over me as soon as I had shown myself in the street! In a profound state of discouragement, I felt a humiliation, a contempt, a bitterness that I wouldn't know how to put into words ... Ah, so this is what it means to die! Nobody, nobody remembered me any more, as if I had never existed.[35]

At the nadir of disillusionment, Mattia makes his courageous decision: he will neither give rise to another entity nor re-assert his previous one. He relinquishes his right to take back Romilda and he declines to have his name removed from the municipality's list of the dead. That is to say, he refuses to occasion more "being", and thereby he brings the entire "samsaric" process to an end. This means no more ignorance, in terms of imagining changeless states free from suffering; no more determinations, constructions of fictional identities; no more cravings for existence or non-existence based on sensation; no more clinging to experience or identifying with it as "self". With the cessation of all

---

35 Nessuno mi riconosceva perché nessuno pensava più a me ... E io che m'ero immaginato uno scoppio, uno scompiglio appena mi fossi mostrato per le vie! Nel disinganno profondo, provai un avvilimento, un dispetto, un'amarezza che non saprei ridire ... Ah, che vuol dir morire! Nessuno, nessuno si ricordava più di me, come se non fossi mai esistito... (p. 246).

these elements of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* network, that which constitutes his personality disappears: for then there is no longer any "I"-making or "mine"-making. Now he is *asaṅkhāta,* not-determined, not-made, not-willed.

This is the crucial difference between the Mattia that left Miragno and the one that returns. Something *essential* is missing. The intangible element known as *saṅkhār'upādāna*, the holding-and-fabricating that constitutes the essence of subjectivity, is absent. Hence, Mattia may remain an individual (i.e., as distinct from others) but cease being a person, a self, a subject. And so now he must be referred to as "il fu" (the late) Mattia Pascal, because his psychological being and its attributes are no more. With this in mind, those opening lines of the novel acquire greater significance: "One of the few things that I knew, or perhaps the only one that I knew for sure, was this: that my name was Mattia Pascal".

Before he leaves Miragno the only thing that he is convinced of is his identity, of that name and all that it entails. But at the end, once he knows how flimsy is the construct of "self", the one thing he knows for sure is that he is *not* Mattia Pascal or anybody else. A name (as Vitangelo Moscarda will point out in the later novel *Uno. nessuno e centomila*) is what we use to designate a "person", that continuing entity which consists of craving, clinging and willing.[36] So while at first reading it might appear as if our protagonist were worse off than before, as if he had "lost" knowledge, it is not so. Before, he did not know the insubstantiality of identity, he did not realise the ambiguity of his existence. Now, at last, he is undeceived. What was known as Mattia Pascal no longer is; there is no longer a subject, a centre appropriating experience and thereby perpetuating itself.

The final scene of the novel underscores our point. Our protagonist is the only one in town who visits the grave of the man identified as "Mattia Pascal" (i.e., the man who really did drown in the mill-race). There, someone asks him, "So who the hell are you, after all?"; and *the only possible response* he can offer is this: "Eh, my friend ... I am the late Mattia Pascal." *Nothing else can be asserted.* Traditional readings of Pirandello have ignored the crucial implications of the final chapter, and have not take into account the fact that in the end, the protagonist sees the dangers of sustaining any identity whatsoever, and so he stops the process altogether. At last he finds the way out of *dukkha* -

---

[36] As we read in the Khandāsaṃyutta, *yam kho bhikkhu, anuseti tena saṃkhaṃ gacchati*: "one aquires a name by that which one clings to."

- not through suicide, but through fully understanding its mechanism: *ettāvatā abhiññeyyaṃ abhijānāti ... diṭṭ'eva dhamme dukkass'- antakaro hotīti.* "Thus knowing, thus seeing, one puts an end to *dukkha* here and now."

Pirandello says that in our craving for being we habitually create form, that we put on masks, but he does not say that we *must* do so. If we have the courage, we can live without them, as does the late Mattia Pascal. He does not, as so many readings suggest, "return to life", and this is why the so-called "sage" remarks of Don Eligio -- "it is not possible to live outside of those circumstances, happy or sad that they may be, by which we are who we are" -- are neither applicable nor representative of Pirandello's thought.[37] As Mattia retorts, "But I pointed out to him that I had not returned, either under the law or to my particular circumstances. My wife was now Pomino's wife, and I couldn't tell precisely who I was."

Precisely because he finds that a "self" leads to suffering, the late Mattia Pascal abjures the evasions of *bhavataṇhā* and *vibhavataṇhā,* and refuses to revive his former "self". Like Peter Schlemihl, he is liberated when *he stops running after his shadow.* "Enough. I now live in peace, together with my elderly aunt Scolastica".[38] Therefore, Mattia's non-existence is not plagued by bitterness or anguish, as is usually assumed; rather, it is liberated from the bitterness and anguish which characterised the tragic existence of the old Mattia. Our protagonist may not have succeeded according to conventional values, but precisely those values have been repudiated: they belong to his former incarnation. The important fact is that he now lives in peace.

---

[37] "Marta mia, guai se si pensa alla realtà che ci dànno gli altri! ... a curarsi di quella che gli danno gli altri ci sarebbe da impazzire o da non vivere più." [Marta, woe to whoever thinks about the reality that others assign to him ... to pay attention to what others assign to him would make him go mad or not live anymore.] Letter dated 30-3-31 in *Lettere a Marta Abba* a cura di Benito Ortolani (Milano: Mondadori, 1995), p. 707.

[38] Basta. *Io ora vivo in pace,* insieme con la mia vecchia zia Scolastica ... (p. 247, italics mine).

