

# GLIMPSES OF THE EELAM TAMIL HERITAGE



942.101  
Som  
SL/PR

**Charles Somasundrum**

# **Glimpses of the Eelam Tamil Heritage**

**Charles Somasundrum**

**Thesam Publishers  
London  
March 2004**

Title: Glimpses of the Eelam Tamil Heritage  
Author: Charles Somasundrum  
Edition: 1st Edition, March 2004  
Pages: 60  
Layout: S. Gauthaman  
Publisher: Thesam Publications, PO Box 35806, London E11 3JX  
Printers: Setline Data Ltd, London  
Copyright: © 2004 Charles Somasundrum

*Dedication*

*To  
Shanthi  
Mithran  
And  
Aruni*

## **Publishers Note**

Thesam Publishers wish to thank Charles Somasundrum for letting us use this collection of articles as the first in a series of books we hope to publish.

We have today, in Britain and in Europe, a large number of young Tamils from Sri Lanka who are being educated in English or in one of the European languages. Some of these young people had their education interrupted as a result of the war, in the north and east of Sri Lanka. Though they are now studying in a different tongue, with the resilience of youth, they are all doing well in their chosen studies. Unfortunately, with the passage of time, their memories of the land they left behind have become hazy.

Thesam Publishers hope through this series of books, to build a fund of knowledge of the land we left behind, among these young people. It is our hope that this series will enable our young people to speak with confidence and knowledge of the land they came from. We also hope that by publishing this series in English, other young people from other lands – friends and fellow students - will learn of our land and begin to understand and appreciate our youth.

Britain today, is a multi cultural society. While we should always think of ourselves as British first, we should always be aware of the rich heritage of the land we came from. Britain has much to offer us and we have much to offer Britain.

The Tamil Diaspora is to be found not only in Britain but in many European countries, America and Canada as well. It is our hope to publish this series in other European languages as well. Already a start has been made with a similar series in French.

It is our hope that this series will set out youth thinking and perhaps, making their own contribution to other books in the series.

T Jeyabalan  
Editor, THESAM

## Contents

Introduction	7
Note One - Why Vadalee	9
Note Two - What is Eelam	12
Note Three - The Vanni and the Vanniyars	15
Note Four - Know Your Jaffna	18
Note Five - More Facts About Jaffna	21
Note Six - Religions of Eelam	24
Note Seven - The Singing Fish of Batticaloa	28
Note Eight - Ancient Eelam and Foreign Trade	31
Note Nine - Christianity in Ancient Eelam	34
Note Ten - Baldaeus' Eelam—1672	37
Note Eleven - Aryans in Dravidian History	41
Note Twelve - The Wells of Jaffna	45
Note Thirteen - Archaeology in Eelam	48
Note Fourteen - Sinhalas and Dravidian Influence.	52
Glossary	56

---

## Introduction

Early in March of 2001, I was approached by one of the producers of a new Tamil newspaper called the *Vadalee*, to be launched in London. This group of young people, hoped to target their newspaper at the new immigrant population in Britain – particularly in London. They were concerned that the more senior of the new immigrants, had limited means of communicating with each other. They also wished to provide a means by which, the younger immigrants, who had been educated in their mother tongue back home, and were now facing education in a completely new medium, could cope comfortably. The paper was to be a monthly tabloid and, though published mainly in Tamil, was to have a page or two for articles in English. This latter was for the benefit of the young people who were getting to be more familiar with English, as well as for some of the older retired persons who already had prior familiarity with English, back home.

I agreed, initially, to write an article or two hoping that other young people would soon take over. The first issue of the newspaper was in April 2001. Eleven of my articles have been published in this paper. Three further articles have however, been added to this collection.

Persons, who have read some of my articles, wanting to know if these would be available in book form, have made a number of enquiries. Strangely, some of these enquiries have come from friends in Sri Lanka and Canada and Australia as well. The article titled '**What is Eelam?**' had been photocopied, by a person or persons unknown to me, and placed along with the various books and pamphlets usually available in the foyer, at the annual luncheon meeting of the International Tamil Federation in the summer of 2001.

Over the years I have become convinced, that the reading habit is fast dying out. Perhaps sometime in the future, books will be treated as curiosities and kept under glass in museums, to be seen and not touched! A similar situation faces the newspapers. Most persons in

Britain today, prefer to watch television than read a newspaper. Even where they do read a newspaper, their choice is more often than not, the tabloids rather than the broadsheets. I was pleased to note when in Colombo recently, that the broadsheet was still the popular read and that Tabloids had not yet encroached.

This is why I thought that a collection of these very short articles would be more welcome than a lengthy tome. These articles are short enough to retain the, sadly brief, attention span of the average modern reader. Each article is termed a 'Note' starting from 'Note 1' and each Note is self contained and does not flow on to the next. This makes it easy for the reader to 'skip read' the book or lay it aside temporarily, if they found their attention lagging. Where an article has been previously published in the *Vadalee*, this has been stated.

I have titled these 'Notes', *Glimpses of the Eelam Tamil Heritage*. They make no claim to being a historical commentary – I am no historian, merely a student of history. What I have tried is to do, is to kindle in the reader an interest in the ancient and continuing history of Eelam, with frequent reference to source material. I hope this will create a desire in the reader to read further on the subject.

The cessation of hostilities in the long drawn civil war in the north of Sri Lanka and the damage to the economic and social fabric of the whole country, caused by the war, will I hope, lead to a much needed renewal of friendships. Both the Tamils and the Sinhalas have much to contribute to each other. It is my hope that my Sinhala friends will also read this book and begin to view the Tamils in a new light. There is no reason why the Sinhalas and the Tamils cannot live side by side amicably. Some of my dearest friends happen to be Sinhalas.

October 2003

London  
United Kingdom

## NOTE ONE

### Why Vadalee

The word Sabra, during the early days of the new nation of Israel, was used to describe the native born Israeli as opposed to the immigrants who poured into Israel from war torn Europe. This word derives its origin from a cactus that grew widely in Israel and flourished, despite the inhospitable climate of the new state.

The persons responsible for the publication of this new newspaper (which is a monthly) have picked the name Vadalee for their newspaper, on a very similar basis. Vadalee is the name by which a young Palmyra palm is called. A palm that in later life grows into a strong limbed and life giving palm tree. A tree that is capable of living for 100 to 200 years.

Many years ago, a man called R Atherton, who was a civil servant with the British colonial administration in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and who worked in the Tamil areas of the island, wrote a poem on the Palmyra palm. Not all civil servants who went out from Britain, as colonial administrators were mere **pen pushers** like today's civil servant in the British Home Office or the British Foreign Office. There were great scholars amongst them who left behind them books and other writings on a variety of subjects like history, archaeology, natural history, novels, poetry and the like. Atherton wrote of the Palmyra palm –

*O tree of the East, with thy thousand gifts  
In thy hand, so wide and free  
There is mighty strength in thy arrowy shaft,  
And a poem we sing to thee.*

*There is a song in the rustle of every leaf  
Thou wavest in upper air,  
Where a home is found for the squirrel's young,  
And the doves which nestle there.*

*There is not a fence by the winding road,  
Or a roof to keep off the rain;  
There is not a mat where the weary sleep,  
And forget their toil and pain.*

*There is not a hut, a house, a boat  
On **Serendib's** stormy sea –  
But is built from a part of thy stately limb  
Oh great Palmyra tree!*

*The earth is full of the great God's gifts,  
Wide scattered o'er every land,  
And he aids the nations who work and toil  
With a sturdy, brawny hand,  
So he gave the thankful Jaffna man  
A priceless boon and free,  
When He gave him His kingly palm,  
The loved Palmyra tree.*

The Sinhala occupation army of our homeland have, I understand, bulldozed large numbers of these ancient and stately trees to build defence bunkers and **fortifications** against the Tamils whose land they are occupying. But that is another story.

