# SONAHAR

## A BRIEF HISTORY

OF

## THE MOORS OF CEYLON



BY

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TO

SIR SOLOMON DIAS BANDARANAIKE,

K.C.M.G., Kt., J.P., F.R.C.I., M.C.B.R.A.S.,

MAHA MUDALIYAR AND EXTRA A.D.C.

TO

HIS EXCELLENCY, THE GOVERNOR

OF

CEYLON.





"The fact that in so limited a book on so large a theme everything cannot receive equally full treatment, may excuse the tit-bit style of some of it. One of the best arguments against vegetarianism is that if we were bigotted vegetarians we would have to eat too much. Our brother, the ox, and our sister, the cow, are good enough to consume cartloads of grass and hay and give them to us in the form of concentrated food. On the same principle a writer deserves some little credit who browses over some acres of books, in order to serve up a dish of steaks which may prove nutritous and not tough."

——E. J. HARDY.

## LIST.

OF

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Tennent's *Ceylon: An account of the Island, Physical, Historical and Topographical.*

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A. M. Ferguson's, *British Administration in Ceylon.*

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## CHAPTER I.

THE NAME "MOORS" A MISNOMER—ABSENCE OF INFORMATION REGARDING EARLY HISTORY—THE ARAB EMPIRE OF THE FIRST CENTURY—COSMAS—THE EMPORIUM OF KALAH—SOLEYMAN—ABU ZEYD.

THERE is hardly any other section of Ceylon's diverse communities regarding the early history and origin of which so little is known as that class of the island's permanent population which is commonly known as the Ceylon Moors. To begin with, the very term "Moor" by which these people are designated is a misnomer. It is suggested that the expression came into being in much the same manner that the early European historians and writers applied the name *Gentoo* to all the inhabitants of Southern India without distinction.

In its present form, the word "Moor" is traced through the Spanish *Moro* and

the Portuguese *Mouro,* either to the Mauri, the ancient inhabitants of Mauretania, now known as Morocco, or as Tennent, the famous historian of Ceylon suggests, to Moghrib. However that may be, it is certain that the only point in common between the Moors of Ceylon and the natives of Morocco is the religion of the Prophet Mohamed.

The Ceylon Moors lay no claim to African origin, just as they resent the suggestion that they are of Dravidian extract. It is not that they feel that any discredit attaches to being classified as Tamils, but being of Arab extract, they take a natural pride in tracing their ancestry to a race of people who were in their day the pioneers of civilisation in the East. More than this, it must be remembered that the Moors of Ceylon are Muslims without execption. It is not to be wondered therefore that they are anxious to assert their origin from the land of the Prophet.

The beginnings of Arab settlement in Ceylon appear to be shrouded in oblivion. With the exception of the fragmentary relics of the distant past scattered over a period of many centuries, the story of the present day Moors who are the descendants of these settlers, hitherto has remained unrecorded. The pleasure derived from writing these pages and the persuasions of his Moorish friends, are the only reasons which have induced the writer to appear in print. Apart from the absence of anything like a continuous narrative describing the growth and development of these people, nearly all the information which the writer has been able to glean from the more educated Moors, is purely legendary. Some pains have been taken so verify facts and it is hoped that the reader will appreciate the spirit in which the writing of this history has been undertaken and not pause to dispute insignificant details of a parochial nature.

However meagre the material available, there is sufficent evidence to show to the unprejudiced mind that the subjects of this history had their origin in the Arab settlers of old who bulk so largely on the horizon during the earliest dawn of Ceylon history.

Coming to the Christian Era, it is necessary first to take a glance at the history of the great Arab empire which flourished in the First Century. At that time the Arabs were the cleverest geographers and greatest navigators of the world. They were a nation of traders and sea-farers. Their explorers travelled all the known lands east of Suez and their sailors scoured all the known seas. Arabia was a recognised seat of learning. Her astronomers, mathematicians and metaphysicians were the foremost in the exact and speculative sciences. Her caravans monopolised nearly all the overland transport of the rich merchandise of the East, just as her ships had no rivals as the carriers from India and distant China. Even to the present day certain expressions which are peculiar to the terminology of navigation are traceable to the Arabic language.

It was during this period of commercial prosperity, when the big-bellied sails of the Arab galleons were familiar objects on the Eastern main, that Ceylon came into the scheme of things One vessel followed



another; the desire for travel had increased, and we find the geographer and the historian following in the wake of the merchant.

One of the earliest undisputed authorities on whom we have to rely for information of this period is Cosmas Indicopleustes. In *The Christian Topography of the Universe* there is an account of the Arab trade with Malabar and the Eastern Archipealgo. From this point onwards there has been a succession at varying intervals of pioneers of discovery and travel.

That these early traders had commercial intercourse with Ceylon is recorded by Nevill, C. C. S., in a contribution to the journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch, in 1881. He refers to a much earlier period than that of Cosmas when he states that the maharajahs of Zabedj ruled Kalah from 100 B .C. to 700 A. D.—The Emporium of Kalah which is mentioned by Nevill is supposed by some to be the ancient name of a seaport which was situated at the estuary

of the Kala Oya, a river in the north Western Province of Ceylon. Others aver that Kalah and Point-de-Galle in the Southern Province are one and the same, and in this connection it is interesting to note the remarkable similarity in the names "Galle" and *Kaly*, the Tamil for the same port. Whichever the correct situation, all are agreed that Kalah was somewhere in Ceylon and that it was a sea-bord town with a harbour.

Although Nevill gives the date of the domination of Kalah by the maharajahs of Zabedj as 100 B. C. to 700 A. D. he adds:—

"The truth, however, is that there were Arabs in Ceylon ages before the earliest date in these conjectures."

The "conjectures" occur in a foot-note on page 607 of Tennent's History of Ceylon and reads as follows:—

"Mounstuart Elphinstone, on the authority of Agatharcides (as quoted by Diodorus and Photius) says, that from all that appears in that author, we



should conclude that two centuries before the Christian Era the trade between India and the ports of Sabaea was entirely in the hands of the Arabs."

Nevill goes on to say:—

"The whole north-west coast and Jaffna has from the most ancient times been peopled by the Tamils and the Moors, thus accounting for the districts being under the maharajahs of Zabedj, who extended their empire and ruled the Malay Islands, Kalah and Travancore."

This last establishes beyond doubt the connections of Arabia with Ceylon over two thouand years ago.

Soleyman, an Arab trader and explorer, recounts his visit to Ceylon in 850 A. D. and mentions a pilgrimage to Adam's Peak. And here is a most significant fact. One cannot think of an Arabian, ignorant of the language of the indigenous inhabitants of a country, unlike its people in every respect in regard to habits, customs, diet and observances, undertaking a long and perilous journey into the heart of an unknown courtry. Does it not suggest that

the Arabs had been in the country some time already, that they were known to the original inhabitants of Ceylon and wielded influence and were therefore permitted to travel far into the interior unmolested?

Fifty years later, in the year 900 A.D. we hear of another Arab, by name Abou Zeyd. He supports the stories of Cosmas and Soleyman and describes the still flourishing port of Kalah. Zeyd's narrations are based on the experiences of other travellers, one of whom was Ibn Wahab who included "Serendib" in his travels. Wahab like his predecessors made careful observations and collected much information regarding ancient Lanka for he is able to tell us that the *Maya Rata* or "Pepper Country", one of the three oldest divisions of Ceylon, was situated between Kalah on the coast and the *Ruhuna Rata* in the South East.

## CHAPTER II.

ARAB SUPREMACY IN THE EAST—SINBAD—BATUTA—SHAIK ABOU ABD ALLAH—ADAM'S PEAK—KNOX'S TESTIMONY.

N the East, the Arabs struggled long with the Turks for absolute supremacy. Both nations were powerful and a protracted war-fare followed. In the end, the Arabs lost, but they were not completely defeated for they continued to be the first sea-power in the Indian Ocean.

More intimate relations between the Arabs and Ceylon commenced on 1st May, 712 A. D., when the great Sind Invasion was undertaken by the famous boy-general, Mohamed Kassim. This campaign of slaughter and devastation, which led to the foundation of a great eastern empire, was provoked by the desire of Walid, the sixth Kaliph, to punish the Karak and Mede pirates who plundered certain vessels returning from

Ceylon laden with presents for the Kaliphate.

This transmission of presents from Ceylon to the Kaliphate. if it does not suggest the submission implied in a tribute paid by the permanent inhabitants of Ceylon, gives the impression that the Arab traders and settlers domiciled in the Island ackowledged the authority of their home Government. It also indicates that the power of the mother country was so far-reaching that not even her most distant sons could have lightly escaped their obligations. In this connection it is interesting to note that in Lane's edition of the *Arabian Nights*, the story is related of Sinbad of the Sea who on his seventh voyage was shipwrecked whilst returning from Ceylon after having conveyed the presents of Haroun Al Raschid to the King of Serendib.

Soon after the great invasion, vessels began to come out East in increasing numbers. With territorial expansion





came the concomittant development of trade. The spices of Ceylon which had gained fame already in the time of King Solomon was in greater demand as the sources of supply became better known. A flourishing trade was carried on in the export to Europe of the fragrant bark of the cinnamon bush which many centuries later gained a much wider advertisement by Bishop Heber's Hymn which gave rise to the "spicy breezes" illusion.

The produce of Ceylon was first shipped to Arabia whence it was transported to the shores of the Mediterranean. From there it was distributed throughout Europe where it was richly prized. This trade connection with Arabia is mentioned by Albert Gray in his English rendering of the French version of Defremery and Sanguinetti's travels of Ibn Batuta. Gray says:—

"From the swift rise of the Mohamedan power in the Seventh Century, down to the arrival of Vasco da Gama at Calicut in 1498, the trade of Europe

with the East, was in the hands of the Arabs. The carrying to Europe was done in their ships, but in the Indian seas, a vast coast trade was developed by all the nations of the Indian seabord, Persians, the races of India, Ceylon, the Eastern Islands, and China."

The next great Arab whose travels in Ceylon are well known, is Ibn Batuta. His descriptions of what he saw throw a flood of light on the customs and history of the period, in addition to the information of topographical interest which he records. He appears to have spent a much longer period in Ceylon than most others of his way. During his sojourn he went on a pilgrimage to the Peak. For this purpose, the monarch of the maritime regions of Ceylon furnished him with an escort, palanquin-bearers, and the equipment necessary for a long and tedious journey.

All this again to a perfect stranger, and one who comes to dispute with the Buddhists of this country that the footprint on Adam's Peak is that of Adam





and not the Buddha's. The courtesy and hospitality which Batuta frequently states was extended to him on every hand implies that the Arabs and the natives of Ceylon were on excellent terms of friendship. And so it well might have been. Could it be that the Arabs who had settled along the coast for hundreds of years now and their descendants, had set up a government unto themselves, independently of the Sinhalese King, since such an institution could not have been viewed with disfavour by the Sinhalese who were never a sea-going people ?

Describing the journey to the Sacred Mountain Batuta says:—

"We left Bender Selaouat, a little town, and after quitting it we traversed some rough country, much of it under water. There were numbers of elephants there, which do no manner of harm to pilgrims, nor to strangers, and that is by the holy influence of Shaik Abou Abd Allah, son of Khafif, the first to open the way to visiting the foot"

The little township of *Bender Selaouat* which is mentioned here is said to be no other than Chilaw, the word *Selaouat* being a corrupt form of *Salapam*, "diving in water"; the reference is undoubtedly to the diving for oysters at the pearl banks off Chilaw. Even in the earliest days the services of the Arab divers of the Persian Gulf had to be requisitioned whenever it was decided to fish for oysters. Incidentally, as in the similarity between *Kaly* and Galle, in this case the Sinhalese name for Chilaw is *Halawatta*, which bears a strong etymological resemblance to *Selaouat*.