Mattia Pascal only experiences bitterness and anguish as long as he nourishes "il tristo desiderio di tornare in vita". After he renounces it utterly, there is nothing to indicate that he experiences any emotion in particular. Perhaps as a result of a cultural predisposition, or of having been conditioned by existentialism, many Western readers assume that not to have an identity is a predicament of anguish.[39] But the novel has shown us differently: it is craving for being/pleasure that causes bitterness; it is self-construction that leads to suffering; and this insight represents another facet of Pirandello's genius.

M. JOHN STELLA

---

[39] For a discussion of how the East sees the absence of being as a desirable end, see Jean Grenier, *Absolu et choix* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961), p. 23.

NETAJI SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE'S ANTI-BRITISH WAR AND THE *BHAGAVAD GITA*: A POSTSCRIPT

The Bose saga was discussed in a previous article published in this same journal. (Arseculeratne, 1997); it considered the enigma of why Bose did not invoke the words of Krishna to Arjuna as related in the Hindu epic, the *Bhagavad Gita*, which legitimised Arjuna's resort to war on a righteous cause. That discussion assumed (1) that the Indian people were familiar with this epic poem and (2) that if Bose, (who had imbibed the message of the *Gita* through his mentors, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo), did invoke that message in his speeches to the Indian people, it could have provided strong motivation for their enlistment in Bose's anti-British military campaign. There is however no evidence in the literature on Bose or his anti-British campaign that he did refer explicitly to the message of the *Gita* in his speeches on the need for anti-British revolt. Indeed, this contrasts with the fact that another Indian patriot, B.G. Tilak, who in his anti-British stance, did invoke Krishna's words to Arjuna: "...in speeches and articles Tilak, a master of invective, advocated extreme methods of opposition, and was not above occasionally using Hindu scriptures to justify political murder. In 1894 at the Shivazji Festival at Raigarh he told the crowd that "the Divine Krishna tells us in the Bhagavad Gita that we may kill even our teachers and our kinsmen and no blame attaches to us if we are not actuated by selfish desires" (Corr, 1975. p.20).

The extensive literature on Bose and the I.N.A. does not provide an explanation of this enigma; nor was Dr. Sisir Bose (Netaji's nephew who drove the car which took Bose out of India, on his way to Europe, in January 1941, and Director, Netaji Research Bureau, Calcutta) able to do so (Personal Communication 1996). A plausible explanation was proposed by Dr. P.K. Mazumdar (1997, Personal Communication). According to this view, Bose deliberately avoided the use of Krishna's words because he was convinced that the liberation of India from the British could be achieved only if there was unity amongst the people of India in this cause, irrespective of their caste and creed, and that the message of Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Hindu epic poem, would have been alien to the considerable non-Hindu proportion of the Indian people, notably the Muslims. This postscript recounts the evidence from diverse sources, which supports this view.

During the latter half of the 19th century the formation and growth of small (anti-British) revolutionary groups in India continued:

> Later, as muscular Hinduism took hold, the ideology shaped itself; the *Gita* in which Lord Krishna had preached the Hindu

> philosophy of life to Arjuna, was a constant source of reference; the motherland conveniently became the mother goddess Durga, and the goddess Kali the symbol of strenegth. All this, laced with a sort of socialism, produced a strong, if confused, driving force (Mihir Bose, 1982. p. 42.);
>
> In May and June 1927 terrible Hindu-Muslim riots had racked Calcutta and in November the leaders were sufficiently concerned to call for a unity conference. Netaji Bose took up the theme at a large gathering at Calcutta's Shraddhananda Park.... (Mihir Bose 1982; p. 59);
>
> He (Netaji) always sought and worked for Hindu-Muslim unity on the basis of respect for each other's religious rights.... (Mihir Bose 1982; p. 60).

In his appeal for Hindu-Muslim unity, Bose "...asked the Hindus to bend over backwards to respect the rights of the Muslims and pleaded for concentration on the most important task at hand: the struggle for Indian freedom" (Gordon 1988; p. 163).

After a brief exile in Europe, Netaji Bose embarked on his voyage from Germany to Asia by submarine in February 1943. Abid Hussain (Hassan, a Muslim A.D.C.) was selected by Bose to accompany him as private secretary and assistant (Gordon 1989; p. 488) on that voyage to Sabang near Sumatra, and later on the flight to Tokyo, before he returned to the Malay peninsula to re-form the Indian National Army.

> A Muslim officer of the I.N.A. commented:
>
> He believed passionately that all Indians, irrespective of the region they came from or the language they spoke or religious faith they practised, were members of the same family. He gave this belief practical shape and convinced all those who came in contact with him that, unless this basic fact was accepted without hesitation, there was no future for India (Ahamad 1992; p. vi).
>
> And so, with no divisiveness on the basis of religion or race,

> All the companies of the regiments of the Indian National Army were mixed up units of the Sikhs, Muslims, Rajputs, Jats, Garhwalis, and Marathas. They all lived together, ate together and so each considered (the) other as his own brother-in-arms....All their loyalties to their religion or region, if any, were subordinated to their loyalty to India. It was not only a model army but a model citizenry for free India (Bhattarcharjee and Muller 1985; p. 56).

Dodwell Cooray, a journalist who led the I.N.A.'s broadcasting unit in Rangoon, Burma, wrote in a profile of Bose (*New Life*, 1987, September 18):

> The Indian National Army comprising many castes and creeds of India, was a unified force under Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. Hindu, Muslim and Christian ate at the same table....No religious differences were allowed to mar the unity of the members of the INA, and he forged a bond of oneness between all the members".