This newspaper plans to educate the youth of **Eelam** on their roots and about their motherland and the richness of their heritage. Though this newspaper is being published in Tamil (a language I love but cannot, unfortunately, read or write), it is the intention of the publishers to have some pages in the English language as well and perhaps in time, in other languages in other countries, depending on how this paper survives like the Sabra or the Vadalee.

This is where the young people of Eelam Tamil origin, living in foreign **climes**, can help. As time goes on, you will begin to be more familiar (in the case of those living in Britain) in the use of English and acquire the English **idiom** and expression with **ease**. A number of you will make friends from among persons of other races and stop moving about in 'tight' Tamil groups. This is a very good thing.

You should widen your group of friends to include a cross section of the society you live in, but always hold on to the fact that you are a Tamil. If your new friends from other cultures, were to ask you about your original home country or the country from which your parents came to Britain you should be in a position to speak with knowledge and confidence, of Eelam. Though educated in English you always try to retain sufficient knowledge to be able to read and write in Tamil as well. This is where Vadalee will be able to help.

## NOTE TWO

### What is Eelam

We often see the name 'Eelam' used in newspaper articles, letters and speeches by a varying number of persons whether they be students, professional persons or the ordinary Tamil of the **Diaspora**. But how many persons who have used this word are aware of its history or do they merely think that it is a word of recent origin.

Rev D J Kanagaratnam in his monograph *Tamils and Cultural Pluralism in Ancient Ceylon*, in delving into the **etymology** of Demela and Sinhela finds that the word *ela* comes from the Austric languages of pre Aryan times. *Dam* and *Tam* are from Tamil. The word '*Then*' meaning south. Hence *Tamila* or *Damila* means the language of the people of the southern country. Rev Kanagaratnam says "Sri Lanka is still called by the Sinhala people '*Ela Rata*' while the Tamils call it by a vary old name – Eelam."

The Portuguese writer Jao de Barros in his book *Decades III* translated by Douglas Ferguson has this to say in a footnote. "*There is moreover current among the natives of the island of Ceilam a tradition that this name is not its proper one, but given to it by chance; for its ancient name is Illanare or Tranate*". Ferguson goes on to say " *All these varieties of spellings represent Tamil Ilan-Nadu, the country of Ceylon*". Ferguson further surmises that Tranate may stand for the Tamil name Thiru-Nadu – the sacred country.

We know that our first foreign conquerors, the Portuguese who arrived in 1518 called the whole island Ceilam. The real name of the island was Illam or Eelam. By the time of their arrival, the

Sinhalese had long since fled the capitals of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa and were now confined to Kandy and the smaller coastal kingdoms of Kotte and Sitawake.

The Dutch defeated the Portuguese in 1658 and took control of those parts of the island that the Portuguese had ruled. The Dutch called the island Zeilon. The British who followed the Dutch in 1805 called the island Ceylon. Each colonial power called the island by a name that rolled easily on their tongue. So, in time Eelam became Ceilam under the Portuguese, then Zeilon under the Dutch and finally Ceylon under the English.

Through all these changes in 'ownership' the Tamils retained their language – Tamil, their religion – Hinduism, their laws – Thesavalamai, their music, dress, arts, food and their customs.

No lesser person than S W R D Bandaranayake (the father of the current President – at the time this note is written) said, as reported in the Morning Leader of July 17 1926,

*"If they considered the past history, they would see that the three communities, the Tamils, the low country Sinhalese and the Kandyan Sinhalese had lived for over a thousand years in Ceylon and had not shown any tendency to merge. They preserved their language, their customs and their religion. It would be a rash man who would pin his faith on the gradual disappearance of those differences."*

I shall end with a statement by Sir Paul E Peiris in *Nagadipa and Buddhist remains in Jaffna* (JRAS (CB) Vol XXVIII No 12 page 68).

*"It will be seen that the village Kantherodai has no reason to be ashamed of its contribution to our knowledge regarding the ancient history of our island. It stands to reason that a country that is only 30 miles from India, that would have been seen by*



Charles Somasundrum

*Indian fishermen every morning as they sailed out to catch their fish, would have been occupied as soon as the continent was peopled by men who understood how to sail. I suggest that the North of Ceylon was a flourishing settlement before Vijaya was born. I consider it as proved that, at any rate, such was its condition before the commencement of the Christian era".*

## NOTE THREE

### The Vanni and the Vanniyars

We have read about or heard of the recent battles in the Vanni and of the bravery and courage of the Tamil fighters, particularly the women, but how much do we know of the Vanni and the Vanniyars?

A big event in the early history of the Tamils of Eelam is the arrival of the Vanniyar Chiefs and their accompanying families and staff at different periods, from the Chola and Pandyan kingdoms of South India. The earliest being the arrival in the island, of a Chola Princess - Marutapiravika Valli, who was on a pilgrimage to Keerimalai and its healing waters, to rid her of a **congenital** 'horseface'. She was successful in this **endeavour** and her 'horseface' gradually vanished. In gratitude she built the Temple of Mavittapuram. Around this time, Prince Uggirasimhan a Kalingan Prince saw her – with her new and beautiful face – and fell in love with her and married her.

In fullness of time, the child of that union, Vara Raja Simhan once he came of age, sent for a princess from Madura to be his wife. A retinue of six Vanniyars of the Taranipar Kulathar, of royal lineage and three thousand others, were nominated by the Madura king to accompany the princess. The king, her father, followed later with yet more colonists.

The Vanniyar colonisation and subsequent over lordship of the Vanni, is disclosed in the Vaiya Padal by Vaiyapuri Aiyar, the court poet of King Sekarajasekaran. The Vaiya Padal also reveals that the land, Vanni, takes its name from the people, Vanniyar and not the other way round as is generally believed.

It is interesting to note that the mother of Vara Raja Simhan, the princess who was healed of her **affliction**, sent a message to her father the king, that he send her a gold image of God Skanda to be placed in the Temple of Mavittapuram that she had built. The king's messengers landed with the image of God Kankesan (Skanda) and the port where they landed is known today as Kankesanthurai. Another wave of colonists followed later on when Kulankodan the Chola Chief was on a pilgrimage to Tiruconamalai.

One must remember, that these waves of colonists occurred during the break up of the Chola and Pandya Kingdoms under the dominance of Muhammadan power in 1605. The most noteworthy was the invasion of these two kingdoms by Malik Kaffur, resulting in wholesale looting and pillage and the raping of womenfolk. The respectable Vellala families considered it **prudent** to flee from their homes in the South Indian kingdoms to the comparative safety of Eelam.