To return to Batuta, his account of the manner in which the Shaik freed the road to Adam's Peak of the wild beasts that haunted its neighbourhood recalls the legend of St. George and the Dragon and is related here owing to its fascinating interest.

Muslims believe that when our first parents were banished from Eden they were sent to Ceylon which from its natural beauty and productiveness



served to mitigate the bitterness of their exile. For this reason the Arab Muslims when they came to Ceylon often seized the opportunity of visiting the Peak to examine the foot-print of their first father. The routes to this mountain, the *Pico di Adam* of the Portuguese and *Sri Pada* of the Buddhists, are named the *Way of Baba* and the *Way of Mama*.

One of these roads which led to the summit of the mountain was notorious for the maraudings of wild animals which preyed on unwary pilgrims. The Shaik and a party of friends were going along this road one day when they were set upon by an elephant. Some fled, others stood rooted to the ground with fear, whilst the Shaik alone advanced to meet the monster. When the former had gone near enough, the elephant is said to have dropped prostrate on its fore-legs in homage to the reverend pilgrim. The elephant then wound its trunk round the Shaik and placing the holy man on its back carried him a good part of the journey towards the Peak.

Batuta says that:—"From that time the idolators respected the Mussulmans ..... They also place great confidence in them, (the Mussalmans)..... Even to this day they venerate the Shaik in the greatest degree and call him the Great Shaik."

The gallant achievement of the mysterious Abd Allah and the manner of his deliverance could not have failed to have impressed those who did not subscribe to his religious beliefs. The Arabs and their descendents who had been regarded with a degree of suspicion in some quaters hitherto, whose conception of God and methods of worship had no interest for their *heathen* bretheren, began to attract some measure of respect now. Many years afterwards, Knox, the captive historian refers to a Mohamedan mosque in Kandy during the time that town was the seat of the Sinhalese Kings. He states:—

"A certain former King, gave this temple, this privilege—that every freeholder should contribute a ponnam



(*fanam* = to 1½d., or about 9 cents) to it; and the Moors go from house to house in the land to receive it (except in Dolosbage); and if the house be shut, they have power to break it open, and take goods to the the value of it ..... Those Moor pilgrims have many pieces of lands given to them by well-disposed persons."

## CHAPTER III.

SHAIK OTHMAN—CONACAR—*VATHIMI KUMARAYA* THE MARTYR OF ETAGALA—SINHALESE HOSPITALITY TO ARAB PILGRIMS—KHIDIR, THE ASCETIC.

BATUTA mentions another mosque. "Outside this town (*Conacar*) is seen the mosque of Shaik Othman of Shiraz."

Some historians identify *Conaçar* with Gampola and Tennent and Pridham lean to this view. Turnour on the other hand points out that Gampola did not become the capital till 1347, whereas Batuta's visit to the Island took place in 1342. Skeen, *Adam's Peak*, fixes the place as somewhere between Gampola and Ratnapura and Colonel Yule suggests that it was Kurunegala.

Shaik Othman, it is recorded, received the dues of a certain public market for his maintenance. In referring to the town of *Conacar*, the Arab writer speaks of a sultan named Conar, but commentators differ as to the identity of this monarch. According to Yule, *Conar* was the Arab's rendering of *Kunwar* which is the Sanskrit for "prince." The name "sultan" suggests a Mohamedan and the fact that the Arabs and their descendants were the only Muslims known to have been in Ceylon at the time comfirms the supposition that there had been a Moorish king in the Island at one period. This view gains more support from the fact that Batuta who is generally punctilious about referring to those who do not profess Islam as "infidels," does not in this case speak of an "infidel" sultan. The last doubt in regard to the existence at one time of a king in Ceylon who was a Muslim is dispelled when the same historian goes on to say that the Sultan and inhabitants of *Conar* were wont to visit the Shaik at the mosque and that they treated the Shaik with great respect.

If further evidence were needed to establish the existence in those days of a Mohamedan ruler in Ceylon, there is the

testimony of Nevill. Since that writer, however, gives no direct evidence to prove this fact, the account of Ceylon by Tennent is available. He states that:—

"The assertion of Abou Zeyd as to the sovereignity of the Maharajah of Zabedj at Kalah, is consistent with the statement of Soleyman that the Island of Ceylon was in subjection to two monarchs, one of whom was a Mohamedan."

That a Mohamedan ince named *Vathimi Kumaraya* did once reign in Ceylon with a certain degree of popularity in Kurunegalle, is clearly, though half-heartedly, recorded in Ceylon history. The unfortunate prince is said to have been perfidiously murdered by the priests of a Buddhist temple which was situated on Etagala—elephant rock. They inveigled him to the summit of the rock under the pretext that a great and important ceremony had to be performed. In an un-guarded moment, the guileless prince was pushed over the precipice and



dashed to pieces on the stones below. In later times a small mound was raised on the spot where *Vathimi* is said to have lost his life, and it was customary to make small offerings here. Some say that the shrine referred to marks the place where the mangled remains were interred and others hold the tomb in reverence as that of the Shaik, Abou Abd Allah.

The life and circumstances of the death of Vathimi is another point regarding which Sinhalese historians of old leave no detail, whilst some of them do not mention the event at all. Likewise, there is the case of the Sinhalese King who was defeated at Sinipitiya near Gampola in a pitched battle with Chinese troops. The King was captured and taken to China as a prisoner, but only obscure reference is made to such a remarkable event by the interested chroniclers of a past age.

Cassie Chitty seems to think that *Vathimi Kumaraya* was the son of

Wijaya Bahu V by his Moorish queen *Vathimi*. It is said that the failure of Turnour to record the incident in his translation of the Mahawansa cannot be argued as conclusive evidence of the non-existence of Prince *Vathimi* at any period, whilst the traditions of the town of Kurunegalle and the assertions of other writers go to prove the true facts. Still there is the suspicious silence of the historians of the country which remains to be explained.

In those days the principal Buddhist monasteries were centres of learning and the recording of the history of the period fell to the lot of the priests. It was an age when religion had a strong hold on the people. What is more likely therefore than that some fanatic priest purposely omitted all mention of *Vathimi*? The reasons for this supposition is that *Vathimi's* religious beliefs differed from those of the Buddhists monks and that the priesthood stood to suffer loss of prestige from the alienation of the Court from the principles of Buddhism. In





addition to this, certain members of the priesthood are said to have been responsible for the dispatch of *Vathimi* and it is but natural that the rest of their order were anxious to screen from posterity the crime of one of their number.

In view of the foregoing facts it is safe to assume that:—

There have been Arabs in Ceylon from the earliest periods of which written records have been kept These Arabs and their descendants, the Ceylon Moors, who were originally merchants and sailors eventually settled along the coastal regions and freely penetrated into the interior of the country. As years rolled on and as trade developed their numbers increased proportionately. Simultaneously they grew in the power which culminated in their setting up chiefs and princes unto themselves. Of the latter we have definite knowledge of at least two; the one who held sway over the port of Kalah and the ill-fated martyr of Etagala.

If we are to rely more largely on Batuta—and there is no reason to discredit the great traveller—the Muslims of Ceylon in his day not only openly practised their religious devotions, but also received a remarkable degree of toleration from the Sinhalese. Without deprecating the native hospitality of the Sinhalese as a race, the manner in which the Muslims of those days were received, whether they were pilgrims to the Peak or permanent settlers, suggests that the former were desirous of living in peace and amity with their neighbours. In regard to religious indulgence, we have seen how the two Muslim places of worship at Kandy and Kurunegalle had been endowed voluntarily by Sinhalese Royalty or those connected with the Court.

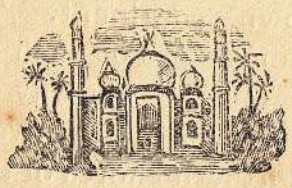
The extent of the spread of Islam in the Island is evident from the numerous small Muslim settlements which according to Batuta, punctuated the route to Adam's Peak. For instance he says:—

"We left Conacar and halted at a cave called by the name of Ostha



Mohamoud Alloury."

In another place he mentions a Muslim ascetic named Khidir, who lived on the road to the Peak, at a point which in those days was a recognised halting-place for pilgrims and way-farers.



## CHAPTER IV.

ARABIAN TRADE WITH CEYLON—THE POLITICAL DIVISIONS OF CEYLON—ARAB SETTLEMENTS IN THE ISLAND—THE MOORS INLAND TRADE WITH THE SINHALESE.

HAVING shown that the ancestors of the Ceylon Moors had been in Ceylon from earliest times, let us now examine the growth and history of the latter up to the arrival of the Europeans in the Sixteenth Century. In Europe the activities of tradesmen and navigators were confined more or less to their own continent. They were content to make use of such products of the East as found their way to the West in Arab ships and by the overland route from the northern shores of the Mediterranean and the Adriatic seas. Meanwhile the Arabs, and their successors for many generations, were exploiting to the full the vast possibilities of Eastern trade.

In Ceylon, their story, although disconnected and fragmentary was not a



peaceful one entirely. There were all the difficulties of the pioneer's life which had to be encountered in addition to the political strife and internal dissensions which agitated the country. It must be remembered that the ancestors of the present day Moors lived in conditions which differed vastly from those which obtain at the present day. Two powerful races in the Island vied with each other, the supreme authority fluctuating at varying intervals. A great part of the north of Ceylon was under the dominion of the Tamil Kings who endeavoured to drive the Sinhalese further inland towards the mountain districts. The latter in turn retaliated each time as soon as they were able to take the field again. In this manner an interminable war-fare dragged on, now in favour of the Sinhalese, now the Tamils gaining another victory.

In connection with these protracted struggles, the *Rajavali* under date 1410 narrates certain facts, which in so far as they bear reference to the status of the

Moors at that time, are of more than passing interest. In that year the Raja of Jaffnapatam was the most powerful monarch in Ceylon. He had the largest army and was possessed of enormous wealth. So great was his power that the other monarchs were in a kind of subsidiary position to his, so much so, that he collected tribute from the high and low-country and the nine ports as well which were almost entirely in the hands of the Moors. The north, extreme north-west and north-east were under the supreme power of the Jaffna King. The central parts of the country bowed to the despotism of the Sinhalese monarchs, now on the wane, and the maritime areas including almost all the sea-ports were in the hands of the Moors.

Unlike the Sinhalese and the Tamils, the Moors had not the equivalent of a regular army, or for that matter, a military organisation of any kind although on occasion they participated in war-fare in a minor degree. They built no mighty palaces and constructed no enormous tanks, nor did they open roads



and erect any remarkable forts. Their chief object was trade. This consisted largely of cinnamon, pearls, elephants, ivory and apes. They built themselves houses and some even cultivated lands and reared cattle, but navigation and trade were their principal interests. There was not, at that time, any properly organized system of exchange, and barter was the recognised means of transacting business.

In spite of these primitive commercial methods, the Moors as a rule amassed large fortunes, the conditions of barter enabling them to make dual profits. The Arab merchant would set about his business in somewhat the following manner. Having selected to embark on trade for a career, he purchases a ship in the first place. In some cases, however, ownership of the vessel was divided amongst a second and third person who were generally the ship's captain and chief assistant.

The vessel is then manned by a skilled and experienced crew to be

remunerated on a profit sharing basis at the end of the voyage. A stock of provisions and fresh water, enough to last throughout the voyage is laid in and after having decided upon the country to be visited, a cargo of merchandise which is most in demand at the port of call is procured. Ordinarily the goods consisted of cloth and musk from India, horses from Persia, gold from Nubia, and other luxuries, in addition to a variety of minor marketable products which are not to be found in Ceylon.