G.R. Wijedasa, a member of the Lanka Unit under the Indian Independence League, recalled (Arseculeratne 1991; p. 288): "Bose made no differentiation between Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims". Consider also the following:

> He succeeded in binding together the Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Tamils, Punjabis or for that matter all communities in a melting pot, namely the Indian National Army. That army stood for India first, India second and India last. His men took the solemn pledge that their loyalty to their religion, language or province would be subordinated to their loyalty to India (Muller & Bhattarcharjee 1985; p. 3).

The proclamation (1943) of the Provisional Government of Free India was signed on behalf of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind (Free India); representatives of the armed forces included Muslims, Lt.Col. Azis Ahmed, Lt.Col. M.Z. Kiani, Lt.Col. Ehsan Qadir, Lt.Col. Shah Nawaz Khan; Karim Ghano and D.M. Khan were advisers (Muller & Bhattarcharjee 1985; p. 117).

"On account of the criticism that *Jana Gana Mana* was in Bengali language, Netaji had specially commissioned Mumtaz Hussain (a Muslim), a local Hindustani poet, to compose the National Anthem of Azad Hind in simple

Hindustani" (Markandeya 1990; p. 276; my words in parenthesis).

During their abortive assault on British India from across the Burma-India border, Muslim officers headed some units- Lt.Col. Shah Nawaz Khan led the Subhas Brigade, and Col. I.J. Kiani led the Gandhi Brigade; the Guerilla Regiment was under Col. M.Z.Kiani.

The last drama of the Bose saga, before his death on August 18, 1945, occurred in Saigon on August 17, 1945; "Here a gathering of several of those closest to him through the last two years of the war took place. These included Colonel Habibur Rahman, Colonel Pritam Singh, Colonel Gulzara Singh, Major Abid Hassan, Debnath Das, and S.A. Ayer, and some other civilians" (Gordon 1989; p. 538). The only Indian whom Bose selected to accompany him on his (last) journey by plane to Manchuria and who was by his side when he died after the plane crashed in Taipeh (in Formosa), was the Indian Muslim Colonel Habibur Rahman. As G.R. Wijedasa, a member of the Lanka Unit under Netaji, said: "In fact his most trusted lieutenants were Muslims".

Following the failure of Bose's military campaign, the surrender of the Japanese and the end of the war in Asia, the treason-trials of I.N.A.'s officers began. At these trials, of the three principal accused: "...Shah Nawaz was a Muslim, Sahgal a Hindu and Dhillon a Sikh..."; they "...represented all the major communities of India. Auchinleck may have hoped that this would stress the communal nature of Indian politics - always Britain's strongest point; but for Indians it demonstrated that the I.N.A. was indeed a national army; that Bose had indeed succeeded in getting Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs to unite for a common cause" (Mihir Bose 1932; p. 260).

During the continuing trials of the I.N.A. officers, Captain Abdul Rashid was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment. "For four days between 11 and 14 February the streets of Calcutta, Bombay and Delhi witnessed unique political demonstrations in which Hindus and Muslims forgot their differences and came together to fight the I.N.A.'s battles." (Mihir Bose 1982; p. 262).

Despite their radical opposition to Bose's military action against the British, Gandhi and Nehru remarked upon the Bose's stand on the need for unity amongst the diverse people of India and particularly his expression of it in his nurture of the I.N.A. "This aspect of the INA impressed very much Mahatma Gandhi who accordingly paid his glowing tribute to the I.N.A. in the following words - "Though the I.N.A. failed in their immediate objective, they have a lot to their credit, of which they might well be proud. Greatest among

these was to gather together, under one banner, men from all religions and races of India, and to infuse into them the spirit of solidarity and oneness to the exclusion of all communal or parochial sentiment. It is an example which we should all emulate" (Muller and Bhattarcharjee 1985; p. 85). According to Jawaharlal Nehru: "The men and women who had enrolled themselves in the I.N.A. and worked under Nataji's guidance had done so because of their passionate desire to serve the cause of India's freedom. The I.N.A. made history not only in Malaya and Burma and elsewhere but also in people's minds all over India and that fact will endure. With the organisation of the I.N.A. on national lines outside India, Netaji has taught a lesson that with intercommunal unity we can solve the most difficult of problems. We must act upon the precedent he has set before us and strengthen our belief in intercommunal unity'" (Muller & Bhattarcharjee 1985; p. 86).

On the use of the message of the *Gita* as a driving force in anti-British revolt,.... (Mihir Bose (1932); p. 42) commented: "Its limitations were that the stress on Hindu myths alienated the Muslims, though some of them did join in during the early stages, and that it was never a mass movement". Mazumdar's explanation of why Bose did not invoke the message of the Gita - because he appealed and worked for the unity of all Indians and that the *Gita's* message in the Hindu epic might have 'alienated' the non-Hindu - is compatible with that view.

REFERENCES

Ahmad, M. 1992. "Netaji--Symbol of National Integration." *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose - a Malaysian Perspective*. Kuala Lumpur: Netaji Centre.

Arseculeratne, S.N. 1991. *Sinhalese Immigrants in Malaysia and Singapore 1860-1990: History Through Recollections*. Colombo: K.V.G. de Silva and Sons.

Arseculeratne, S.N. 1997. "Subhas Chandra Bose's anti-British War as a Righteous War, A Dharma Yuddhaya. *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, Vol. 22 (1996) No. 1&2 pp 153-159.

Bose, Mihir. 1982. *The Lost Hero*. London, Quartet Books.

Coor, G.H. 1975. *The War of the Springing Tigers*. Bornbay: Jaico Publishing House.

Gordon, Leonard A. 1989. *Brothers Against the Raj*. New Delhi: Penguin Books (India).