M D Raghavan (Tamil Culture in Ceylon) considers that the name 'Vannia' is derived from the Sanscrit 'Vahini' meaning fire. Agni the God of Fire is connected with **regal** office and kings hold in their hands the fire wheel or Agneycharka. As Gustav Oppert (quoted by Raghavan) claims -

*"The existence of these fire races, Agnikula or Vahinikula Vanniya in North and South India is a remarkable fact. None can refuse to the **scion** of a non -Aryan warrior tribe the title of Rajputra, but in so doing we establish at once Aryan and non-Aryan Rajputs. The Vanniyan of South India may be accepted as a representative of the non-Aryan Rajput element."*

The Vanni is that part of North Eelam bounded by the Jaffna Lake on the North; by the Aruvi Aru on the South; by Tiruconamalai on the East and by the district of Mannar on the West. The Vanniars have always been a proud and independent

people. They enjoyed a certain degree of independence from early times, both from the Tamil Kings of Jaffna and from the Sinhala kings of Kandy. The Vanni also served, as a **buffer** state between the Tamil kingdom of the North and East and the Sinhala kingdom of Kandy - by this time both Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa were deserted by the Sinhalas, who had withdrawn first to Dambadeniya and subsequently to Kotte and Sitawaka and the closest Sinhala kingdom, to the Tamil kingdom, was Kandy.

As the largest division of their territory of Jaffna, the Dutch looked to the Vanni for their largest income - mostly derived from the sale of elephants. The Dutchman Van Rhee writes with **indignation** that although they (the Vanniars) receive the land from the company (Dutch East India Company) they have in the course of time -

*".....become conceited and imagine the title of the Vannia is one invested with awe and so important that although they receive it from the Company they do not need to respect the Company or those placed in authority here....."*

It is hardly surprising that the Sri Lankan army, and briefly, the IPKF of the Indian Army, have been unable to make much headway against them either.

## NOTE FOUR

### Know Your Jaffna

The first of three visits of the Buddha to the island now known as 'Sri Lanka' was not to that little island, known today as Nagadipa, off the northern shore of the Peninsula of Jaffna but to the Naga king who lived in the Peninsula that was then an island and bore the name Nagadipa. The Peninsula is about 85 miles long and from about 8 miles (at its narrowest point) to 25 miles, wide. It covers an area of 1,220 square miles. Apart from the various islands on its North Western border, its four districts are called Vadamarachi; Themarachi; Pachilapalai and Valigamam.

Karainagar is an island but connected to the mainland by a causeway. Its name is derived from *Kara* a shrub that once grew here in **profusion**. There is a **Jataka** story featuring a Brahmin sage Akkita who is said to have *flown* (as Hanuman, the Buddha and others at that time were said to have *flown*) from Benares to this island where he lived in a cave eating nothing but the Kara shrub.

Velanai is another island quite close to the main peninsula. The Portuguese called it *Cais* meaning a wharf. A letter 't' was added in the course of usage making it *caits*. Under the Dutch, it came to be called Kayts. Marco Polo refers to this island in his record of his travels. Velanai played an important role in the economy of the peninsula and served as a port for sailing craft from far off Arabia and nearby India. In the early years of independent Ceylon it served as a point for the landing of tiles from India. In the early 1940s, this trade was moved to Karaioor where a spur line from the Jaffna Railway Station met the ships. Trade was two way – Calicut tiles from India and Tobacco to

India. The Jaffna – Malayalam Tobacco Company controlled this trade.

Not far from Velanai is the island fort of Hamenhiel. The Dutch called it by this name as they thought that the whole island took the shape of a 'Ham' and this island formed its 'heel'. In like manner, the Dutch called Karainagar Amsterdam Island; Analativu Rotterdam; Nainativu Haalem; Pundudutivu Middleburgh; Velanai Leyden and Neduntivu Delft. The only name to last to this day is Delft though the name Neduntivu is still widely used.

To **digress**, a Dutch lady called Frau Christina Beauker de Roo in narrating her experiences as a prisoner of war in the last war, mentions that in Delft (in Holland) there is an ancient cemetery called 'Jaffna'. She also says that it was close to 600 years old and is in one of the most beautiful spots of Delft. She also says that only the highest aristocrats are buried there. Perhaps this has some connection with the battle fought by the Dutch with the British, when a number of senior Dutch officers (most officers of European armies were of **aristocratic** lineage) lost their lives.

Another island is Mandativu that was connected to the Peninsula by a causeway from just beyond the point where the Jaffna Fort used to stand. The furthestmost of the islands is Neduntivu or Delft. During Dutch rule an Irishman called Lieutenant Nolan who was employed in the Dutch Regiment, was entrusted with the task of importing and breeding ponies on this island. He transferred his loyalty to the English when they took over and continued in this task till 1906 when it was abandoned. He had supreme authority not only over the breeding of ponies but also over the whole island. It is said that even today, there are persons with Irish 'green' eyes on the island!

Though not an island it is interesting to note the origin of the name Chavakacheri. In 1253 AD, Jetavarman Vira Pandya came to the aid of Jaffna against an invasion of the Javakas led

Charles Somasundrum

by Chandrabanu. One thing remains to remind us of this invasion and that is the name Chavakacheri. One cultural trait attributed to this Javanese contact is the *Musical Kite of Jaffna* – the home of which is the Indonesian Islands. Taking the whole island, this Musical Kite is to be found only in Jaffna today.

## NOTE FIVE

### More Facts About Jaffna

Sir Emerson Tennent writing in 1859 had this to say about Jaffna -

*"The perfection of the village cultivation is truly remarkable; it is **horticulture** rather than agriculture, and reminds one of the market gardens of Fulham and Chelsea more forcibly than anything I have seen out of England".*

Alas, There is nothing to remind us today of the neat market gardens of Jaffna – after the regular 'crop dusting' of the Sinhala airforce and the army. In like manner there is nothing left today to remind us of the market gardens of Fulham and Chelsea which have long ago fallen to the 'concrete jungles' of the developers.

Tennent also describes the method used by the Jaffna villager to water his gardens that he likens to the Egyptian Sakkias. He says that the exception was that in Jaffna, two persons were used to raise water from the wells using buckets frequently woven out of palm leaves. He says that one person walks back and forward along the lever while the other directed the bucket in its ascent and the water was then guided along a succession of conducting channels. The path of the water along the channel was then controlled, by moving a clod of earth to block the water or guide it along its route.

Every house or garden had its own well whether for domestic use or for use in the fields. When I visited my brother in Jaffna in 1989 (he still lives there), when the IPKF controlled the North,

my brother said that a Punjabi soldier had told him -

*"I don't know what you people are fighting for. You have got your own well and your own cow or goat and chicken. What more do you want?"*

To the Indian soldier whose women folk had to walk miles with a pot or pitcher balanced on their heads to fetch water for daily use – it was the height of luxury.

The northernmost point of Jaffna is Point Palmyra in Point Pedro. The name Point Pedro is a corruption of the Portuguese name for it, which was Punta das Pedras or the rocky cape. During early English colonial rule, Point Pedro was one of two principal ports in the North. The other being Kayts 12 miles to the South - West. The Tamil name for Point Pedro is Parithithurai meaning Cotton Port. Evoking a picture of a flourishing cotton growing district and cotton weaving industry.

Poetical compositions have likened the cloth manufactured in Eelam in the early days of Naga kings, to the 'Slough of Serpents', 'Woven Wind' and the 'Vapour of Milk'. During early Dutch rule, the Dutch drew up a scheme to develop the cotton industry and weaving made much headway at Mannar and other centres. A colony of Andhra Weavers and Chenia Chettis were brought down from South India and settled in Jaffna Town and till as recently as the 1950s, there was flourishing cotton weaving industry, producing textiles of very fine quality, elegant saris and other products.