On arrival in this Island, the vessel is anchored off the coast behind the sheltering reef or headland of some friendly roadstead. The captain or some other responsible person, along with a few others then come ashore, leaving the rest of the crew to look after the safety of the ship and guard against thieves and pirates. Once on *terra firma* the landing party are met by their fellow-countrymen, if any, or their Moorish descendants who receive them with friendliness and hospitality. The



more religiously inclined repair to the mosque, if there is one at hand, first to give thanks to Saint Miram Sahib who is said to be the patron saint of Muslim sailors. After the usual conventional courtesies are over inquiries are received regarding the nature of the cargo, the quantity and the period for which the vessel would remain at that port.

If the cargo is very extensive a house is taken on rent, and serves both as a temporary residence as well as a store. The merchant and part of his crew remain here until the entire cargo is disposed or until it is decided to proceed to other Ceylon ports. Meanwhile, the news spreads of the arrival of the ship. Local Moors anxious to avail themselves of the opportunity of buying goods which in turn are transported to the interior and retailed there to the Sinhalese, begin to flock in from the surrounding country, as also those of them who are desirous of selling Ceylon products to the ship's merchants. The

little colony of Moors in the neighbourhood of the port is agog with activity till the departure of the vessel, when they turn their attention to the barter of their wares to the Sinhalese and the Tamils. It will be noticed that the indegenous producer does not come in direct contact with the Arab merchant, with the result that the Moor trader makes his bargain at both ends, being the middleman.

Eventually, the good ship sails away heavily laden with cinnamon and pepper, cardamons, pearls, precious stones and other valuables. The possibility of encountering pirates, the dangers of shipwreck and the hardship of a sailor's life in those distant days do not seem to have chilled the desire for trade in these hardy and enterprising navigators and we find these traits present to this date, though in a less prominent manner in their descendants, the Ceylon Moors.

In this manner, a continuous trade was carried on for several centuries. As time went on, some of these merchants made lengthy sojourns in this country,



some with the object of disposing of surplus cargo, until the ship returned to Arabia before re-visiting Ceylon, whilst others remained behind as the buying agents of the more prosperous merchants knowing the immense profits that can be made. In the process of time, the nucleus of a small colony was formed here, and from this sprang the flourishing community known as Sonahar.

As the volume of trade increased, larger store-houses or *Kittengis* were erected, and permanent dwelling houses were built. Gradually the pioneer began to take an interest in his immediate surroundings. He began to acquire land in the maritime districts which were of no consequence to the Sinhalese whose seat of government, cities and palaces were many miles away in the distant mountainous regions. Presently little unpretentious mosques of modest dimensions began to rear their dimunitive minarets, hitherto an unfamiliar feature in the landscape.

## CHAPTER V.

THE MOORS OF THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY—MORE ABOUT THEIR INLAND TRADE- THE ARRIVAL OF THE SALAGAMA PEOPLE—IBRAHIM, 'THE SHIP CAPTAIN"—DJALESTY—"THE ACCURSED SARACEN"

ITH no devastating wars, no politics and no intrigues, the Moors were able to concentrate their attentions on the accumulation of wealth alone. Meanwhile, the Tamils of the North made an occasional invasion into the territory of the Sinhalese Kings, only to be massacred and driven back later. This state of affairs continued, till in the Thirteenth Century, the Moors were in the zenith of their power. Trade had expanded on every hand and business flourished. Their influence increased proportionately and their Buddhist neighbours were beginning to receive them with cordiality and recognise the avowal and free performance of their religious rites.



The thriftless Sinhalese petty-trader and the improvident garden cultivator were disposed to overlook the Moorman's sharp, bargain-making proclivities so long as the former realized that there was something to be gained by such forbearance on their part. For one thing, there was always the possibility of obtaining ready money from the Mussalman in an awkward and trying moment; the one against his crop of arecanuts or cinnamon the other in the form of a loan—of course at remunerative interest—when his rice-crop failed. As for the wealthier classes of Sinhalese feudal chiefs of the interior, they were satisfied to receive their supplies of salt from the coast and such luxuries and articles of daily use which the Moors imported from abroad.

It was beneficial for both parties to live in peace, and this form of relationship was permitted to continue indefinitely, since there was no clash of interests, the Sinhalese never having been a sea-faring race. The activities of

the latter were confined to the mountain fastnesses, where they hatched their plots and schemed their intrigues. It was the northerners whom the Sinhalese had to prepare against, in the event of an inroad into their preserves in the North-Central Province, whilst the Moor made his profits and battened on the produce of the land.

The Moors of the Fourteenth Century, like their descendants of the present day, never missed the opportunity of driving a shrewd bargain. Where a Sinhalese country yokel still turned over a proposition in his mind, the Moorman saw at a glance, with the traditional instinct of his race, the business possibilities of an offer of any kind. The following historical incident which is related by Johnstone, besides illustrating this trait in their national character, throws some light on an obscure point in regard to the history of that community of the Sinhalese people who belong to the Salagama caste.



Up to the Fourteenth Century, the Sinhalese were not familiar with the art of spinning and the weaving of cloth. Of course, there were the primitive hand-loom and distaff, but the best articles produced locally were inferior in quality and coarse in texture, as well as insufficient to meet the wants of the whole population. Accordingly, they had to depend on India for their clothing.

Whilst things were in this state, a certain Sinhalese King issued proclamations offering handsome rewards to any person who would go over to India and bring some skilled artisans for the purpose of introducing the art of the manufacture of cloth into Ceylon. About this time, a Moorman of Beruwella, in the Kalutara District—to the present day the strong hold of the Moors and the Salagama people, respectively,—induced by the tempting offers, made the voyage across Palk's Strait and brought with him a batch of eight weavers of the Salagama caste, from a place call Saliapatanam.

There is a tradition that the eight persons referred to were drugged and bound and taken on board and that they only realised that were being transported to a foreign country when they had been many miles out at sea. It is stated that two of the victims, rather than being the subjects of such deception, jumped overboard and were never heard of again.

According to others, these founders of the cloth-making industry in Ceylon were inveigled to the ship on the pretext that there was to have been an excellent opportunity of making a fortune by taking part in a particular game of chance which had been arranged, and that the vessel noiselessly slipped its moorings and sailed away whilst play was in progress.

However the case may have been, the weavers were accorded a cordial welcome upon their arrival in Ceylon. In due course they were presented to the King who treated them with every kind-



ness in order to induce them to commence practising their craft locally. They were at the instance of the Court, married to women of distinction and given houses and lands. A manufactory was established for them in the vicinity of the Royal Palace and the highest honours were conferred on their chief. Amongst other things they were allowed the privilege of travelling in palanquins and were permitted to wear a gold chain on certain occasions.

By such methods as this, the Moors ingratiated themselves into Royal favour. This obtained for them a larger measure of indulgence which they in turn utilized in exercising their power to the fullest within their territory along the sea-coast

Prominent among the Moors of that period was Ibrahim, "the ship captain," who entertained Batuta and his party at his mansion at Galle The same historian in his referrence to Colombo, which he describes as "one of the largest

and finest cities of Serendib" mentions "the Vizier, prince of the sea, named Djalesty" who had about five hundred Abyssinians"

According to local legend, Djalesty was a petty sultan and had a band of powerful Moors and Africans who were alike valiant fighters on land with the scimitar, as they were pirates and plunderers, familar with every creek and jungle fastness along the coast of Colombo. It is said that he lived in state, with all the pomp of a minor ruling potentate on an elevated headland overlooking the sea. A place called Rasamunakanda, in Mattakkuliya, in the north of Colombo is pointed out as the spot where he had his little fortress concealed behind the huge trees of the neighbouring hills. From this coign of vantage, the arch-pirate could spy an approaching merchant ship and his band of brigands always would be ready to swoop down in their small craft under cover of darkness and plunder the unsuspecting stranger.



It would appear that Djalesty is the individual referred to by John de Marignolli who was driven to Ceylon by adverse winds in the May of 1350 A.D. Marignolli, however, gives him another name. He states that he met a certain tyrant named Koya Jaan, "a eunuch who had the mastery in opposition to the lawful King" He was "an accursed Saracen" who by means of his great treasures had gained possession of the greater part of the kingdom. Marignolli must have been a Roman Catholic. His bitterness against the "accursed Saracen" is easily explained, for he makes no secret of it that this sultan "in the politest manner" robbed him of the valuable gifts which he was taking to Europe, to His Holiness, the Pope.

# CHAPTER VI.

HASHIM AND HIS FAMILY—VASCO DA GAMA—DECLINE OF ARAB SEA-POWER—THE ARRIVAL OF THE PORTUGUESE—MOORISH TRADE LOSSES—BACK TO THE LAND.

HEN the early merchant-sailors returned home to Arabia with ship-loads of rich merchandise, they undoubtedly spread the news of the productiveness of Ceylon and its natural beauties. The accounts of its wealth and the prospect of amassing fortunes attracted other adventurous spirits and yet other merchants followed in the trail of their sea-faring predecessors. In this manner many of their countrymen came to Ceylon, until in the course of time there was a small colony of Arabs in this country. Amongst those who made Ceylon their home was Hashim and his family who are mentioned by Denham in his census of Ceylon. Hashim arrived some time in the seventh or the ninth century



according to this authority. It is said that Hashim was accompanied by his family and although the case is an isolated one, it is proof of the fact that there have been Arab women too in Ceylon at one period.

Denham's story of this foundation of an Arab colony in Ceylon is supported by Johnstone who states that the Moors first permanently settled in the island in the Eighth Century, that they were of the house of Hashim and that they were driven from Arabia by the tyranny of the Caliph, Abdul Melek Ben Merwen.

The inauguration of a colony in this manner is not without parallel in history. There is a striking similarity between this incident and that of the arrival of the Pilgrim Fathers in America by the "Mayflower" in December, 1620. Like Hashim the heroes of the "Mayflower" left their home-country for reasons of freedom and liberty; the one owing to religious persecution and the other owing to political intolerance, for we are left to infer that

Hashim's political creed was a danger to the tranqulity of his country.

Had circumstances permitted the early Moors to continue indefinitely in the position which they held in Ceylon, it is possible that the subsequent history of this country would have been totally different. However, the appearance of Vasco da Gama in the East changed the trend of events completely. In 1498, the Portuguese navigator struck land at Calicut in South India, and this brings us to modern history. European dreams of colonial expansion had begun to materialise and when it had come to the day of navigators of the type of Columbus, Arab sea-power crumbled and disappeared.

The first Western nation to whom the Arabs had to yield pride of place as sailors was the Portuguese. With Arabia's decline in naval importance, her foreign trade collapsed, and as a natural sequence the business of the local Moorish merchants suffered. Arab vessels ceased to call as frequently as







before. Occasionally a fugitive pirateer would show its sails on the dim horizon and disappear again in the distance. Those Arabs who had made Ceylon their home, with their children and grand children found themselves cut off from communication with Arabia, but their descendants have retained the religion and observances of their ancestors to the present day with that inward conservatism which is a racial habit.

Under the altered circumstances, the less well-to-do Moors were perforce driven to the land for a living. Many of them, nevertheless, continued to carry on a trade with South Indian ports in cinnamon and arecanuts. For this purpose they had to rely on the small coasting vessels or *Champans* and when opportunity offered, musk, cloth and brass were imported by them from the neighbouring continent. In the course of time, the Moors succeeded in establishing a fair trade with the Portuguese and later with the Dutch in regard to whom the Moor was the middleman. Those of them

who had not the necessary capital to engage in export trade with India became pedlars and hawkers whilst a few made large profits through the exploitation of the salt pans on the Western and Southern sea-bord. For many years afterwards, almost the entire inland trade in salt had been in the hands of the Moors. Just as their ancestors transported their merchandise overland by camel caravan, the local Moor in those days of difficult communication conveyed their salt from the coast to the Sinhalese Capital and other interior towns by means of *tavalam* or pack-bulls.

The Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Vol: II, Part II, 1853, describes the Moors of the Chilaw and Puttalam districts as follows:—

"They carry on a very extensive trade in rice, salt, indigo. chanks, cheya, etc. and by making advances to the natives for the purpose of repairing their tanks, were the means of keeping the nothern part of the island in a



very prosperous condition. They are the most industrious class; they are traders, boutique-keepers, master-fishers, etc. They also deal largely in cattle and are frequent purchasers of Government taxes.....They are for the most part confined to the immediate neighbourhood of the sea; there are however Moor villages scattered about the interior....."

## CHAPTER VII.

PORTUGUESE COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISE—SETTLEMENTS ALONG THE COAST—LORENZO DE ALMEIDA—THE CEYLON MOORS RESIST A LANDING—DESTRUCTION OF A MOSQUE.

N the same way that the arrival of the Portuguese in 1496 in Calicut meant the commercial extinction of the Coast Moors of that country, their appearance in Ceylon in 1505 marked the downfall of the Ceylon Moors. The rounding of the Cape by Vasco da Gama was an epoch-making event in many ways. The news spread with great rapidity and particularly in Portugal which was at the time one of the leading naval powers in the west, there was great speculation in regard to the possibilities of trade with the East, now that direct communications had been opened. Extravagant stories of the fabulous wealth of India, with her gold and spices and precious stones, created a headlong desire for the adventure of reaching this El Dorado. The



intriguing fascination of the mystic East with its Pagoda Tree with leaves of gold stirred wild dreams in a people by nature imaginative. To the merchant and explorer alike, the gentleman adventurer and the fugitive from justice and not a few wild-cat speculators and pirates, the lure of the land of golden dreams was irresistible. Nor did the pious Catholic missionary shrink from the arduous labours which awaited him in this new vineyard, Every vessel bound for the East brought small knots of this heterogeneous mob. Chief among them were the merchants who were anxious to carry back in their own ships the rich produce of India and the neighbouring countries.

It was not long before the Coast Moors of South India began to realise the perilous condition of their trade. At first they made some slight show of resistance which in time developed into open defiance. Failing in both these methods of compelling the Portuguese to abandon their designs on the coastal regions,

the former tried to create differences between the Portuguese and the Hindus, but without any appreciable measure of success.

By 1504, the Europeans had annexed some possessions in India and were steadily displacing the Arabs both on land and sea. The latter having had to admit the superiority of the Portuguese sailors began to show signs of a disposition to make way for the Westerners. However, the nation which had for so many centuries wielded undisputed supremacy in the Indian seas were reluctant to give up their privileges. As a retaliatory measure, they roved the high seas and plundered Portuguese ships returning to Europe heavily laden. This precarious form of existence did not continue for any considerable length of time. In order to put a stop to further depredation, Francisco de Almeida, the Portuguese Viceroy of India, in 1505 sent his son, Lorenzo, to capture some of the tramp vessels of the Moors and the Arabs. The freebooters, so as to avoid



an open engagement with the enemy were passing far to the South of Ceylon, by way of the Maldive Islands. Whilst in pursuit of them, Lorenzo drifted to Colombo by reason of contrary winds. On the eventful day of his landing at Colombo Arab and Moorish predominance along the littoral of Ceylon was doomed for ever. Up to that time the Moors held first place along the seabord of Ceylon. Since then they have never regained the distinction.

The Portuguese soldiers upon arrival were described to Parakrama Bahu, the King of Ceylon, as a race of men "exceeding white and beautiful. They wear boots and hats of iron and always move about. They eat white stones and drink blood; they have guns that make a noise like thunder. and even louder, and a ball shot from one of them, after flying some leagues will break a castle of marble and even of iron"

Needless to say the contest between these supermen and the Moors was an unequal one. The Portuguese were

trained and disciplined soldiers conversant with modern methods of war-fare and equipped with weapons unheard of by the peaceful and industrious Moor, but the former were too much taken up with the beauty of the country to pay any attention to the Moors. Instead, they sent an embassy to the Sinhalese king asking for permission to trade, and this request was granted.

Percival states that the difficulty the Sinhalese felt in defending themselves against the Moors and the Arabs influenced the former to receive Almeida hospitably, and the Portuguese who were the natural enemies of the Moors did not miss the opportunity to destroy a Mohamedan mosque which stood near the root of the South-West arm of the Colombo breakwater. The exact site of this mosque is said to be at Gal Baak, where the Harbour Master's Office once stood. Tennent says that the spot was held in veneration by the local Muslims as being the tomb of one of their saints. Several Colombo Moors of the older generation





to the present day subscribe to this view.

In 1827 a slab of stone which was used as the door step of a dwelling-house in the Pettah of Colombo was found, bearing a Cufic inscription of the Tenth Century. It is still a matter of doubt as to whether this stone originally belonged to the mosque at Gal Baak.

During the twelve years following 1505, nothing is known concerning the Portuguese and their relations with Ceylon They were busy extending their possessions in India during this time. Having made Goa their capital for India, they went further east till they conquered Malacca. The annexation of that place had the effect of bringing Ceylon into the scheme of things again. From its convenient situation between Goa and Malacca, Ceylon became a desirable possession and the Portuguese decided on its conquest.

In the meanwhile the Moors of Ceylon were happy to be left to carry

on their inland trade unmolested by the interference of an outside power. However, tales of the cruelty and hatred of the Portuguese towards the followers of the Prophet in Calicut had reached Ceylon and their co-religionists here were in fear and trembling at the possibility of a second visit from the Christians. The Moors appreciated the extent of loss that would be sustained if the Portuguese established themselves in Ceylon. Knowing the natural animosity of the Portuguese towards them and remembering the wanton insult by the desecration of their mosque in 1505, they had a foretaste of what was in store for them. Even more important than this was the fact that in the event of hostilities between the Portuguese and the Sinhalese, the Moors who were largely domiciled along the sea-coast would be in a relatively closer proximity to a powerful enemy engaged in a bloody war-fare.

Accordingly, they set about ways and means to meet the impending evil.



Their behaviour towards the less opulent Sinhalese of the Low-country became more cordial. By this friendly attitude they contrived to ingratiate themselves into the good graces of those in power and succeeded in making a secret treaty with the Sinhalese. They related to the ministers of the State, the avarice and cruelty of the Portuguese in India and grossly exaggerated the stern measures which had been employed to subjugate the Indians. Everything possible was done to create dread and suspicion in the minds of the Sinhalese by tales of the frightfulness and horrors which have followed in the wake of European conquest on the neighbouring continent.

## CHAPTER VIII

THE CROSS VS THE CRESCENT—THE YONGALLE EPISODE—THE MUD FORT BESEIGED BY THE CEYLON MOORS—SINHALESE AND MOORS ATTACK THE PORTUGUESE—MAYA DUNNE AND RAYIGAM BANDARA—THE AKURANA MOORS—MOORS BECOME THE ALLIES OF THE PORTUGUESE—DE COUTO'S TRIBUTE.

T length Lopez Suarez Albegaria arrived at Colombo in 1517 with a fleet of seventeen ships. The Moors of Colombo made a feeble attempt to prevent a landing, but were soon overpowered. The small Moorish fort which was situated at the corner of the crescent forming the bay of Colombo was captured, but not before the Moors made a desperate struggle to defend it. There was much wanton blood shed in the conflict. The superior arms and training of the Portuguese easily asserted themselves over the antiquated weapons of the undisciplined Moors. As if remembering the Moroccan hordes from northern



Africa which over-ran and pillaged the south of Europe, the Portuguese in Ceylon almost out-rivalled the savagery which had been inflicted on them in a past age.

Having established themselves in Colombo, the Portuguese commenced a vigorous campaign of the Cross against the Crescent. The Moors were subjected to every torture and humiliation. It is supposed that it was during this time that the martyrdom of two Moorish saints took place at Mutwal in the north of Colombo. The story has a live legendary interest and is deep-rooted in the neighbourhood of the scene where the incident is said to have taken place.

It is said that a party of Portuguese soldiers be-sotten with drink came upon a pretty Moorish girl who had gone to the sea-shore with her brother to pick drift-wood. Terrified by the appearance and demeanour of the strangers she fled calling out to her brother for help. Seeing that resistance would be of no

avail he followed his sister. Both were pursued through the wooded jungles of Mutwal and the young Muslim was eventually tracked down to a spot behind the convent of the Brothers of the Christians Schools of today. Here the hunted Moor stood on a rocky crag overlooking the sea. With the enemy gaining on him every second, the faithful follower of the Prophet raised his voice and called on God to save him, whereupon the ground opened under his feet and received him.

A small mosque has been built on the spot to commemorate the incident the victim of which is regarded as a saint. Many fanciful tales are told about this mosque, in the interior of which is the walled entrance to a subterranean passage which the present trustee states leads to Mecca.

The unfortunate girl escaped the wrath of her pursuers similarly. She too entered a huge rock at a point about a quarter of a mile away. A small shrine



has been erected here and the place is held in veneration. This rock is known to the present day as *Yongalle*, or "Moor's Rock."

Infuriated by the cruelty of the Portuguese and driven to desperation by the oppression to which they had been subjected, the Moors made an attempt to re-capture their fort. They delivered a powerful attack on it and kept the foreigners beseiged for a short time. After a very plucky fight on the part of the Moors they were forced to own defeat owing to the superiority of arms and heavier ordnance of the Portuguese.

As soon as open hostilities with the Moors had ceased and the surrounding country reduced to tranquility, the Portuguese proceeded to erect a factory and rebuild the old, mud fort of the Moors. News of these martial preparations were forthwith dispatched by the Moors to the Sinhalese King, Parakrama Bahu IX who had been watching the trend of events with grave concern,

The defeat of the Moors also contributed to make the situation dangerous and the Sinhalese King demanded to know the purpose for which these arrangements were being made. The Portuguese replied that the construction of a fort had been permitted by the treaty of 1505 and that such precautionary measures were necessary to guard against the depradations of the Moors. The extent of the success of this subterfuge is indicated by subsequent events.

Parakrama Bahu was too wise to be satisfied with this explanation. He commenced preparing for war and was engaged with these arrangements for nearly a whole year. A powerful army was collected, and in 1520, 20,000 men, including a large number of Moors, beseiged Colombo for a continuous period of seven months. Eventually, the attack was not only repelled and Parakrama Bahu's throne put in jeopardy, but the Sinhalese were forced to submit and pay tribute to the king of Portugal. Encouraged by this success and fearing a subsequent



attack, the fort was entirely re-built with stone, although both the Sinhalese and the Moors did everything that was possible to prevent the work being carried out.

For a time all parties concerned appeared to be tired of fighting. The attention of the Sinhalese monarch was absorbed in the affairs concerning the government of the rest of his kingdom in the hills, whilst the Moors were anxious to retain some of their disappearing trade. On the other hand, the Portuguese themselves were desirous of concentrating their energies in the collection of cinnamon and the spread of the Roman Catholic faith, for they were not only a conquering but a proselytizing race as well.

During this interval there followed several developments which affected the security of the Sinhalese throne. When Bhuwaneka Bahu became King in 1537, two of his brothers, Maya Dunnè and Rayigam Bandara set up separate king-

doms at Sitawaka, or Avisawella and Rayigama, respectively. The Kotte King, Bhuwaneka, had directed that his grandson, Dharmapala should succeed him as king. Maya Dunnè thereupon openly refused to recognise this order of succession and commenced hostile preparations. Learning this, the King hurried to Sitawaka and with the assistance of the Portuguese succeeded in capturing that city and putting Maya Dunnè to flight. Soon afterwards Maya Dunnè collected an army and in 1538 made another attempt to defy his brother who was the ally of the Portuguese, but again without success. Nothing daunted by his second failure, Maya Dunnè in 1540 delivered a final attack on Bhuwaneka before he made his exit from Ceylon history.