Markandeya, Subodh. 1990. *Subhas Chandra Bose. Netaji's Passage to Immortality*. New Delhi: Arnold Publishers.

Muller, E. and A. Bhattacharjee, 1985. *Subhas Chandra Bose and Indian Freedom Struggle*. New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House.

C.N. ARSECULERATNE

BOOK REVIEWS

THE ARNOLD ANTHOLOGY OF POST-COLONIAL LITERATURES IN ENGLISH

Editor: John Thieme
London: Arnold, 1996. xxiv+936pp

The Arnold Anthology of Post-Colonial Literatures in English is compiled by John Thieme, Professor of English and Commonwealth Literature, University of Hull. As editor of *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, which is the most established journal in the field, and as one who has published several books and articles on the subject, he is eminently qualified to undertake the pioneering project of compiling an anthology on Postcolonial Literatures.

To compile an anthology, especially an anthology on such an exciting and dynamic area like Postcolonial Literature, is a perilous exercise. It is somewhat like trying to select the best world cricket eleven of all time. Once a side is chosen, others could come up with ten teams, equally talented, and capable of beating the original selection. An anthology is much the same. An interested reader or critic could argue that, say, a writer's best works have been left out and that the extracts chosen for the anthology do not represent the best excerpts in a given work. And they could also maintain that other (perhaps better) writers have been ignored altogether. John Thieme's volume is particularly open to such challenges because it is not an anthology on just fiction, poetry, drama or criticism, but one which covers all genres. It is inevitable, therefore, that some writers and critics would be left out. Sri Lanka, for instance, is given a privileged position in relation to its size; still, there are those who would contest his choices on the basis that he has omitted some established writers who have shaped Literature in English in Sri Lanka over the years. Such charges are understandable, but impossible to sustain, or indeed to remedy, given the nature of the anthology which Thieme claims is "less to provide a definitive array of big names than to provide a multiplicity of texts that are all stimulating and exciting in themselves" (p. 6). The editor of any such anthology must make choices; else, he will have to compile several volumes to accommodate all the writers of note.

This anthology must be evaluated, therefore, for what it sets out to do and for what it has achieved, bearing in mind especially that it is a pioneering work. What is so special about this book? To say that it is a very substantial volume with more than 240 entries spread over 900 pages is insufficient by itself because figures reveal very little about Thieme's true achievement. While *The*

Anthology gives due recognition to authors like Achebe, Naipaul, Margaret Atwood, Patrick White, and Katherine Mansfield who are part of an emerging canon in Postcolonial Literatures, it also accommodates aboriginal and other discourses that are unfamiliar to the general reader. The editor, furthermore, acknowledges that hybridity is central to the Postcolonial condition, but does not eschew "specificities of particular cultural situations" (p 3) either. In the last section which is entitled "Trans-Cultural Writing," John Thieme draws on the richness of immigrant experience. Once again, he is not satisfied in merely listing some of the better known expatriate writers. He has provided some variety here too by putting together different kinds of "immigrant" writing. If Louise Bennett and Caryl Philips exemplify the concept called "colonialism in reverse" because they were born in the periphery but now inhabit the centre, a writer like Sri Lanka's Anne Ranasinghe, who has moved from Germany through England to Sri Lanka, provides a different voice to Postcolonial Literature of the diaspora.

Commonwealth Literature was regarded as an offshoot of British Literature at one time because it was produced by writers in the former colonies after an "engagement" with Britain; these definitions, however, were subsequently rejected by critics on the grounds that such approaches rendered our Literatures "derivative or subsidiary," kept them within the colonial context, and thus perpetuated the idea of Empire. Commonwealth Literature, the New Literatures in English, and even Postcolonial Literature, therefore, were regarded as fraught, loaded categories which should be discouraged at all times. A third group of critics now contend, however, that these Literatures are "simultaneously different and like."[1] And, although the phrase is not Thieme's, it is in the spirit of this third declaration that the Arnold anthology has been compiled. The writers who are included in this anthology are held apart by national, ethnic, cultural, historical, and temporal factors, but the colonial experience, their sympathy for the marginalized, the awareness that the English Language must be decolonized and re-formed to suit local needs, an appreciation of the role of women, and a sensitivity to humanity in general give these Postcolonial writers a contiguity in the world of art. And it is this contiguity that makes the kind of intertextual reading this book invites a task that is specially rewarding.

John Thieme makes the modest claim in a cogently written but still very accessible introduction that this anthology

---

[1] Kendrick Smithyman, 'The Common Experience, the Common Response' *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 6.1 (1971): p8.

> ...endeavours to provide students (and other) readers with an extensive cross-section of writing from the new anglophone literatures to illustrate their consanguinities and differences and their richness and variety. (p 1)

This is surely an understatement because the anthology is not only useful for the student and the general reader but also essential reading for teachers and specialists. Since John Thieme refers to students as his target group, however, it is necessary for teachers and academics to decide how best to use this volume of more than 240 entries as a textbook and the level at which it should be introduced. To my mind this anthology will be invaluable reading for first year university students and for those awaiting entrance; that is, those students who are comfortable with the idea of English Literature, but are, as yet, unfamiliar with the concept of Literature in English. This goal will only be achieved by a collaborative effort, however. Since the book is beyond the means of most teachers and students, libraries, universities, schools, and other institutions interested in promoting Postcolonial Literatures should take the initiative and ensure that multiple copies are available for reading.