Complementary to the textile industry was a dying industry using a Dye root called Chaya Ver. These roots were from a plant that grew wild in Mannar. Ananda Coomaraswamy in his 'Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon' says -

*"The old Kandyan flags were of Tamil workmanship, as dye painting seems never to have become a Sinhalese craft".*

Valvettiturai three miles to the west of Point Pedro was well known for its sea faring inhabitants. Valvettiturai also had a reputation for successful shipbuilding. Needless to say, the men of Valvettiturai were experienced and daring seamen. In the 1940s and 50s, Valvettiturai enjoyed a reputation for smuggling to and from India, despite all the efforts of the Sri Lankan customs and the police. Confiscated boats of the smugglers would be sold at auctions in Colombo. The Valvettiturai 'smugglers' bought these boats that once again went back to smuggling. I remember the days when people would go all the way to shops in and around Valvettiturai to buy saris for weddings – saris that were hard to come by elsewhere in Jaffna. I remember accompanying my sister on one such trip.

Finally, I would like to share a comment of Sir Emerson Tennent, made in 1859. Tennent says -

*"In figure and carriage, the Tamil women are much superior to the Singhalese. This is shown to advantage in their singularly graceful and classical costume, consisting of a long fold of cloth, enveloping the body below the waist, and brought tastefully over the left shoulder leaving the right arm and bosom free. This, together with the custom of carrying vases of water and other burdens on their heads, gives them an erect and stately gait, and disposes their limbs in attitudes so graceful as to render them, when young and finely featured, the most unadorned models for a sculptor."*

## NOTE SIX

### Religions of Eelam

When Vijaya, a Hindu, arrived in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. there were already several Saiva shrines on the island. One of his first acts was either to repair existing temples or erect new ones, as a thank offering for his safe arrival on land after a dangerous sea voyage.

Hinduism was the religion of the people of Eelam and of the Sinhala ruled parts of the island. The Sinhalas ruled Anuradhapura and some southern parts of the island. This was the scene when Buddhism was introduced, in the reign of Devanampiya Tissa. Siva was the chief Hindu deity of the Tamils at the time. The five Ishwarams or Temples to Siva around the island were in Munnesvaram, Ramesvaram, Thiruketisvaram, Konesvaram and Nakulesvaram.

The first of these temples, as borne out by its name, was Munnesvaram in Chilavam – a temple at which Rama is said to have worshipped, according to the Ramayana, during his invasion of the island. The ruler of the island, Ravanna, whom he was attempting to overthrow by his invasion and who was also the abductor of his wife, is said to have worshipped at Konnesvaram in Tiruconamalai. Ravanna is also said to have observed the last rites to his mother at the hot springs at Kanniya.

A brother of Rama, Lakshmanan, is still worshipped in the Sinhala districts as Saman Deviyo. A large number of other Hindu Gods are also worshipped by the Sinhalas in various parts of the island. It is interesting to note that though Buddhism is not a religion and therefore has no Gods, the island's

Buddhists, worship most of the Hindu Gods and even have ritual and ceremonial and direct prayers to them.

There was a brief period, during a time of Buddhist **propagation** when Buddhism flourished throughout India and Ceylon and various countries of the Far East. Kannaki who is worshipped as the Goddess Pattini, by the Sinhalas, was a Buddhist from South India. The Buddha is said to have left two footprints on his three recorded visits to the island. One was on the peak of a mountain popularly known as Adam's Peak, but known to the Sinhalas as Samanala Kanda and to the Tamils as Sivan Adi Padam. The other (referred to in the Manimekalai) was at the beach near Chulipuram, still called Tiruvadi Nilai. The sea now submerges this shrine and the temple. The people of the area however, claim that the footprint can be seen on a rock in the sea in a **fathom** of water. There is however, little doubt that there had been a two-way cultural and religious interchange between the Sinhalas and Tamils. There were Hindu Sinhalas and Buddhist Tamils.

One little known fact, is that though it is generally assumed that Roman Catholicism was forced on the people by bombardment by the Portuguese **conquistadors** after the massacre of 600 Catholic converts at Thondaveli five miles North west of Mannar in 1545. Roman Catholicism appears to have arrived much earlier. M. D Raghavan, claims, in his book Tamil Culture in Ceylon that -

*"A Persian cross has been found in the ancient ruins of the old capital of Ceylon, Anuradhapura, in strata that would date it to the sixth century A.D."*

The Syrian Christians of South West India claim to have kept the faith from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century if not from the time of St Thomas the Apostle. The discovery of the Persian cross does indicate that Christianity was introduced to Buddhist Anuradhapura very much earlier than is generally accepted. There is evidence of a permanent **cosmopolitan** population of traders, mostly Jewish,

Persian and Arabic, in Mantai and the cities in its vicinity.

Muslims in the island have been referred to as the Moors though the term Moor is rarely used today. From early times, Arab traders have traded with the Naga kingdom and this led to the establishment of a permanent Muslim presence in the island. Added to this, as the Muslims gained power in South India they gradually made their way to the island. In time, Tamil became the language of both, the Muslims on the island and the newly arrived South Indian Muslims. M D Raghavan has pointed out that in Mannar, there is an Arab settlement from very early times. He says -

*"One can discern the racial characters of the Arab, comparatively unmixed with other racial strains."*

The Muslims never attempted to **proselytise** and their religious observances and religious days were more a matter of personal discipline. Their places of worship, as a result, did not attain any historical importance. The first Muslim settlements in the Jaffna Peninsula were in Mirusuvil and in Usan. Muslim presence however, is largest today in Batticaloa, in East Eelam. The Sinhala (and Tamil) word Marakala to describe Muslims, is derived from the Tamil word Marakalam meaning ship.

When the Dutch took over the Tamil North from the Portuguese, they found that Catholic churches studded the coastal districts. They immediately transformed these into centres of Protestant worship. According to Baldaeus these churches were located at places like Chankanai and Tellipallai. With the coming of the British, many of these churches were abandoned as their, now Calvinist congregation, reverted to their original religion of Hinduism while the church buildings were allowed to decay. It was left to the Anglican, Methodist and American missionaries, under British rule, to build new churches, usually with a mission school next to it.

Despite, and through all these changes, Eelam has had an

enviable history of religious tolerance. A tolerance that is sadly lacking, among at least some members of the Sinhala Buddhist occupation armies of Eelam today.

## NOTE SEVEN

### The Singing Fish of Batticaloa

The brochure that was distributed at the recent Tamil Sports Festival (2001) contained a number of beautiful photographs of our homeland in north and east Eelam. Among these was one that was titled the Longest Bridge in the Island at Kalladi. Those who know the beautiful land of Batticaloa would have recognized this bridge and even crossed it either on foot or by vehicle. What attracted me was the sub heading that read

*'From here one could hear the melody note of the Singing Fish on a full moon night'.*

The Singing Fish of Batticaloa date from before the bridge came to be built. For the information of those readers who have heard of the Singing Fish of Batticaloa but have never been to Batticaloa, to listen to them, I would say that one would have to have to go right down to the water in the **vicinity** of the bridge to listen to the musical notes.

Sir Emerson Tennant visiting Batticaloa in September 1848 and having heard stories of the Singing Fish, attempted to investigate the phenomenon. He says that although the sounds were heard at various spots on the lagoon it was best heard in the night when the moon was nearest the full -

*"between the pier and a rock which intersects the channel."*

The Kalladi Bridge came to be built later, at this same pier and replaced a ferry.