On this occasion Maya Dunnè joined forces with his brother Rayigam Bandara and was also supported by an army of Moors. More than this, Mohamedan troops had been brought over for the purpose from Calicut and Cochin.



A long, fierce struggle ensued. The combined armies fought desperately, but they were doomed to defeat a third time. The Portuguese with the Royalists completely routed them and burned to the ground the city of Sitawaka. In connection with the outside assistance sought by the Sinhalese against their enemies, the Portuguese, the late Mr. J.P. Lewis, C.M.G. writes as follows concerning the village of Akurana, in the *Ceylon Antiquary*, Vol: VII, Part III, p. 187:—

"The tradition is that three Arabs made their way to Kandy during the Reign of Raja Sinha. When the Portuguese attempted an invasion, the King engaged their services to fight the enemy. Ultimately the King was successful and desired the men to settle in the country. They asked for wives among the Kandyan women. The King gave them encouragement, and, during the *perahera*, the three men boldly carried three Kandyan young women away, and concealed them in the Palace. The relatives then appealed to the King who advised that, as the Arabs

had already taken the women by the hand and led them away, it was best to let them go. The relatives consented. The men went to Akurana and settled there. These were the ancestors of the people of the village."

The third encounter appears to have been the turning-point in the policy of the Moors in regard to their attitude towards the Portuguese. The former had realised that the Europeans had established themselves firmly in Ceylon by now and that their friendly relations with the Sinhalese King had rendered the position of the Portuguese doubly strong. The prospect of driving the Christians out of the country was remote and nothing remained to be gained by fighting any longer. Accordingly, the Moors reconciled themselves to the inevitable and once more settled down to trade.

Having decided to quit fighting and betake themselves to more profitable occupation, the Moors discovered the impoverished state of trade and entered



into friendly relations with the Portuguese. The frequent contact between the Moors and the Portuguese and the business connections which resulted served to bring about a better understanding by which both parties benefited. It so turned out that during the intermittent warfare between the Portuguese and Sinhalese afterwards, the Moors were the chief medium through which trade was carried on between the belligerents.

In the process of time, the old wounds of racial and religious difference were healed and so great was the cordiality which resulted that when in 1586, Raja Sinha I, the son of Maya Dunnè, at the age of over a hundred years laid seige to Colombo, we find the Moors this time taking the field as the faithful allies of the Portuguese.

The Portuguese historian, de Couto says of them:—

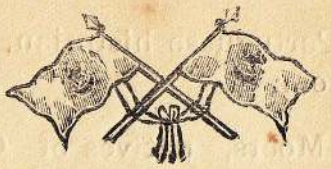
"The Moors, natives of Ceilayo of whom there would be some fifty villages,

fought with as much courage and willingness as the Portuguese themselves."

He goes on to add that:—

"They always served with much loyalty, upon which they greatly pride themselves, they being the only ones in India in whom we never found deceit."

These distinctive features in the character of the Moors may be seen even today amongst their descendants, by those who know them intimately and have had the opportunity of observing these national traits. This is accounted for partly by their conservative nature and rigid though simple up-bringing, for the Moor when once he espouses a cause will remain faithful to it with an unrelaxing tenacity.



## CHAPTER IX.

RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION BY THE PORTUGUESE—END OF PORTUGUESE RULE—THE ARRIVAL OF THE DUTCH—POLICY OF THE VEREENIGDE OOST INDISCHE COMPAGNIE—LAWS OF OPPRESSION—COMMERCIAL JEALOUSY—RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE.

ALTHOUGH the Portuguese had referred to the bravery of the Moors in most complimentary terms, as a race the former are known to have forgotten their best friends and most devoted allies on occasion. Having gained their diplomatic ends in 1586, the loyalty of the Moors and their ungrudging services soon passed into oblivion. The question of religious difference manifested itself again and the position of the Moors was indeed a precarious one. On one side were the Sinhalese whom they had openly fought; on the other side were the Portuguese whose religious fanaticism was stronger than their sense of obligation to an ally. Notwithstanding these hardships, the

Moors contrived with the utmost tact and cunning to maintain a considerable inland trade with the Kandyan districts.

Towards the end of the Portuguese rule we hardly find any mention of the Moors and it would seem that they did not take up arms with the Portuguese against the Dutch in 1656. Thombe, who gives a careful account of the Portuguese capitulation, says nothing regarding Moorish troops and this silence is significant.

When the Dutch had dispossessed the Portuguese of their territory in Ceylon, there commenced one of the darkest chapters in the history of the Ceylon Moors. Although the Hollanders' primary interest in this country was trade, the rigour of their persecution of these unfortunates exceeded that of the Portuguese, who for the most part were actuated by religious prejudice. *Mynheer's* chief concern was buying and selling. Finding experienced rivals in the Moors, from the very start, the officers of the *Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie*



entertained a dislike for the former which soon developed into hatred. They considered that the Moors were constantly interfering with what the Hollanders regarded as their special monopoly.

This jealousy led to the enactment of many iniquitous laws calculated to destroy trade and to harass and eventually exterminate the whole race of Muslims. The numerous Dutch records in the archives of the Colonial Secretary's Office, leave no doubt on this point, whilst on the other hand they clearly outline the policy of the Dutch towards their subject races.

Hardly two years elapsed after their arrival in the Island, when a regulation was passed prohibiting the residence of Moors within the gravets of the towns of Galle, Matara and Weligama. This was at the time that Galle was the chief port of call for the island, and the difficulties which this law imposed on the trade of the Moor is easy to imagine. Matara and Weligama were also im-

portant trade centres, so that it was sought wherever possible to ruin the business of their rivals. It is suggested that the Netherlanders jealously guarded their rights and were anxious to conceal from their enemies the extent of their trade and the nature of their military strength and fortifications.

As a result of this law a large slice of the trade of the Moors with South Indian ports passed into the hands of the Dutch Company. As a retaliatory measure, the Moors endeavoured to, and partially succeeded in, controlling the export trade from their position as the middlemen who bought from the Sinhalese producers in the interior districts and sold to the Dutchmen who were now the actual exporters. In order to prevent them from deriving the benefit of their position as the medium of business, the avaricious Hollanders afforded every encouragement to the Sinhalese which would tend to foster a better understanding and direct exchange with the Company's merchants.



No very material results accrued from this arrangement and this enraged the disappointed Dutchmen all the more.

On their part the Moors employed every artifice to circumvent the operation of these restrictions. They diverted their commercial activities to other ports in the country to which the regulation did not apply, thus finding an outlet for their accumulated stocks of arecanut and other produce and checking the decadence of their vanishing export trade. Further, the Moors sought to avoid suspicion or detection by conducting a considerable part of their business through the Malabars or *Gentoos* whose language and customs they had gradually assimilated. This move on the part of the oppressed Moors is supposed to have been the occasion for a second regulation. According to the new law not only the Moors, but the Malabars as well, were prohibited from owning houses or grounds and residing within the Fort and outer Fort of Colombo.

By means of this law, the Dutch *Coopman* was enabled to go into occupation of the storehouses and godowns of the Moors in the prohibited area—particularly in Bankshall Street, Colombo, where the Harbour-Master's offices and warehouses of the Dutch authorities were situated.

It was hoped that these stringent measures would render living in Ceylon so intolerable to the Moors that they would prefer to return to the land of their origin, or to Kayalpadanam, in South India where was a large Moorish colony already. In order to ascertain the extent to which the foregoing regulations had acted as a deterrent to permanent domicile in the country, a census of the Moors was taken in 1665. A proclaimation was issued making it compulsory for every Moor to register himself under pain of banishment.

In the same year, another law prohibited the sale of lands in any part of the Dutch territory to the Moors. By these





means a campaign of systematic persecution was carried on from the earliest days of Dutch occupation. Each successive law was more oppressive and humiliating than the previous one. The harshest measures were employed to enforce these enactments which were carried out to the letter. The liberty of the Moors had been curtailed in every way. Nearly all trades and occupations were closed to them and not even their religious observances escaped attention for instructions had been issued to the Dutch Governors of the Colony not to permit the Moors to exercise the rites of their faith.

According to a translation, by Sophia Pieters, of the instructions from the Governor General and Council to the Governor of Ceylon 1656—1665:—

"Only agriculture and navigation must be left open to them as occupations and they are prohibited from engaging in all other trades, within this country, either directly or indirectly and with a view to gradually exterminate this im-

pudent class of people, Their Honours have prohibited any increase to their numbers from outside. The Dessave must not permit the Moors to perform any religious rites nor tolerate their priests either within or without their gravets."

## CHAPTER X.

MORE OPPRESSIVE LAWS—THE ECONOMIC WORTH OF THE MOOR—A REMARKABLE DUTCH RECORD FROM GALLE—THE HEAD TAX—THE BATTALION OF THE MOORS.

ON their part, the Moors did not truckle down supinely to these iniquitous conditions. This was the occasion to elicit the most enduring traits of their character and staying power against odds that would have broken men of lesser stamina. Their dogged perseverence under difficulties. their remarkable resourcefulness and unfailing ingenuity only provoked more ruthlessly deliberate persecution from the enemy who pursued its quarry.

In 1744 a law was passed by which every Moor who was unable to furnish a certificate in proof that he had paid his taxes or performed the services due from him to the Company, was liable to punishment and to be put in chains.

They were not allowed to possess slaves, and any Moor who committed adultery with a Christian slave was liable to be hanged. In addition to the other services to the State which were demanded of them, they were forced to perform undignified menial duties and were employed as porters in the transport of cinnamon belonging to the Company, and as palanquin-bearers.

However, after many years had elapsed, the persecution was relaxed in proportion to the realisation of the indispensable worth of the Moor as an economic unit in the societyof the Colony and as a source of revenue. In later years, Wolf in his "Life and Adventures" has the following in regard to the value of the Moor:—

"These Moors have the art of keeping up their credit with the Company at large as well as with particular care among the Europeans, and a Moor is hardly ever known to be brought into a Court of Justice. The Company often



makes use of their talents, particularly when it wants to buy a tax upon any article of commerce. Nobody understands the value of pearls and precious stones as well as they do, as in fact they are continually employed in the boring of pearls; and the persons who are used to farm the Pearl Fishery always rely on their skill in this article as well as in arithmetic to inform them what they are to give for the whole fishery."

Whilst natural hatred and arrogance always formed a barrier between the Dutch and the Moors the inside history of the Dutch government of Ceylon reveals the true commercial instinct of the Hollander, as the following translation by Mr R. G. Anthonisz, of the "Resolutions and Sentences of the Council of the Town of Galle," shows:—

"Whereas Adriaen Pietersz, of Madelbeek, Corporal in garrison here, stationed at the point of Vriesland, at present a prisoner, did, without torture or any threats of same, freely confess, and it has

become sufficiently evident to the worshipful Council of this Town that, unmindful of the previous misdemeanour and the punishment consequent thereon, he did again last Friday, being intoxicated, buy a piece of cloth of a certain Moor (outside the town gate) for*—— stivers, wishing to give him a*—— in payment, on condition that the said Moor should return the same to him, which the said Moor was unwilling to do; upon which the prisoner having no linen or doublet upon him, told the Moor to go with him into the town to his house, where he promised to hand him the said doublet; then together going into the town and coming near the house of ensign Leuwynes, the said Moor caught the prisoner by the sleeve, insisting on being paid the four stivers immediately, upon which the prisoner and the Moor having got into words, and the prisoner having pushed him away from his body, the said prisoner drew his cutlass, in-

* These words are omitted in the translation, perhaps because the original mannscript had been moth-eaten in these places.



tending as he says to give the Moor a blow on the back with the flat of the said cutlass, and struck him on the arm and severely wounded him;

"All of which being matters of very dangerous consequence, for as much as by them, the Moors, whom we ought to befriend in all possible ways, seeing that they are of great service to us, might easily be estranged from us, and begin to sell their goods to other nations and thus leave us altogether unprovided.