Given that John Thieme is a Postcolonial critic, he could have easily restricted this anthology to "politically correct" pieces which foreground "an overtly adversarial attitude towards the post colonial project" (p. 2). Thieme, fortunately, has adopted a more enlightened approach. Deciding that these adversarial postures are based on several ideologies which quarrel among themselves even as they are united in opposing the colonial enterprise, he has introduced discourses that are not always consonant with each other. No anthologist who places extracts from Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Decolonizing the Mind*, Walcott's *The Muse of History* and Rushdie's *Imaginary Homelands* in the same volume could be accused of bias.

Critics have made brilliant transcontinental analyses of Postcolonial Literatures ever since these Literatures began to be taken seriouly more than thirty five years ago. Unfortunately, few of them have provided students and subsequent researchers with the tools to analyze Postcolonial Literatures in a comparative perspective--the kind of contribution that I.A. Richards made for "close reading" with *Practical Criticism,* for instance. Without making any ridiculously large claims for this anthology, one could say that the reading strategies suggested here will benefit not just the Postcolonial critic but the general reader as well. While those who are comfortable with sequential readings could follow the regional and chronological patterns that inform the

work, the more adventurous readers, on the other hand, could utilize the "reading connections" provided and "piece together their own comparisons and contrasts" (p 7). These pointers will surely lead to more sophisticated reading practices and to an awareness of the merits of reading Postcolonial Literatures in relation to each other.

Ever since Roland Barthes wrote his influential essay "Death of the Author"[2] and even before, perhaps, the role of the writer has been challenged by many schools of criticism, and especially by Deconstruction. This interest in theory has even affected critics of Postcolonial Literature who have tended to focus on the philosophy governing the Literature rather than Postcolonial Literature *per se*. While acknowledging that some attention to theory was crucial at a time when theoretical approaches to Postcolonial Literatures were almost non existent, John Thieme, like many other sensitive critics, has become increasingly aware that theory has perhaps overreached itself. Theoreticians are so powerful now that they are capable of making writers the marginalized group in Postcolonial studies. This selection, which is a celebration of creative writing, as it were, is one contribution towards remedying the situation. Even the critical pieces that appear in the volume, consequently, are rendered by writers. This mission to restore a sense of balance, carried out as it is by a leading Postcolonial critic and not by a creative writer, is surely another reason why John Thieme should be applauded for bringing out this anthology.

It is perhaps fitting to end this review of *The Arnold Anthology of Postcolonial Literatures* by focussing briefly on Sri Lankan writing which is given a significant place in the same. Not only does the Sri Lankan section include the work of Jean Arasanayagam, Patrick Fernando, Punyakante Wijenaike, Lakdasa Wikkramasinha, Rajiva Wijesinha, Richard de Zoysa and Shyam Selvadurai, but the island is also represented by Yasmine Gooneratne, Anne Ranasinghe, Michael Ondaatje, and Rienzi Cruz in the category called Trans-Cultural writing. The signal honour paid to Sri Lankan writers in English is apparent especially when these numbers are compared *vis a vis* two of our larger neighbours in the sub continent: Pakistan is represented by three writers, Bangladesh by just one.

Sri Lankan writing in English is now taken as a donee. But the recent upsurge of creative writing in Sri Lanka, the awards given to individual writers,

---

[2] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author' *The Rustle of Language*. Trans. Richard Howard. Berkely: University of California Press, 1989. pp49-55.

the acceptance of more than a dozen papers on topics relating to Sri Lankan writing for the last ACLALS conference, and the publication of at least six Sri Lankan novels by International Presses within the last three years should not make us forget that this fame was not easily won. Although enlightened academics introduced Sri Lankan Writing in English to our School and University English syllabi in the 70s, those who were entrusted with the task of teaching these texts did not always share the enthusiasm of the syllabus planners. Many teachers and critics opposed these introductions on the basis that the category called Sri Lankan Writing in English did not exist and that our writers were incapable of creating an idiom that could convey experiences that were genuinely Sri Lankan. True enough, Sri Lankan Literature in English was at an embryonic stage then, and infelicities were frequent. But as I recall, very little encouragement was given to these fledgling writers. Criticism was largely damaging not constructive. The international reputation that our writers now enjoy, therefore, was achieved after combatting bias, elitism, and what Achebe calls "colonialist criticism"[3] from within and without. Brief references to the recent work of two home-based authors included in the Sri Lankan section of this anthology--Jean Arasanayagam and Punyakante Wijenaike--and Anne Ranasinghe who is accomodated in the section on "Transcultural Writing" give some indication of the extent to which Sri Lankan writing in English has come of age. Jean Arasanayagam's *All is Burning* was recently published by Penguin, and her work has also appeared in prestigious journals like *Ariel, Kunapipi,* and *Wasafiri*. Other international journals, like *Commonwealth: Essays and Studies,* furthermore, have carried critical articles on her writing. Punyakante Wijenaike, who has been writing for almost four decades now, won the Gratiaen award in 1994, and her novel, *Giraya,* was made into a film. Her other novel, *Amulet,* is also contracted for a film. Then again, she carried all before her recently in becoming the joint winner of the BBC's Commonwealth Short Story competition for her story "Anoma." Anne Ranasinghe won the Triton prize recently thus adding to the many honours bestowed on her over the years. This includes the Sri Lanka Arts Council Award for Poetry which was awarded to her in 1985. She is not only the most "International" of our writers in that her work has appeared in England, New Zealand, the USA and Japan to name just four countries, but she is also one of the most versatile since she writes fiction, poetry, and translations with equal competence.

These awards and the inclusion of so many of our writers in John Thieme's anthology have rescued Sri Lankan Writing in English from the

---

[3] Chinua Achebe, 'Colonialist Criticism' *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays 1965-87.* London Heinemann, 1988. pp 46-61.

corrosive criticism that had enervated it in the past. The publication of this seminal volume on Postcolonial Literature, therefore, is especially gratifying to Sri Lankans because it affords us an opportunity to recognize the efforts of Sri Lankan writers in English, to commend them for their resilience, and to wish them well as they continue in their efforts to create a vibrant, sophisticated, and 'authentic' Sri Lankan Literature in English.