Tennant writes after having visited this spot -

*"I distinctly heard the sounds in question. They came up from the water like the gentle thrills of a musical chord, or the faint vibrations of a wineglass when its rim is rubbed by a wet finger. It was not one sustained note, but a multitude of tiny sounds, each clear and distinct in itself; the sweetest treble with the lowest bass."*

Tennant found that the sounds increased in volume on applying the ear to the woodwork of the boat. He says that the people knew the sound as 'oorie coolooroo cradoo'. Tennant says that this was the local name for the 'crying shell'. I am sure the reader will recognise the words, quoted by Tennant, despite the way he has spelt them. Tennant holds that the sound was made not by a fish but by shells, two living specimens of which were brought to him by local fishermen.

It is interesting to note that when Tennant first visited the lagoon it was infested with crocodiles of prodigious size. The local people would mount the hollow teeth (of dead crocodiles) with silver lids and use them to carry chunam for a chew of betel leaf. There are no crocodiles in the lagoon today.

A beautiful sight in the night is that of persons fishing for prawns and shrimps with the aid of a hurricane lantern, a short net and a small basket to drop the collected prawn. On most nights the sight of a row of lanterns along the edge of the lagoon is indeed a beautiful, calming and peaceful sight.

Most of the coastline of Batticaloa is sandwiched between the Indian Ocean on one side and the lagoon on the other. The coconut plantations abound here and the trees are healthy because of optimum growing conditions - sandy and pervious soil, a profusion of fresh water on one side and the presence of the sea on the other, which contributes a saline atmosphere. Tennant says that a coconut was brought to him that weighed



fifteen pounds.

The Portuguese built the fort in the island of Puliantivu in 1627 in violation of their treaty with the king of Kandy who was guardian of the eastern part of the island at that time. The Dutch arrived with a flotilla of ships from Batavia in 1638 and captured the fort without much of a fight.

In subsequent years, the presence of the Kotamunai bridge at one end and the Kalladi bridge at the other made Pulliantivu seem less of an island, as more houses came to be built and the working parts of the town spread on both sides of the island and the mainland.

Batticaloa however remains one of the prettiest places of Eelam.

## NOTE EIGHT

### Ancient Eelam and Foreign Trade

Both Casie Chetty in his History of Jaffna and Mudaliyar Rasanayagam in Ancient Jaffna are agreed that the Greeks and Romans traded with the northern and northwestern parts of the Island. There is also evidence that the people of the Cholanmandalam (Coromandel) Coast not only traded with these parts of Eelam but also settled down in ports such as Point Pedro and Valvettythurai, often marrying into families in the vicinity of these ports.

Readers who are familiar with the Christian Bible will be aware that about a thousand years before the Christian era, the ships of King Solomon called at ports of South India and Ceylon in search of material for the building of the temple of Jerusalem and carried away building material from Ophir amongst other places. I refer you to the Old Testament of the Bible at I Kings chap 9.v.26 that reads -

*"King Solomon built a fleet of ships at E-zion-ge-ber, which is near Elath on the shore of the Red Sea in the land of Edom. And Hiram sent with the fleet his servants, seamen who were familiar with the sea, together with the servants of Solomon; and they went to Ophir and brought from there gold, to the amount of four hundred and twenty talents...."*

Chapter 10 v.22 reads -

*"For the king had a fleet of ships of Tarshish at sea with the fleet of Hiram. Once every three years the fleet of ships of Tarshish used to come bringing*

*gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks".*

Various theories have been put forward as to where these places were. Ophir is no other than the land of the Nagas – the Oviyar, who lived around Mantai known today, to the Sinhala as Mantota. This name was a shortened form for Mahatotam that described the fertile region fed by the waters of the Giants Tank. Further evidence, if necessary, apart from the similarity of Ophir and Oviyar, is available in the Hebrew words for ivory, apes, aghil and peacocks which are *ibha*, *kapi*, *ahilem* and *turkeyim* which in turn are almost identical to their Tamil names *ipam*, *kapi*, *aghil* and *tokai*. No doubt the traders carried these names as well, along with their goods of trade.

To examine further the names Ophir and Tarshish, Mudaliyar Rasanayagam advances the theory that since the port, Mantai was often identified with Thiruketisvaram (the holy shrine of Isvara (Siva) worshipped by Ketu the noble serpent) it is valid to assume that Tarshish is a corrupted form of Thiruketisvaram.

If further evidence is needed, of trade with the north and north west of the island, this is available in the Greek names for common Tamil food items of everyday use like *arisi*, *inchi* and *karuva*, which the Greeks call *oriza*, *inchiver*, and *karpion*. Ivory, apes, aghil and peacocks were easily obtained in and around Mantai. Peacocks were abundant in the islands off Jaffna and the mainland north as recent as Dutch times and are referred to by Baldeaus as being available in plenty in these places. Unfortunately, these birds were hunted to extinction once the Dutch discovered them to be a table delicacy. Elephants were another item of trade. It might be mentioned that elephants were common on the peninsula at one time, usually coming from the mainland to feast themselves on the ripe fruit of the Palmyra tree and the wood apple that was also to be found in the peninsula.

Elephant Pass, at which the elephants usually crossed, is known in Tamil as *Aanai Iravu*. Megasthenes who was Greek

ambassador to the court of Chandra Gupta has written about the elephants transported from the island to the King of Kalinga. He has written that the islanders exported these elephants in boats specially constructed for this purpose out of strong timbers supplied from the island's woods.

Till as late as the 19<sup>th</sup> century, elephants were shipped from the port of Kalah or Kayts, as it is known today. Rasanayagam writing in 1924 says that site of the elephant quay from which the elephants were transported was still to be seen here.

A seaman by name Hippalus, in the reign of Emperor Claudius, discovered that the steady prevalence of the monsoons enabled a shorter route across the Indian Ocean to the shores of India and Ceylon. Since that time, trade between India and Ceylon became extensive and this helped the early Greek writers in compiling their works. For example, the Geography of the World by Ptolemy, compiled around 150 AD, contains a great deal of near accurate information of minute detail. Ptolemy obtained most of his information by interviewing seamen and traders. Ptolemy himself did not venture far from Greece.

Coastal trade with India and Ceylon remained in the hands of the Arabs. The **Baobab** trees that form a special feature of Mantai and Mannar were possibly carried there by them.

Around 50 AD, when Claudius was Emperor of the Romans, a ship carrying the Freedman Annianus Plocamus that set out to collect the revenues of Arabia was carried, by the monsoon to Kudiraimalai near Chilavam and the oyster fisheries. Annianus Plocamus and his men were taken to the king at his capital at Kadiraimalai where they were entertained most hospitably by the king, who sent him back with an embassy of four to the Court of Emperor Claudius.

It is clear that Eelam was carrying on an extensive international trade centuries before the western world, as we know it today, existed.

**NOTE  
NINE**

## **Christianity in Ancient Eelam**

With Christmas round the corner there is no better time to examine the presence of Christianity in Ancient Eelam. Regular readers of the *Vadalee* will remember the article in the September issue on *Religions of Eelam* where reference was made to a Cross found in Anuradhapura that could be dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> Century AD.

My brother in law Dr M Kanagaratnam (who lives in Sri Lanka and is a former Superintendent Health Services - Badulla) having read the issue of September 2001, wrote to me about an article written in the Sri Lankan *Daily News* of 24 February 1993 by his namesake (though no relation) the Ven. Dr Donald J Kanagaratnam, and kindly sent me a copy of the article. Rev Kanagaratnam was writing about '*Christian-Islamic Cooperation in Pre Portuguese Times*'. Rev Kanagaratnam, when a lecturer, at the Theosophical College of Lanka at Pilamatalawa, also wrote the well-received monograph on *Tamils and Cultural Pluralism in Ancient Sri Lanka*. He was, later, the Anglican Archdeacon of Jaffna in 1991.