"Which should not be in the least tolerated in a place where justice and the law are administered, but should as an example to others be most rigorously punished;

"Therefore the Lord President and his Council, having considered all that pertains to this matter and has been allowed to move their Worships' minds, administering justice in the name of the Supreme Authority, have condemned and sentenced the said prisoner, as they condemn and sentence him by these

presents, to receive a certain number of lashes at the discretion of the Council, and be made to mount guard in heavy armour; also to pay three pieces of eight to the Moor in lieu of the pain he has suffered; *cum expensis*."

This incident is typical of the mercenary instinct of the Dutchman who was anxious to gain all the advantages along the line, when it appeared that the Company's coffers were likely to be affected. In many ways the Moors were a source of revenue. Apart from their usefulness as tradesmen, a certain amount of money was derived from them by the sale of licenses which permitted them to reside in their villages. According to an extract from the Wellesly manuscripts published in the "Ceylon Literary Register", Vol II, the takings from this source in 1794-95 amounted to 1,340 rix-dollars or £ 100 sh. 10 Besides this, the Moors were liable according to the laws of the land to render certain services to the Dutch Government, but the majority of them preferred



commutation by the payment of a certain sum of money.

In the last days of Dutch rule we find the first mention of the Moors as an organised military body. Although there is reference to their participation in active warfare in earlier periods, there is very little detail available of the actual part which they played on those occasions. Owing to this fact there has been some difficulty in gathering much evidence relative to the composition of the Moorish troops.

In regard to the Dutch period, however, the list of the garrison of Colombo at the time of its capitulation to the British on February 16th, 1796, gives the following details concerning the Battalion of Moors:—

The Battalion was commanded by Captain Beem and was composed of three companies.

First Company. Lieutenant Brahe commanding; 1 drill sergeant, 1 captain,

1 Lieutenant, 3 sub-Lieutenants, 94 sub-officers and men.

Second Company. Lieutenant Kneyser comanding; 1 drill sergeant, 1 captain, 1 Lieutenant, 1 sub-Lieutenant, 31 sub-officers and men.

Third Company. Lieutenant van Essen commanding; 1 drill sergeant, 1 captain, 1 Lieutenant, 1 sub-Lieutenant, 72 sub-officers and men.

The Moors were also admitted into the artillery regiments and several of them served under Major Hupner who was the Officer Commanding this section. There were altogether 134 of them, divided as follows:—

First Company; under Captain Schreuder, amongst other officers and men, 28 Moors.

Second Company; under Captain Erhard, 34 Moors.

Third Company; under Captain Ducrok, 38 Moors.





Fourth Company; under Captain Lagarde, 32 Moors.

The following is an example of the nature of the ranks conferred on the Moors during the later stages of Dutch rule:—

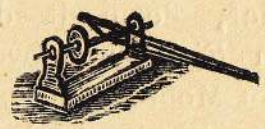
"Whereas the Moor. Seyde Kadie Nainde Marcair Lebbe Naina Marcair was by us recently appointed Joint Chief of the Moors of the Town of Galle, and as now the other Chief of this community in the commandments has appealed to us that he being the oldest in the service should have preference over the other, we therefore in consideration of the request made by him, the said present Chief, deem it desirable to appoint him *First* Chief over the Galle community of Moors residing within the four Gravets with authority to employ the Moor, Ismail Lebbe Meestri Kader as his Canne Kappel.

"Wherefore one and all to whom it may concern are commanded to regard respect, and obey, as it behoves them,

him the said Aghamdoe Lebbe Sinne Lebbe Marcair as First Chief of the Moors."

Colombo, 28th July, 1757.

The above extract was taken from the "Report on the Dutch Records in the Government Archives at Colombo," by Mr. R. G. Anthonisz, the well known antiquarian and Dutch scholar.



## CHAPTER XI.

CEYLON CEDED TO THE BRITISH—A REGIME OF FREEDOM—ABOLITION OF PUNISHMENT BY TORTURE—RAJAKARIA—A DISGRACEFUL LEVY.

FOR nearly three hundred years, the Portuguese and Dutch, actuated in turn by religious fanaticism and commercial jealousy, subjected the Moors to cruelty and oppression. Each sought by measures of increasing harshness to exterminate the race if possible, but without success. By slow degress the Moors were ingratiating themselves into the favour of the Hollanders as we have seen in the previous chapter, till in 1796 there commenced an era of freedom and progress.

The Netherlanders in Ceylon capitulated to the British under Colonel Stuart on February 16th, 1796. This event harbingered political as well as commercial and religious toleration, not for the Moors alone, but as well for all races

that inhabited the Island. Even during the short interval between 1796 and 1798, when the government of this country was conducted from Madras by the British United East India Company, facilities were afforded to all and sundry in Ceylon for the purposes of trade. The iniquitous *Plakaats* which disfigured the administration of the avaricious Dutchman found no place in the British Statute Book, even though the English East India Company, like its predecessor, was to a considerable extent a mercantile organisation.

In this connection, it is but fair to state, in justice to the Hollander, that when he had assumed the government of the maritime provinces, conditions were vastly different. The resources at his command had been limited, and so it was with the machinery of civil and military administration. For the purposes of the latter, the Dutchman had to depend largely on the services of mercenary regiments composed of Swiss, Austrian, German and French soldiers, many of whose descendants today masquerade under the designation of *Dutch* Burghers, so that it was necessary to keep a vigilant eye in order to check the rapacity and excesses of these hirelings. On the other hand, the civil government, for the most part, had to be entrusted to the care of the different classes of merchants such as the *Opperkoopman* or *Hoofd Administrateur, Koopman, Onderkoopman, Boekhouder, Adsistent* and *Aankweekeling*. The majority of these were revenue officers who had no previous administrative experience.



One of the first acts which made the government by the British appear fair and equitable in the eyes of the indegenous population was a proclamation bearing the date, September 23rd, 1799. It runs as follows according to an extract from the Wellesly M. S. S. published in the *Ceylon Literary Register* Vol: II:—

"And we do hereby allow liberty of conscience and the free exercise of religious worship to all persons who inhabit and frequent the said settlements

of the Island of Ceylon, provided always that they peaceably and quietly enjoy the same without offence and scandal to Government; but we command and ordain that no place of religious worship be established without our license or authority, first had and obtained. And we do hereby command that no person shall be allowed to keep a school in any of the said settlements of the island of Ceylon without our license first had and obtained, in granting of which we shall pay the most particular attention to the morals and proper qualification of the persons applying for the same. And we do hereby in His Majesty's name require and command all officers, civil and military, and all other inhabitants of the said settlements, that in the execution of the several powers, jurisdictions and authorities hereby and by His Majesty's command erected, created and made or revised and enforced; they be aiding and assisting, and obedient in all things, as they will answer the contrary at their peril."



By another clause of the same Proclamation, punishment by torture was abolished. Similar laws extending the liberty of their subjects were enacted by the British Administration, in all of which the Moors benefited most since they were the most oppressed class. The freedom to worship in accordance with the rites of any religion greatly overjoyed the Moors to whom their faith means so much. Doubtless, the granting of this privilege served to emphasise the toleration to be enjoyed under British rule, in contrast to the wanton indignities imposed by the Dutch, and the inconoclastic destruction of mosques by the Portuguese.

By another Proclamation, certain sections of the people were liable to render compulsory personal service to the State. This was really a legacy of the Dutch who based their system of forced labour on the custom obtaining amongst the Sinhalese Kings. In the territory of these monarchs it was known by the name of *Rajakaria*, with

which the Dutch system was more or less identical. According to this system, the Kandyan Court through a system of feudal laws compelled a certain amount of forced labour from its subjects in return for benefits of doubtful and sometimes negligible value. Abuses crept into the manner in which these services were exacted. The duties demanded of the serfs were often unequal in their incidence and of a humiliating nature, whilst the superior officers appointed to see that each individual performed his obligations to the full, were frequently unforbearing and harsh.

In the concluding years of Dutch rule, these services were commuted by a payment of 12 rix-dollars per head, so far as the Moors, against whom the tax was directed chiefly, were concerned. This seems to have been repugnant to the British mind and the collection of the tax was discontinued by the authorities at Madras in the first years of British rule.



Shortly afterwards when it was proposed to revive it, the Hon. Frederick North who was the first British Governor of Ceylon, according to the Despatch of February 26th, 1799, condemned it as oppressive and disgraceful. However. Lord Hobart who was the Secretary of State for the Colonies did not share this view. In a Despatch dated, March 13th, 1801, he expressed the opinion that there was nothing disgraceful in the tax. Accordingly, the Governor, by a Proclamation dated December 2nd, 1802 relevied the tax, with a modification which reduced the commutation from twelve to eight rix dollars, making it payable in two instalments. The revenue from this source was estimated at 60,000 rix dollars at the rate of eight rix-dollars each, from 7,500 Moors. This last figure, incidentally serves as an indication of the extent of the population of the Moors in Ceylon in early British times.

The report of Captain Schneider on the Matara and Hambantota districts, dated 1808, contains lengthy references

to this tax and urges its continuation. He also states that:—

"Within the Fort of Galle are many houses belonging to private individuals, including Moormen. The latter have a mosque. As no one has any income from these premises, especially those inhabited by the Moormen, who living in the Fort are making great progress, therefore, I think, when an order be issued to pay one pice for each square yard of ground annually to Government, it would not hurt them at all."

The report referred to betrays the mentality of the Dutchman. It was submitted to Governor Maitland and was published for the first time in the *Ceylon Literary Register*, Vol I, No 10, 1886.





## CHAPTER XII.

REMISSION OF TAXES—MOORISH SPIES-THAMBY MUDALIYAR'S DETACHMENT—THE MOORS BATTALION—THE VELLASY MOORMEN—HADJEE AND HIS BROTHER

ABOUT the year 1804, the relations between the Sinhalese King and the maritime government were so strained that an outbreak of hostilities was imminent. It was therefore considered unwise to press for the payment of the head-tax and thereby alienate the sympathies of the Moors who could be of service to the British in many ways. Those who had already paid the tax due for 1803 had their monies refunded and in the following year, a Proclamation dated October 2nd, entirely exempted the Moors and Chetties from the payment of this levy or the performance of forced labour in lieu.

Although the total abolition of *Rajakaria* did not take place till many years

afterwards, this first step towards the realisation of that object was received with general approval as an indication of the governing policy of the British. It also tended to beget confidence in the fairness of British justice which the members of the permanent population were wont to regard with suspicion at first, owing to the tactless breaking of faith on the part of the Netherlanders and the errant Portuguese.

The reason for this partiality to the Moors in those days, on the part of Government, is not far to seek. During the periods of warfare between the British and the Sinhalese, the Moors turned out to be of invaluable service to the former. Owing to their position as middlemen and itinerant pedlars, the Moors were able to collect information regarding the State of the country in the King's dominions, the military preparations that were going on and the secret intrigues. This knowledge was of utmost importance to the maritime authorities. That they did make use of





such information is proved by the existence in those days of a detachment of regular spies, most of whom were Moors, under the command of an officer named Don Adrian Wijesinghe Jayawardana, Thamby Mudaliyar. (See *Ceylon Artiquary*.)

In these early wars between the British and the Sinhalese, the Moors took an active part. The Despatch of February 18th, 1801 mentions a Moors Battalion under the command of Captain Martin of the Madras establishment. The battalion was divided into two sections. Of these, the first was intended for internal defence, in the event of the Sinhalese of the Kandyan provinces crossing the border-line at Grandpass, near the Kelani River and marching into Colombo. This natural barrier with its other pass at Pasbetal, Mattakuliya, marked the northern boundary of Colombo and was regarded as the most likely direction from which a raid or invasion could be expected from the intrepid hill folk.