S.W. PERERA

TAPROBANE: ANCIENT SRI LANKA AS KNOWN TO GREEKS AND ROMANS

D.P.M. Weerakoddy
(Indicopleustoi 1), Turnhout: Brepols, 1997.
xxii + 287p., 3 pl. BEF 2500.

From his over 20 years of experience in the field of Taprobanica, D.P.M. Weerakkody has now presented us with the first comprehensive collection of and commentary on Greek and Latin references to Sri Lanka. His scope ranges from the remarks of Onesicritus, a commander in the fleet of Alexander the Great, down the ages to notices in the Cosmographies of the 6th and 7th centuries AD. In describing the impact which a poem by Alexander Lychnus has had in literary history, Weerakkody even goes as far as to discuss the remarks of Eustathius, the 12th century bishop of Thessalonica.

The work starts off with a chapter supplying information on the historical context in which the Greek and Latin notices took their origin, and then proceeds to a discussion of the different names for Sri Lanka used in the classical texts. Weerakkody clearly points out that only notices mentioning Taprobane, Palaisimoundou, Salike and Sielediba should be regarded as genuine references to the island. His arguments for establishing that these names really refer to Sri Lanka are convincing, and the review of explanations that have been brought forward to account for them is very interesting. The most intriguing example is the name Palaisimoundou - so far, no convincing Sri Lankan etymon has been found, but scholars have brought forward an amazing multitude of explanatory hypotheses. In fact, none of the other names has caused a comparable "outbreak" of etymological inventiveness. With due caution, Weerakkody arrives at the conclusion that the use of the "short-lived name" Palaisimoundou "was, in all probability, confined to foreigners who traded with the ports of the island" and that it was "a foreign word which did not enter local speech" (p. 22). At face value, however, this conflicts with the fact that one of the earliest western writers who recorded the name in question was Pliny the Elder, who put it in the mouth of the Sri Lankan envoys coming to the Roman Empire in the time of emperor Claudius (n.h. VI 85f.). To my mind, there are three possible ways out of this dilemma:

1) The members of the Sri Lankan delegation were acquainted with the foreign name Palaisimoundou and reported it to the Romans. Admittedly, this does not sound very plausible, all the more since the envoys apparently did not call their whole island by that name, but a river and their capital city. It is very hard to see why they should use foreign names for such prominent places.

2) Palaisimoundou is a Sri Lankan indigenous name which did not find its way into the Pali and Sinhalese chronicles, for instance, because it is derived from Tamil. I am not here making a case for Rasanayagam's awkward suggestion Palaisilamandalam, which is not only not attested, but also raises philological problems, but it might be worth observing that the Tamil word muntal (also sometimes transcribed mundal) means "cape, headland, promontory." It has often been pointed out that there is a phonetic similarity between Palaisimoundou and Cape Andrisimoundou, mentioned by Ptolemy. At least the latter name would in part be semantically well explained, if one accepted the connection -moundou - mundal - "cape, headland." And if there really is a link between Andrisimoundou and Palaisimoundou, it follows that they probably stem from the same language. Present-day Tamil place names in Sri Lanka, such as Palai, Pallai, Palaimoddai, Mundal, Malaimuntal, Mundampiddi or Mundumrippu seem to make a Tamil origin of Palaisimoundou even more plausible. It follows, then, that the Sri Lankan envoys mentioned by Pliny must have had at least some knowledge of Tamil (names). Still, there remains the problem which actual places the delegation was referring to - their capital city Palaesimundum can hardly have been Anuradhapura.

3) Another way to resolve the apparent conflict mentioned above would indeed be to assume the name Palaisimoundou to be not indigenous to Sri Lanka at all, as does Weerakkody. But then, the forms Palaesimundo and Palaesimundum, which we find in Pliny, cannot be the words of the Sri Lankan envoys, if they really came from Sri Lanka (which, on other grounds, Weerakkody convincingly asserts). It then follows that either Pliny or somebody before him interpolated this name into the envoys' report. This is not implausible, since the only two mentions occur in an extremely blurred (to say the least) geographical account, and, as stated above, they do not even refer to the whole island, but to an obscure capital city as well as a river flowing out of an even more mysterious lake. It is therefore possible that Palaisimoundou first appeared in an ancient sailor's report, took its origin in an unknown language (perhaps even an Austronesian one?) and denoted some remarkable island in the east. Whether Sri Lanka was meant originally or not, it was certainly associated with Palaisimoundou by the writer of the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* and the person who interpolated Palaesimundum into the report of the Sri Lankan envoys. From these sources or from derivatives which are now lost, Ptolemy might have culled his somewhat obscure knowledge of this name, and the mentions

in Marcian, Stephanus of Byzantium, and the *Geographiae Expositio Compendiaria* are nothing but echoes of Ptolemy. So it seems that the name started falling into oblivion soon after it was heard in the west for the first time. It is interesting to notice that Pliny's mention of Palaesimundum is not echoed at all, not even by his most faithful followers Iulius Solinus and Martianus Capella. What can be gleaned from the above remarks is that Weerakkody is certainly right in assuming that the name was short-lived. Whether it was "foreign" and did not enter local speech at all, or whether it just did not make its way into the extant Sri Lankan records, must be left open to debate. It is obvious that up to now all hypotheses brought forward to account for the origin of Palaisimoundou are not completely satisfactory. Unless new material comes to light, the riddle most probably will not be solved, and it is good to see that, unlike others before him, Weerakkody does not seem to insist on any one solution dogmatically.