In his article, Rev Kanagaratnam mentions that the earliest Christians in Sri Lanka were the Nestorians. The Nestorians were named after Nestorius who died in 451 AD. He was a Syrian churchman and was patriarch of Constantinople from 428 to 431 AD.

The Nestorians were a sect who did not believe in the hypostatic union. Their belief was centered on the existence of two distinct persons in Christ. (*Hypostasis* is the belief in the one personality of Christ in which his two natures, the human and divine, are

united). They were persecuted for their belief by Rome, between 450 and 500 AD and fled to Persia in 498 AD. The whole Persian Church declared in favor of Nestorianism. With the support of the Persians and particularly, the Persian traders and their co traders the Arabs who traveled widely throughout the East and Far East, Nestorianism flourished for several centuries. They spread their message from Persia to Arabia, India, Eelam and even as far as Hsian-fu in China where there is an inscription of 5<sup>th</sup> Century AD to prove their presence.

The Nestorian sect of Christianity attracted the Prophet Mohamed and the Arabians, because of their doctrine of the human person of Jesus and their repudiation of the worship of Mary and the use of images, apart from the cross. Prophet Mohamed, personally, had very close relations with the Nestorian Christians of his time. The Prophet learnt his Christianity from a Nestorian monk called Sergius. This close contact with the Prophet Mohamed, won the Nestorians many benefits and privileges from the Arabs of that time.

The influence of the Nestorians was beneficial particularly, to the Arabians and had a great influence on their schools and learning. It was through the Nestorians that the Arabians first got acquainted with Greek and Latin literature. The Nestorians also introduced the Arabians to medical and pharmaceutical methods that they began using in their own systems of medicine.

The tangible examples of Nestorian influence in Eelam and the Sinhala kingdom in Anuradhapura are the Baptismal Font found in Mantai dating to the 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD and the Nestorian cross, found at Anuradhapura believed to be from the same date. In his article Rev Kanagaratnam says that this font is now at the archeological museum in Vavuniya.

Rev Kanagaratnam also says that in 1973, David Whitehouse and Andrew Williamson, in their research paper on the 'Sasanian Maritime Trade' have stated that Mantai was the principal port around the 6<sup>th</sup> Century AD. There clearly was a

settlement of Persian Nestorian merchants in addition to Arabs as also a Jewish settlement in Mantai. Even though Kadiramalai was the capital of Eelam at that time, Mantai was the commercial capital and a prosperous emporium. It is not surprising that many traders and their families settled down in Mantai and its vicinity. Mantai appears to have had quite a cosmopolitan flavor.

Of the Arabian writers of the middle ages, one who writes most about the Island is Edirisi born of a family who ruled over Malaga after the fall of the Khalifs of Cordova. He compiled his Geography in AD 1154. As regards the Island, he particularly mentions twelve cities around Mantai and says that the 'sovereign' (possibly the chief administrator of Mantai - under the king at Kathirimalai) who was celebrated for his enlightened administration, was assisted by a 'council of sixteen, of whom four were of the national religion, four Christians, four Mussalmans and four Jews.' Clearly, the 'sovereign' could not have been the king at Anuradhapura as claimed by Tennant! Such a composition, of a council of advisers, would however, have proved viable in cosmopolitan Mantai, under the chief administrator.

Adam's Peak was visible to the Arab traders as they sailed towards the island and they called the peak *Barq Silan* (Light of Eelam) while Ptolemy called it *Ulipada* that would have been *Olipadam* in Tamil. Rev Kanagaratnam claims that it is on record that around the 8<sup>th</sup> Century AD, Muslim and Christians came together in Arabian boats, on pilgrimage to Adam's Peak. He says that the '*History of the Marmuluk Sultans of Egypt*' by Mufazzil Ibn Abil Fazail a Coptic Christian of the 14 Century AD mentions of pious pilgrimages of Christians and Muslims to the '*foot of our father Adam and the Monastery of Mar Thouma*'. Rev Kanagaratnam says that this was common practice because of the close relationship between these two religious communities in the Middle East at that time.

NOTE  
TEN

## Baldaeus' Eelam 1672

**Calvinism** that had taken hold of 16<sup>th</sup> century Holland was not a proselytizing religion like the Catholicism of the Portuguese. However, in 1619 the Dutch East India Company decided to spread their brand of Christianity so as to undermine the Portuguese hold over the Catholic converts they left behind, in the areas they had controlled till recently.

The *Batavian Code* of the Dutch East India Company issued in 1642 stated,

*"No other religion will be exercised much less taught or propagated either secretly or publicly, than the Reformed Christian Religion as it is taught in the public churches in the Netherlands".*

It is no surprise therefore that churches and schools in Dutch controlled Eelam went hand in hand as it was to do in later years under the British and American missionaries. Young Rev Phillipus Baldaeus when he arrived in Eelam at the young age of 24, with a second wife (his first having died a year after his marriage) arrived with a great deal of zeal and enthusiasm. We are lucky in that he left behind him, a book titled the *True And Exact Description Of The Great Island of Ceylon*, describing his experiences. Although the emphasis, in his book, is Dutch progress in spreading Calvinism, we are gifted with a rare picture of our homeland as it was in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Baldaeus takes us on a conducted tour on foot (remember, he was a young man of 24) around the churches in the various towns and villages and in the process we get a peep into life in Eelam in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

For convenience of the reader I will give the place names as he has spelt them, with the current name in brackets alongside. Starting with *Telipole* (Tellipalai) in *Belligamme* (Valigamam) where he says that the church and church house were built by Jesuits and there is a pleasant garden with a rich vineyard and all kinds of 'Indian' fruits he moves on to *Mallagam* (Mallakam) that he says is half an hours walk. He then goes on to *Mayletti* (Mylletti) that is quite close to the sea and where there is plenty of fish and crabs apart from hare and partridges. Then there is *Achiavelli* (Atchuvelli) that is a village -

"situated among the woods "

- where there are innumerable coves of turtle doves that coo at regular times and serve the inhabitants as clocks. This village also has plentiful hare, deer and wild boar though there is always danger from snakes.

*Oudewil* ( Uduvil) is in a large plain and has a fine view. The soil is fine red clay and has been adapted for the cultivation of rice. *Battecotte* (Vaddukoddai) that is half an hour's walk from Uduvil also has rich sowing fields and being near the 'salt river' (Uppu Aru – called so because it was used to transport salt from the interior, not because it was salty or brackish) has an abundance of fish as well. Half an hour away is *Paneteripou* (Pandatherippu) though here he is more involved in describing the church than the village. A further half hour from Pandatherippu is *Changane* (Chankanai) with a fine **esplanade** in front of the church and a garden planted with coconut trees, grapes, sweet potatoes, bananas and Portuguese figs. Back to Jaffna town he touches on *Sundecouli* (Chundikuli) where he says that the chief inhabitants are the *Civias* (Chiviars) who are the palanquin bearers and water carriers.

He next touches on villages in *Tenmarache* (Thenmarachi) mentioning *Navacouli* (Navatkuli). This village he says has a pleasant view of the sea and has fruit trees in abundance. The inhabitants engage in agriculture and fishing. *Chavagatzery*

(Chavakachcheri) he says has several ponds of water teeming with wild duck, teal, snipe, heron, martins and other birds.