The second section consisted of those who were recruited for general service, but it is a noteworthy fact that the fighting ranks were more popular. In a short space of time, the combatants numbered as many as five hundred, which figure can be regarded as a very large percentage, considering that the Moors of Colombo and its environs alone are taken into account.

Henry Marshal, F.R.H.S. in his book, *Ceylon*, gives a description of the Moors of his day, 1808–1821, which may be regarded as typical of the class that enlisted in Captain Martin's Battalion. Marshall says:—

"The Vellasy Moormen, an active, energetic body of Kandyan merchants, were the first portion of the population of the newly acquired territory who became useful to the English more especially by furnishing carriage cattle to the commisariat for the purpose of conveying stores and provisions from the coast stations. This class of the popu-



lation formed an intermediate link between the traders in the maritime district of Batticaloa and the interior provinces. They supplied for example, almost all the salt which was used in the Kandyan country, and as this was an expensive article, being monopolised and highly taxed by Government, the traders required to possess a considerable amount of capital. Although the Moormen had petty headmen of their own caste, they were like the other classes of inhabitants completely under the subregal control of the dissave and other Sinhalese chiefs of the Province of Velassy. These chiefs levied heavy taxes and fines from the Moormen, and insisted upon obtaining from them whatever salt they required, as well as other articles of trade, at their own price, and sometimes as is alleged, without any remuneration. In consequence of extortions of this kind, the Moormen solicited General Brownrigg, through Colonel Hardy, to be placed under a headman of their own religious persuasion, and their

request was granted. Hadjee, a Moorman who received the appointment, was a person of superior intellect, and highly respected among his own caste, not only on account of his natural talents, but also in consequence of having made a pilgrimage to Mecca. The Moormen forthwith practically renounced the authority of the Sinhalese or Kandyan headmen and withheld some of the dues which they had been accustomed to pay, either in kind or in money. Being deprived of their usual revenue, the chiefs were greatly incensed with the Moormen, and more especially Hadjee, who had in no small way supplanted the dissave in authority.'

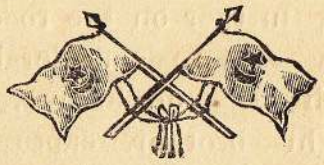
The same writer goes on to describe the nature of the services rendered to Government by Hadjee who by his loyalty and self-sacrificing zeal won for his community the favour of the British. He states:—

"On the 10th October, 1817, Mr. Wilson, Assistant Resident, Badulla,



having received information that a 'stranger' with two old and six young priests, had recently taken up their abode in the jungle in the province of Velassy, it was deemed necessary to dispatch a party to apprehend 'the stranger.' For this purpose Hadjee was selected. He took his brother with him, together with a small party of Velassy Moormen, and left Badulla to execute his mission. On arriving at one of the passes into the Velassy, he was met by a party of men who attempted to prevent his proceeding further. Hadjee secured four of the party and sent them to Badulla. Proceeding further on the road he was opposed by a more considerable party, armed with bows and arrows, who after wounding his brother, captured Hadjee himself. The rest of the party effected their retreat to Badulla. The news of Hadjee's capture reached Badulla on the 12th, and on the 14th, Mr Wilson set out for Velassy with a party of Malay soldiers, under the command of Lieutenant Newman, and attended by an

interpreter and some native Lascoreens. Having halted at Alipoot, the first night, he proceeded early the next morning towards Velassy. At 3 p.m. he reached Wainawelle, and found that all the inhabitants had fled, except two Moormen, who stated that Hadjee had been flogged and sent prisoner to the man who was called 'the stranger.'"



## CHAPTER XIII.

CODIFICATION OF MOHAMEDAN LAWS—MOORISH CLOTH MERCHANTS MUTILATED—MAJOR HOOK'S EXPEDITION TO HANWELLA—ANNEXATION OF THE KANDYAN COUNTRY BY THE BRITISH—"SEKADY MARIKAR"—APPOINTMENT OF MOORISH CHIEFS—THE FIRST MOORISH NOTARY PUBLIC—MOORS PERMITTED TO OWN PROPERY IN THE FORT AND PETTAH—EDUCATION.

TO RETURN to the civil rights of the Moors; it would appear that as early as 1804 they had so succeeded in enlisting the sympathy of the Britisher that a resolution was passed on the 5th August, publishing a code of Mohamedan Laws which were observed by the Moors residing in the area known as the Province of Colombo. It will be noticed that whilst the Portuguese and Dutch did everything that was possible to disregard the rights of the subjects of this history and wantonly wound their susceptibilities, the diplomatic Englishman took them under his sheltering

protection, with that characteristic solicitude for subject races which distinguishes British rule in the most distant out-posts of Empire. Government's attitude towards the Moors who were only a minority community even in those days could not have failed to impress the Sinhalese themselves who in the territory of their own kings were not infrequently made the instruments of arrogant chiefs and intriguing ministers of the Royal Court.

The next outstanding event relative to the Moors of those pioneering days of British colonisation in Ceylon was the incident of 1814. In the November of that year, ten Moorish cloth merchants from the Coast who had gone into the interior for purposes of trade and barter were seized and punished on the orders of the Sinhalese King. They were so horribly mutilated and dismembered, that seven of them died on the spot. The three survivors managed to escape to Colombo, where their blood-curdling tales of the torture inflicted on them provoked





the anger of the authorities. The Governor at the time, General Brownrigg, considered the treatment meted to the Moors who were British subjects as an act of aggression, and Major Hook immediately took the field and advanced as far as Hanwella. It is supposed that it was the commencement of hostilities on this occasion really that terminated in the overthrow of the Sinhalese kingdom and the annexation of the Kandyan Country. However, although the brutal massacre of the Moorish merchants is regarded by some as one of the immediate causes of the last Kandyan War, it is well known that there were numerous other contributory factors, the chief of which may be regarded as the long desire of the Britishers to be absolute masters of the whole of Ceylon. The Moors, of course, regarded the injury done to their kinsmen as the primary *casus belli*, and it is a noteworthy fact that whilst there have been a few petty insurrections on the part of the Sinhalese, since British conquest, the Moors, to the present day have remained loyal to the Union Jack.

It is about this time that Ceylon Moors were for the first time appointed to native ranks. One of the earliest of these was Hadjee of "Velassy" the distinguished, though little known Moor. A more popular individual was Uduman Lebbe Marikar Sheik Abdul Cader, the grandfather of the late I. L. M. Abdul Azeez, who in his day was a prominent member of the Moorish Community. "Sekady Marikar" by which name he was better known was appointed Head Moorman of Colombo by Sir Robert Brownrigg, on June 10th, 1818. Several other appointments followed soon afterwards and the Moors were not only made chiefs in different parts of the maritime Provinces, but they were also admitted into the Public Service. The names of some of these with the offices which they held are to be found in the "Ceylon Calendar" of 1824 which was an official publication, published in book form those days. These names are mentioned here as indicating the status of the Moors a hundred years ago.







Head Moorman of Colombo, Uduman Lebbe Marikar Sheik Abdul Cader, Interpreter to the Agent at Tamankaduwa, Mr. John Downing; Cader Sahib Marikar, Kariaper, or Head Moorman over the Temple at Welasse; Neina Marikar, Head Marikar of the Moormen in the jurisdiction of Trincomalie; Cader Sahib Marikar, Head Moorman under the collector of Galle; Pakir Mohadien Bawa Saya Lebbe Marikar and Samsi Lebbe Ali Assen, Head Moormen of Gindura; Slema Lebbe Samsy Lebbe, Head Moorman of Matara; Sekadi Marikar Sekadi Lebbe Marikar, Head Moorman of Weligama; Kasi Lebbe Sinne Lebbe Marikar, Head Moorman under the Collectors of Chilaw; Omer Marikar Sego Lebbe Marikar, Head Moorman of Puttalam; Neina Lebbe Bawa Marikar, Head Moorman of Kalpentyn; Sinna Tamby, Clerk and Storekeeper to the Deputy Assistant Commissary of Hambantota; S. A. L. Munsoor Sahiboo, Storekeeper to the Assistant Commissary at Badulla.

In March, 1825, Sir Edward Barnes, Governor of Ceylon, appointed the first Moorish Notary Public, "Sekady Marikar," "for the purpose of drawing and attesting deeds to be executed by females of the Mussalman religion." The fact that there was not a single Moorish lawyer in the island in 1825 and that the community is today represented in all the learned professions and has two elected representatives in the Legislative Council, indicates the advancement of this section of the population during the intervening period of a hundred years. Again, it is worthy of note, that the Moors who had not one among their number in 1825 who was capable of holding a brief before even the Minor Courts of Justice, in the year 1904 weilded such influence as to be able to insist on the rights of their lawyers to appear in their Fez-caps before "My Lords."

The regime of Sir Wilmot Horton, 1831-1837 which is notable for the establishment of the Legislative Council,



the running of the "First Mail Coach in Asia," the abolition of compulsory labour and the publication of the first newspaper in Ceylon, also saw the repeal on June 1st, 1832 of the Dutch Resolution in Council of February 3rd, 1747, by which Moors and Tamils were prohibited from owning property or residing within the Fort and Pettah of Colombo.

Up to this time, according to the old order of things, various sections of the public had separate residential areas allotted to them. For example, the Moors were, confined to Moor Street which is designated Moors Quarters in old maps of Colombo, the Colombo Chetties lived in Chetty Street or Chekku Street, as it was also known, the brassfounders in Brassfounder Street, the barbers in Barber Street and silversmiths in Silversmith Street, whilst the "dhobies" lived in an area called Washermen's Quarters."

The removal of these restrictions led to an influx of Moors into the business

quarters of the City. Gradually they began to acquire property in the Pettah of Colombo and in the process of time nearly all the immovable property here which originally belonged to the descendants of the Dutch passed into the hands of the Moors. It is significant that a large proportion of the shops and other buildings in Pettah today belong to this community, whilst all that remains to the descendants of the Hollanders who excluded the Moors from this area, is their ancient *Kerkhof* behind "Consistory Buildings."

Having established themselves in business here, the Moors were now able to carry on a flourishing trade without any hindrance whatever, and strangely enough they count amongst their chief patrons, the Burghers who are the descendants of the Dutch. Although all professions and occupations were thrown open to this hitherto oppressed class of people, true to the instincts inherited from their Arab forefathers, the Moors largely engaged in



trade and amassed fortunes, whilst education suffered. It was in comparatively recent times that the efforts in this direction of the late Mr. A. M. Wapche Marikar, a building contractor, the Muslim Educational Society and the United Assembly were crowned with success. After more than a generation of patient endeavour, the Moors slowly began to realise the extent of the disadvantage encountered on every hand owing to a lack of modern education. The introduction of up-to-date business methods, strongly contrasted with the primitive systems of exchange and barter and it became necessary to be properly equipped in order to meet the competition from other quarters. Other communities were forging ahead in the march of progress and the Moors as a community were badly left behind. These considerations led to a wider interest in education, and the more progressive Moors sent their sons to the best schools at the time. Of these the most popular institution seems to have been Wesley College, due perhaps to the proximity of this institution in those days to

Moor Street, still the stronghold of the Moors. There had been no Muslim Schools at the time, with the exception of the small classroom attached to most mosques where the Muslim youth is instructed in the Koran and receives an elementay knowledge of the reading and writing of the Arabic language. The founding of the Muslim Zahira College, at Maradana, although it was proclaimed with much gusto, did not for very many years rise above the level of an elementary school. It is only during the last decade that it has mushroom-like sprung into prominence under the energetic direction and untiring zeal in the cause of enlightenment by its present principal, the Hon. Mr. T. B. Jaya, B.A., London.