In Chapters III to XIV of his book, Weerakkody features a brilliant commentary on the Greek and Latin references to Sri Lanka, discussing in chronological order the texts by Onesicritus, Megasthenes, Eratosthenes, Strabo, Pliny, Ptolemy, Aelian, Palladius and Cosmas Indicopleustes, while summarizing chapters on the followers of Pliny (ch. VII) and Ptolemy (ch. IX) are added in due place. So are discussions of poetic (ch. XI) and Christian (ch. XIV) texts which mention Sri Lanka.

Weerakkody's book is augmented by a chapter each on Roman coins from Sri Lanka (ch. XV), texts whose reference to the island has been claimed, but is either doubtful or not given at all (ch. XVI), and on the alleged Interlinear Inscriptions published by Prof. S. Paranavitana, who believed that they revealed a vast knowledge of western learning in ancient and medieval Sri Lanka. Pointing out blatant anachronisms and linguistic improbabilities, Weerakkody convincingly sets out to disprove their authenticity, and he does so with due respect for the marvellous, strictly scientific work Prof. Paranavitana had contributed to Sri Lankan epigraphy in earlier years.

The work is rounded off by a collection of extracts from the classical texts in their original versions, followed by a chapter containing their corresponding English translations. Also, the excellent foreword by Osmund Bopearachchi adds to the value of the book by furnishing the latest data on Sri Lankan archaeology and numismatics. Bopearachchi's findings in many cases back up the conclusions Dr. Weerakkody has drawn from the classical texts.

The analyses presented in Weerakkody's book clearly show that, while the information supplied by the early western explorers and geographers, such as Onesicritus, Megasthenes and Eratosthenes, was in some form present in nearly all authors discussed, outright "bursts" of new knowledge about the island reached the west in the 1st (Pliny), 2nd (Ptolemy) and 6th (Cosmas) centuries AD, whereas after that, hardly more than the name Taprobane itself was known in Europe and the Mediterranean area. Also, Weerakkody makes it plausible that the ancient western and the indigenous Sri Lankan sources often complement each other, and that there are motifs in Sri Lankan and Indian tradition which might well be the sources of some passages in Greek and Latin texts, which have so far "if at all" been explained out of a purely western context. Moreover, it is good to see that even in the case of the most controversial issues, such as the question of whether the Serendivi in Ammianus Marcellinus refer to Sri Lankans or not (ch. XVI), Weerakkody presents valuable new material and ideas, contesting old views and opening up new dimensions for discussion. So far, it has been held almost unanimously among scholars that the Divi and Serendivi mentioned as "Indian nations" in Ammianus Marcellinus (*Res Gestae* XXII 7, 10) refer to the inhabitants of the Maldives and Sri Lanka respectively. Weerakkody takes a new look at this hypothesis (p. 23f. and 179f.) and comes to the conclusion that the possibility of the Serendivi being Sri Lankans is "at best remote" (p. 24) or "not at all satisfactory" (p. 180). It is his merit to compare Ammianus' passage with the Diben(o)i and Sirindiben(o)i found in the Latin and Coptic translations of the treatise on the 12 gems in the breastplate of Aaron (cf. Exodus 28, 15ff), written by the Cypriot bishop Epiphanius around the year 370. Just like in Ammianus, those peoples are labelled "Indian" here. However, Epiphanius names another 11 (or 12?) "Indian" peoples together with them, and as Weerakkody has observed correctly, almost all of them can be clearly identified with ethnic entities on either the African or the Arabian side of the Red Sea. So, Weerakkody's implication is that the Diben(o)i and Sirindiben(o)i must be sought in their vicinity. Moreover, he mentions Schoff's opinion that the name "Serandib", by which the Arabs and Persians knew the island, originally designated a different island, probably Masira, formerly also known as Serapis, off the Omani coast. To back up his case, Schoff quotes from an article by T.H. Holdich (*Geographical Journal* 7, 1896, 387-405) to the effect that also the island of Hashtola off the Makran coast was (at Holdich's time) "locally known as Serandip". Weerakkody now infers that the Arabs, when they heard the Indian name for Sri Lanka, Simhala-d(v)ipa, they transferred the name of 'their' original Serandib to it because of the similarity of the sound.

All this is possible, and Weerakkody's ideas deserve the greatest attention. However, a few points in this hypothesis give rise to further discussion. For example, it must be asked whether Holdich was right in ascribing the name "Serandip" to the island of Hashtola. Tomaschek, writing at the same time as Holdich, knows a number of names for Hashtola (Astolah, Astaluh, Sataluh, Satta-dib and Habt-tala), which all seem to be Indian in origin, and "Serandip" is not among them (W. Tomaschek, *RE* 4. Halbband, 1896, col. 1789, s.v. "Asthala"). Is it possible that Holdich "re-interpreted" the name "Satta-dib" as "Serandip", which he expressly knew to be an old name for Sri Lanka? Or, even if not, it is not unlikely that the island was dubbed "Serandip" in comparatively recent times, in reminiscence of the 'big' Serandib, namely Sri Lanka. It should be noted, too, that any name ending in "-dip/-dib" used for an island primarily suggests Indian, not Arabic origin. So, it is not easy to explain why any island should be called "Serandib" by the Arabs prior to their acquaintance with either "Simhala-d(v)ipa" or perhaps another island with a similar (Indian!) name.