*Illondi Matual* (Elethumatuwal) is also close to *Nagar Kojel* (Nagar Kovil). This village he says has troops of peacock and also large quantities of wild elephants. The elephants of the company are also stalled in this village, as **fodder** is available in plenty.

The next province he mentions is *Waddemarache* (Vadamarachi). He says that this province is rich in pasture and there are cattle, goats, sheep, fowl, pigeons, partridges and wild fowl in abundance.

*Paretiture* (Parithithurai). was called *Punta das Pedras* by the Portuguese. Parithithurai means cotton harbour because of the large amounts of cotton produced on small trees. It is possible to moor ships, he says, for 7 to 8 months till the onset of the northeast monsoon.

The final province *Patchiarapalle* ( Patchirapallai) he says is excessively warm and lacks good water and suffers from the depredations of wild elephants. This province is full of wild palm trees but there is not a year when the fruit arrives at maturity when hundreds of trees are thrown by the elephants in search of the ripe fruit.

Of the islands he says *Ourature* (Kayts) and *Caradiva* (Karainagar) are separated by the river (we know it as the lagoon) in the middle of which is the Fort Hammenhiel. As he sailed to the island of *Pongardiva* (Punguduthivu) he passed a deserted island that along with Karainagar abounds with serpents. Punguduthivu has an abundance of deer, hare and peacocks (these, particularly the peacocks, proved to be a table delicacy to the Dutch who soon hunted them to extinction, not only here but throughout Eelam) also, ample fish and good large oysters – these he says, are better eaten stewed than raw.

*Charles Somasundrum*

*Nindundiva* (Nedunthivu) he says, has a large number of cattle but their oxen, steers and cows are much smaller than those on the mainland. There are also horses introduced by the Portuguese. Although short of good drinking water there is one place, among the rocks in the middle of the island, which, according to the inhabitants, was split open by a thunderbolt, where there is good drinking water.

**NOTE  
ELEVEN**

## **Aryans in Dravidian History**

The earliest reference to the Dravidian civilization could be said to date from the excavations carried out at Mohenjo-daro and at Harappa in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by Sir John Marshall. Marshall has said that the excavations reveal a civilization, not incipient but already age old, with many millennia of human endeavor behind it. Mohenjo-daro and Harappa are both in the extreme northwest of the sub continent of India. If we need a date for the **heyday** of this civilization it would be roughly, between 2500 and 1800 BC.

This was a superior civilization ruled by kings (rajahs) and superior kings (maharajahs). The cities as indicated by the excavations, were laid to a neat chequerboard plan with a castle, at a high point, dominating the city. The houses were constructed of brick, often rising to many stories while the system of rivers augmented by canals, served for transport and trade. Seals using animal figures were in use. Among the seals found was one of a male figure in the yoga position and surrounded by animals and representing Shiva.

As Jawaharlal Nehru says in his 'Glimpses of World History' -

*'We find that in the Indus Valley we go back not only five thousand years but many more thousands till we are lost in the dim mists of antiquity when man first settled down'.*

It must be mentioned that this advanced civilization was not merely confined to Mohenjo-daro and Harappa but would have existed elsewhere in the vicinity as well. It is just that the

excavations have been carried out in these two places so far.

A few points of difference between this civilization and the contemporary civilizations in Egypt and Mesopotamia are worthy of note. The use of cotton for textiles was exclusive to the Mohenjo Daro and Harappa civilization as also were well-built baths and houses intended for the citizens. In Egypt and Mesopotamia, much money and effort was lavished on the magnificent temples of the Gods and the palaces of kings. The people however, lived in mud built dwellings that have since disappeared. In Mohenjo-daro and Harappa the finest structures were for the convenience of the citizens and we are able today, to see and enjoy their neat and planned cities and the houses of their citizens.

The Aryans (the Arya people) were a people of Indo-European origin and migrated from the Northwest into the Ganges valley around 1500 BC. This period from 1500 to 1000 BC is known as the Early Vedic period. The Aryans, who used chariots and were militarily superior to the Dravidians, gradually pushed them south. One must not go away with the belief that there was one large battle or a series of serious battles between the Aryans and the Dravidians that the Dravidians lost. Rather, it was a very gradual process over a number of centuries. The Aryans were a peasant culture with individual homesteads, herds of animals but little grain production.

When the Aryans arrived in India, India was already 'civilized'. The Dravidians, who had a rich civilization, had already begun to drift southwards. The Dravidian languages in the south today are Tamil, Telegu, Kanarese and Malayalam.

In early history, one must always remember that the countries of the world were not as intensely populated as they are today. Spaces between inhabited places were often impenetrable jungle filled with wild animals or were desserts. The slow drift of the Dravidians southwards, through the dense forests of the central Indian sub continent, took place before the arrival of the

Aryans. One of the earliest Dravidian kingdoms in the Dekkan, long before the Aryan entry, was Kalinga and covered Orissa and Bengal. Kalinga is mentioned in the **Ramayana** and the **Mahabharata** as one of the flourishing states of the Dekkan. All historians admit the remote antiquity of Kalinga and its non-Aryan origin. It might be mentioned that the Kalingas were the first of the Indian people to cross the seas. They came to Eelam and went further east to Java and what is present day Singapore. Even today, Indians (from which ever part of India they may hail) are known as 'Klings' by the Singaporeans - a corruption of the term 'Kalingas'.

Mr. J V Chelliah a former head of the English Department of Jaffna College and later its Vice Principal and sometime acting Principal has translated into English verse the Ten Tamil Idylls '*Pattupattu*' published by General Publishers Ltd of Colombo in 1946. It has a foreword by Swami Vipulanda a former professor of Tamil at the University of Colombo and at the Annamalai University. Mr Chelliah has contributed comprehensive introductions to each of the ten poems. In one he says -

*'To a modern reader these poems will seem strange and difficult. There are words and phrases that have become obsolete, and grammatical forms that are utterly strange. Many of these poems were written at a time when Tamil was comparatively free from Sanscrit words and Aryan culture.'*

It must be accepted that the Aryans and the Dravidians have mingled over the centuries and that today, there is a lot of the Aryan amongst the Dravidians and a lot of the Dravidian amongst the Aryans. For example, cremation of the dead is an Aryan introduction. Ancient Tamils were not vegetarians. Vegetarianism was a later introduction with the advent of Buddhism. Ancient Tamils called the Aryans *melechas*, because they originally migrated to India from outside. Even as regards the Hindu Gods, Vishnu is an Aryan God the corresponding Tamil god is Mayon (*the deceiver*), the Goddess Lakshmi is an

Aryan Goddess.

These **tidbits** are given purely as background information. We should always be proud of our heritage but it does not matter today if one is Aryan or Dravidian. The differences have so merged that it is no longer possible to tell them apart anyway. As **Nehru** says –

*'It is not healthy for any person or any nation to be always looking back. As someone has once said if man was meant to go back or always to look back he would have eyes at the back of his head'.*

## NOTE TWELVE

### The Wells of Jaffna

Most readers are aware that Eelam, both north and east, is part of the 'dry zone' of the island. This land receives its rainfall during the northeast monsoon. At all other times it is mostly rainless, receiving only the very occasional short shower.