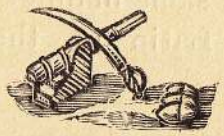
Of those Moors who engaged in trade, a large majority became shopkeepers. Their chief articles of merchandise were cloth, hardware, crockery, household goods and groceries. A few exported arecanut to South India and still continue to do so, and a fewer still became planters and made large profits







in the days of "King Coffee" which preceded the tea-growing industry. Several continued to be dealers in precious stones, having gained distinction in this line since Dutch times when they were credited with an expert knowledge of pearls and gems. To the present day the leading firms which deal in jewellery and precious stones are conducted exclusively by the Moors. One of these has even found it necessary to open a branch establishment at Cairo in order to provide a nearer depôt for its numerous European patrons.



## CHAPTER XIV.

LANGUAGE—DRAVIDIAN WIVES—NOMENCLATURE—A BERUWELA TRADITION—COLOMBO—HAMBANTOTA—*MARAKALAYAS*—SONAHAR.

AMONGST a people who have for over twenty centuries preserved their identity as a distinct community, it is a matter for speculation how the Moors of Ceylon have come to adopt Tamil as their mother-tongue. The reason for this is directly traceable to Dravidian influence, but it is remarkable that although Tamil is their language today, the Arabic tongue is without exception used in the recitation of prayers, in the same manner that Roman Catholic use Latin in their religious services.

Throughout the entire history of the Ceylon Moors, there is hardly more than a single instance on record where the Arabs of old brought their womenkind with them when they came to this



country. Consequently the early Arabs had to look to the Sinhalese and Tamils for their wives. Of these two races, the latter they had been familiar with already on the Indian continent and as the sea-coast regions were more generally peopled with Tamils, whilst the Sinhalese capitals and strongholds were far away in the interior, what is more natural than that the Arabs as a rule preferred Dravidian wives. The influence of these women in the household hardly needs emphasis and therefore does not need to be explained at length No one will deny that it is easier for an Arab to learn Tamil than for a Dravidian woman to familiarise herself with the harsh gutterals which occur so frequently in the Arabic language.

Under these circumstances, it is but natural that the husband adopted the new language rather than undergo the inconvenience of initiating an unlettered stranger into the tricky pronounciation and linguistic gymnastics of his own language. Besides,

a knowledge of Tamil was more useful to him as the means of communicating with the people of Ceylon generally, who from the proximity to India and the inhabitation of North Ceylon by Tamil speaking people, were more likely to understand that medium of speech, than Arabic. Marriages there must have been between these Arabian settlers and the Tamils of the coastal towns, but amongst a people whose religious canons permit of a plurality of wives, it is not unreasonable to expect that there must have been a large number of polygamous liaisons with Tamil women.

A certain well-known European traveller who was noted for his ability to converse in any European language, is reported to have said that the easiest way to acquire a practical knowledge of a foreign tongue was by living with a woman who spoke that language only. Such a situation undoubtedly affords unique opportunities for learning. It is not difficult to imagine the embarrassing circumstances which would



arise, making a familiarity with the new language imperative, owing to the fact that in some cases it would not only be inconvenient but also undesirable to call in the help of an interpreter.

Then there is the case of the children of these Arabs by their Tamils wives. Nothing is more probable than that in the first years of his youth, the young Moor was taught to speak in Tamil by his mother with whom most of the day was spent, whilst his Arabian father was away transacting his business, mending his sails, or may be far away on the high seas on a voyage to the Fatherland. In view of this strong Dravidian influence in domestic life, it is no matter for surprise that so many Tamil customs have crept into the life of the Ceylon Moor, as for instance the ceremony observed when young Moorish girls attain the age of puberty.

The nomenclature of a subject generally throws some light on its origin and history. The process of tracing the

different versions of a tradition backwards with the object of ascertaining the secrets which etymology reveals, is not without its pitfalls, but even the doubtful information derivable from this source is denied to the student of Moorish history, since the Arabic language ceased to be spoken in Ceylon several centuries ago. The seeker after truth in these fields of doubt and error, therefore, has to rely entirely on Sinhalese and Tamil place names for snatching a fragment of the history of Arab times.

Kudre Malai or "Horse mountain" for instance, has no Arabic name of which we know, although this bold headland off the Northern coast must have been well known to Arab sailors. The Greek name "Hippuros" for this place, however, still survives. Another example is Beruwela, a sea-coast town in the South West. This is a purely Sinhalese name, derived from *Be*, a part of the verb *Bewa*, to lower, and *Ruwela*, sail; hence, "the place where the sails were lowered," the reference being of



course to the sails of the Arab merchant vessels which frequented that port. It is amazing that the Arabic name for this place is not known, considering the widespread tradition that Beruwela was the landing place of the first Arabs who visited Ceylon. This little township by the sea continues to be a stronghold of the Ceylon Moors to the present day and is noted for its ancient shrines and tombs said to date back several centuries. It will be remembered that it was a Moor of Beruwela who set out in the Thirteenth Century to bring the Salagama weavers from South India.

In an ancient Arabic document which is in the possession of one of the oldest Moorish families living in Beruwela today, the following interesting legend relative to the history of that town is related. It is said that in the 22nd year of Hejira, which is said to correspond to 604 A.D, a fleet of four vessels conveying three sultans, left Yemen, in the time of Omar Kathab. The three distinguished pioneers were Bad-ur-Din,

Salah-ud-Din and Mohamed. The first named is supposed to have landed at *Kanoor* (? Cananore) in South India. Salah-ud-Din also made for the Indian Coast, arriving at a place named Periya-patnam, whilst his son Sams-ud-Din cast anchor at Mannar off the North west of Ceylon. The fourth vessel which conveyed Mohamed's son, Sad-ur-Din sailed further south and landed at Beruwela where he is said to have settled and where there are a few Moors who trace their ancestry to him. It is not improbable that it is on this evidence that the Moors of South Ceylon base the tradition that Beruwela was the first landing place of the Arabs of old who colonised the Coastal regions of the Island.

The name "Serendib" itself is said to be a corrupt Arab form of "Sinhala Dwipa." It is used frequently by Batuta to refer to the Island of Ceylon. The same writer calls Colombo, *Kalambu* which in turn is said to be derived from the Tamil form *Pu Kalum*, "the flower



pond" which when transposed reads *Kulampu*, hence, *Kalambu* and the Europeanised version Colombo.

Hambantota, also a sea port town, in the South-east of the Island traces its origin to the connection with the Moors. The name in use today comes from *Hambayan tota*, or the "ferry of the *Hambayas* or Coast Moors." It is also stated that the root word of *Hamban* is *Champan*, which means a boat or a coasting vessel; hence *Champan tota*, "the ferry of the coasting vessels, *Champan* is also said to be of Malayan extract and is supported by the fact that there had been at one period a small coasting trade between Ceylon and the Malay Archipelago. It is possible that the name *Champan* came to be applied to any small brig or skiff whether it came from Malaya or not; cf *Champan-turai* in the Jaffna peninsula. The suffix *turai* here means "pertaining to the sea coast" and is noticeable in place names like Kangesan *turai*, Parati *turai*, Colombo *turai*. The same root form is also present in

*Hambankaraya*, "the men of the ships." This name is applied to the Coast Moors only, who it must be remembered are a community distinct from the Ceylon Moors. The stronghold of the Coast Moors at Bankshal Street, Colombo, is known in Sinhalese by the name of *Hambanwidiya*, "the street of the *Hambayas* or *Hambankaryas*." The Tamil form is *Hambankotte*, "the fort of the Coast Moors.

Another name by which this section of Moors is known is *Marakalaya*. Although this form is Sinhalese, the origin is from *Maram*, tree, wood, log, boat, and *arkel*, men, or people; hence *Maramarkel*, the people of the boats or ships. The use of the word *Maram* to designate a boat is present in the word Cattamaran, from *Kattu Maram* to bind logs together so as to form a raft or boat. The Tamil form *Maramarkel* became *Marakalaya* in Sinhalese.

Another explanation of the word *Marakalaya* is to be found in the Sinhalese work, *Janawansa* where it is said of



the Coast Moors that because they have "much trickishness" *mahat Kallan*, in trading, they are called *Marakalayas*, but Denham rejects this theory as "purely fanciful." Besides, it would appear, that the *Janawansa* applies this term to the Ceylon Moor, who certainly is not a Marakalaya. The *Hambayas* and *Marakalayas*, or Coast Moors are a floating population. They generally do not remain in the Island for more than a few years, whereas the Ceylon Moor has been permanently residing in Ceylon for several centuries. On the other hand, the Coast Moor having made a small fortune here as a boutique-keeper or petty trader, goes back to South India and seldom returns. It is of him that the Sinhalese say "there is no place where the crow and the Hambaya is not to be found." The reference is to the *Hambayas'* enterprise in generally being the first to open his *Kaddy* or store in every small village of any importance. These Coast Moors have an entirely different history to the Ceylon Moors. (See *South*

*India and Her Muhamedan Invaders* by Prof. S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar, M. A., Oxford University Press.) The chief difference between the Coast Moors and the subjects of this history is that the former are more or less Hindus in language and manners, whilst the latter who are of Arab descent, have through isolation in Ceylon, and intermarriage amongst themselves preserved their identity, where a less conservative community would have been merged in the indegenous population. The Coast Moors are closely allied to the Mapilas or Moplahs, who are also known as "Half-Hindus."

The vernacular equivalent for the Ceylon Moor is *Sonahar*. If properly understood, this single word embraces the entire history of these people. Sonahar is another example of the different changes and transformations to which a name or expression is subjected by usage in the course of time. It is said that *Sonahar* is derived from the word *Yawana* which was applied in





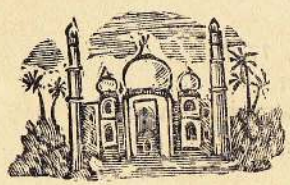
India, and later in Ceylon, to designate the Ionian Greeks. Afterwards the expression came to signify any people who came from a northerly direction and brought with them new religions rites. In this manner the name passed from the Greeks to the Arabs who introduced the Mohamedan faith. The different stages through which the word Ionian, *Yonian Yona, Yonaha* came to be rendered *Sonahar* is easily imagined. The Sinhalese of old called the Ceylon Moors, *Sonakarayas, Sonas* and *Yonas*. From the last word, we get the adjective *Yon*, "Moorish" in *Yon Weediya*, Moor Street. It will be seen from this, that from the earliest times the Sinhalese observed the distinction between the Coast Moors and the Ceylon Moors whom they called *Hambankaryas* and *Yonas*, respectively. The differentiation was extended even to the names of the localities in which these two sections of Moors lived, as witness, *Hambanweediya* and *Yon Weediyia*.

A less satisfying explanation is that *Sonahar* is derived from *Sunni* through the corrupt from *Soni*. However this might be, it is a striking coincidence that the Ceylon Moors generally belong to *Sunni* sect of Muslims of the Shafi school, recognising the *Sufis*.

As in most other respects, in regard to proper names too, the Coast Moors who are a less literate community, comparatively, have been subject to a larger measure of outside influence than the Ceylon Moors. For example it is only amongst the Coast Moors that the purely Arabic name Saed, or Sahid and Saheed becomes *Saedo*, *Sayado*, *Seyadu* and ultimately *Sego* until its original form is camouflaged beyond recognition. Similarly the name David which is rendered Davood in Ceylon, becomes in the Coast Dauthoo. Likewise, Omar, becomes *Omeroo* and Hamid, *Hamidoo*. This Tamilisation of Arabic names goes on and on in this fashion till we come to the stage where such a name occurs as *Segoo Dauthoo Omeroo Lebbai* and



wonder whether it is the relict of some long forgotten Red Indian or Central African dialect.



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