Another point that might need further investigation is whether Schoff's idea to equate the "original" Serandib with the island of Masira can be substantiated. Unfortunately, he does not offer any positive proof. Unless this be found, it must be assumed that his hypothesis is pure speculation, based on the (most probably incidental) likeness of the first two syllables of the name "Serandib" (which in Arabic and Persian texts also exists as Saran-, Seren- and Sirin-dib) and one of the old names of Masira, "Serapis".

The most intriguing and crucial thing to know, however, would be how the Diben(o)i and Sirindiben(o)i found their way into the texts believed to be written by Epiphanius. In this context, two things must be emphasized: first, the bishop of Salamis on Cyprus was anything but an expert in geographical matters - from the translations as well as from the Greek text we have, it can be seen clearly that he had extremely confused notions of Africa, Arabia and India and sometimes seems to have used place names and ethnic names indiscriminately. For example, he equates the Indus with the Ganges and says that these are but names given to the same river by different peoples, whose identities he does not seem to be sure of either. Secondly, it is somewhat irritating that the passage regarding the Diben(o)i and Sirindiben(o)i is missing from Epiphanius' Greek text as we have it and shows considerable differences in the Latin and the Coptic translations, respectively.

Even if one agrees that the passages in question are Epiphanius' work in their entirety and if an explanation can be brought forward to account for the

divergent versions, it is still to be asked wherefrom Epiphanius might have taken the bits and pieces of information which he finally construed into his digression on the peoples of "India". It is certainly misleading (to say the least) when he calls the Alabastri, Himyarites, Axumites, Adulites, Bugaei, Tajani and Sabaeans "Indians". If this can be attributed to his general confusion with regard to Africa and Asia, it is nevertheless interesting that at least the Himyarites, Axumites, Adulites, Bugaei and Sabaeans are also mentioned in connection with each other in stone inscriptions from the Axumite empire (cf. Dittenberger, *Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae*, Vol. 1, inscr. no.s 199 and 200). The Alabastri are known from Pliny and Ptolemy, while the Tajani are probably to be identified with the Taenoi in Stephanus of Byzantium. The Liberii/Lentibenoi cannot be identified because we are not even sure of their exact name, and Epiphanius' text is contradictory with regard to their location, too. It is well possible that their sole reason for existence is an error in the Greek text from which the Latin and the Coptic translation were produced. The other peoples Epiphanius mentions are even less specific than all others: Troglodytae ("hole-dwellers", missing from the Latin version), Ichthyophagi ("fish-eaters") and Evilaei (probably connected with the Evilat/Eueila(t)/Havilah of Genesis 2, 11). It is interesting that the Diben(o)i in both translations are said to have separated from the fish-eaters (which could be located virtually anywhere along any coastline in the world) and the Sirindiben(o)i are said to have separated either from the hole-dwellers (Coptic version), who may or may not have been the people so described on inscriptions from the Egyptian desert, or from the Evilaei (Latin version), the inhabitants of a biblical land of whose real location Epiphanius probably only had a very blurred concept.

Considering all this, it does not seem implausible that either Epiphanius himself (in his later years) or somebody who perused his treatise had heard about "Indian" peoples named Diben(o)i and Sirindiben(o)i and thought it appropriate to add a marginal note to the original text. Obviously the Latin and Coptic translators thought it worthy of being integrated into the main body of the text, but could not decipher it unambiguously. If this were true, it would once again be completely open to debate where the information on the two peoples in question came from and where they should be located. African or Arabian origin can certainly not be ruled out, but 'really' Indian origin would be just as likely. If the latter one were correct, it is not at all implausible to connect the Sirindiben(o)i/Serendivi with Sri Lanka, whereas for the Diben(o)i/Divi not much more can be said than that they might have come from *some* Indian island.

As a concluding remark it should be added that the points raised above are not to be understood as hard criticisms subtracting anything from the value of Weerakkody's book. They are just some thoughts on rather peripheral issues that occurred to me on close reading. As such, they indicate both that the book leaves virtually nothing to be desired and that it evokes fruitful discussion whenever Weerakkody cautiously presents new ideas and conclusions. It is beyond doubt that his masterpiece is bound to become a standard work of reference for all those interested in "Taprobanology"; moreover, it is also simply a joy to read.

STEFAN FALLER

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

S. PATHMANATHAN – Ph. D (London); Professor of History, University of Peradeniya.

S. W. PERERA – M. A., Ph. D. (New Brunswick); Senior Lecturer in English, University of Peradeniya.

SIRIMA KIRIBAMUNE – M. A. (Ceylon), Ph. D (London); Professor of History, University of Peradeniya.

MERLIN PERIS – M. A., Ph. D (London); Professor of Western Classics, University of Peradeniya.

ANNE M. BLACKBURN – M. A., Ph. D (Chicago); Assistant Professor of Religious Studies, University of Southern Carolina.

JONATHAN S. WALTERS – M. A., Ph. D (Chicago); Associate Professor of Religion, Whitman College, Walla Walla, Washington.

DUSHYANTHI MENDIS – M. A. (Ohio); Lecturer in English, University of Colombo.

JOHN HOLDER, Jr. – M. A. (Illinois, Chicago) Ph. D (Southern Illinois); Associate Professor of Philosophy, St. Norbert College, Wiscounsin.

JOHN STELLA – M. A. (Oxford), Ph. D (Western Australia); Associate Professor of English, University of Western Australia.

C. N. ARSECULERATNE – Dip. Bact. (Manch.), D. Phil (Oxford); Emeritus Professor, University of Peradeniya.

STEFAN FALLER – Ph. D (Freiburg); Lecturer in Classical Philology, University of Freiburg,

Cover printed for the Editorial Board of the Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities
University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya by T. B. S. Godamunne & Sons Ltd.,
Sithumina Printers, No. 20, Colombo Street, Kandy.