Currents from the Cholamandalam (Coromandel) Coast of India have over centuries carried the sand, which covers a vast extent of the peninsula. The arable soil of Jaffna is mostly a deep to mild red hue, due to the presence of iron. Due also to the presence of lime from coral detritus (old coral residue) and magnesian-limestone, it is good cultivable land. There is one hitch though; Jaffna has no rivers apart from Uppu Aru, which is more a channel, stretching inland from the lagoon towards Kanterodai (Kadiramalai). The Jaffna man however, with his traditional ingenuity and skill, has dug wells around the peninsula. Almost every house in Jaffna has its own well. Also, there are the wells attached to the market gardens and tobacco fields, around the peninsula. Tillage, in the fields and gardens, is carried out with water being lifted from the wells by manual or mechanical means. Clearly, the Jaffna man is not affected by water shortages at times of drought, unlike the city of Colombo, since his well is always there and it never runs dry.

There are however, a number of unusual wells. One is at Puttur on the west side of the road leading from Jaffna to Point Pedro. The surface of the land around the well is only fifteen feet above sea level. This well is however 140 feet in depth. The water though fresh at the surface gets brackish lower down and intensely salty deep below. Attempts have been made by various Government Agents of Jaffna to draw the water by



mechanical means with a view to irrigating the lands around, but these have invariably been given up. The universal local belief is that it is an underground pool connected to the sea by a vast subterranean channel emerging at Kankesanthurai, seven miles to the northwest. It may be that sometime in the future, in a free Eelam, there may be adventurous young men and women who will wish to explore this channel with the aid of oxygen tanks, **snorkels** and electric lights. Perhaps with still and TV cameras and 2 way radio connection with a computerised control point on land.

A short distance from the Puttur well is another at Navakeri that, like the Puttur well, is thought to connect with the sea by an underground fissure or channel beneath an arch of magnesian-limestone. Both these wells rise and fall a few inches every two hours. This is believed to coincide with the high tide.

There is however, a remarkable well at Tellipalai where, when sinking the well, the workmen met with a crust of coral at a depth of fourteen feet. On breaking through this crust they faced a cavern containing the water they were searching for, with a depth of more than thirty feet. One remarkable fact about this well is that it maintains its depth at all seasons uninfluenced by rain or drought. Its level does not rise and fall, like the wells at Puttur and Navakeri

Emerson Tennant claims that there are other wells near the coast that *"maintain their level with such uniformity as to be inexhaustible at any season, even after years of drought"*. He believes that their supply is chiefly derived by percolation from the sea.

A Mr Byrne, the Government surveyor for the district in 1859, has said *"all the wells are below the sea level"*. He has further said that the November monsoon rains tend to fill the wells to the brim but that the water quickly subsides and *"sinks to the uniform level, at which it remains fixed for the next nine or ten months unless when slightly affected by showers"*.

There is an unusual well or group of wells, though not in the peninsula, in Tiruconamalai. These are the famous Kanniya Hot Wells not far from the city limits. They are a series of small tub sized 'wells' either rectangular or square, within a walled in enclosure but roofless, where the water in each 'well' is at a different temperature from hot to tepid. A short-cemented parapet surrounds each 'well' and it is possible, while standing by each 'well', to scoop out the water with a small container. There is no evidence of volcanic activity in this area that would account for the presence of these 'wells'. Tradition has it that Ravana of Ramayana fame, observed the obsequies for his mother at these wells.

## NOTE THIRTEEN

### Archaeology in Eelam

I tried recently, to purchase a map of the island of Sri Lanka. I had difficulty finding one. At the first bookshop I went to in Finchley Road, a large one, the salesman claimed he could find no reference to Sri Lanka in his database! I was finally able to place an order through Hamicks of Harrow-on-the-Hill. Unfortunately they only had three different maps on their database and these were all tourist maps. I purchased the best of a bad lot, a map from the Nelles Maps series. These maps though printed in the west are prepared by the Sri Lankan government's cartographic service that charge a fee from commercial firms for their work. Nelles Maps are printed in Germany.

Apparently, Sri Lanka's cartographers are not concerned about accuracy as far as our motherland is concerned. Jaffna town is shown as the '*Ancient Tamil Capital*', not Nallur or Kanterodai (Kadiramalai), which is shown as a village. Singai Nagar (near Valipuram) that was the capital after Kadiramalai is not even shown. Quite a lot of places of significance to the Tamil people are not indicated. For example, Fort Frederick in Tiruconamalai is shown as also a place called Swami Rock but not Koneswaram Temple. I mention all this to show to what extent our history is suppressed or distorted.

All Eelam Tamils are aware that Mantai or Mantota (the home of the Oviyar – Ophir of the Christian Bible) and the site of Thiruketheeswaram (Tarshish of the Christian Bible) is of great significance. This town and its vicinity, is full of history and evidence of archaeological value. But, unlike Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa it was entirely neglected by the Archaeological

Department and, instead of being conserved the rights to its exploitation were sold to the Nattucottai Chetties who, in their search for the temple of Thiruketiswaram have so vandalised the site that its archaeological value is now non-existent according to Mudaliyar Rasanayagam.

In Kanterodai (Kadiramalai) archaeological research is no longer possible as the entire area, which contains the ruins, has passed into the hands of private house owners. Yet according to Mudaliyar Rasanayagam, as recently as 1924 -

*"Large quantities of beads of various kinds, fragments of necklaces of different shapes and sizes, made of glass and coral, cornelian and agate, jade and alumina with holes perforated for stringing together, had been found here. Ancient coins, both Roman and Indian, have also been picked up".*

Most of these finds are confined to the western part of the village of Kanterodai where were concentrated the residential quarters of royalty while temples and sacred buildings tended more towards the east.

Kudirai Malai close to Mantai and near the pearl fisheries, is the site of the royal residence of Alli Arasany whose love affair with Arjuna of Mahabarata fame is the subject of a popular Tamil drama. There are the ruins of historical towns at Tammana Nagaram, Tavirkia Nagaram, Aca Nagaram, Mantai and Arasapuram. There also are the following places commencing from Munneswaram (where Rama is said to have worshipped) extending northwards, places like Ponparipu (golden plains) Nanattan, Musali, Mantai, Vadattalivu, Pallavarayankattu, Punakari, and Kalmunai but none of these places has been excavated or preserved, instead, they have been built upon.

Charles Pridham (a colonial civil servant) in his book *An Historical, Political and Statistical Account of Ceylon and its Dependencies (1849)* has this to say

*"The whole district of Mantota is surrounded with a halo of interest for the **antiquary**, and it is far from improbable that the measures that cannot fail to be taken, sooner or later, to restore its former fertility to this neglected but very capable district may evoke some relic of the past to **elucidate** what is now shrouded in mystery."*

Unfortunately this hope of Pridham was not to be fulfilled. People like Pridham and Rasanayagam were voices in the wilderness. The Archaeological Department of Ceylon was now filled with Sinhala staff that were prejudiced by their personal views on the antiquity of the Tamil presence in the Island. The Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society was controlled by similar individuals – Dr S Paranavitrane, Dr G C Mendis and Mr C W Nicholas - who were described bitterly by Mr S J Gunasegaram (MA (London) and a former Education Officer), as its '*Shining Lights*' in his Introduction. Mr Gunasegaram's attempt to publish his research in the journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society was obstructed by the Society. He was compelled to publish his monograph, privately. It was titled 'The Vijayan Legend and the Aryan Myth' these people he went on to say, describing the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, had set themselves up as -

*the custodians of the scholarship, learning and historical lore of Sri Lanka.'*

Fortunately, We do not have to depend on archaeological evidence alone, to support our history. We have instead, the works of writers, travellers, traders and the like who have put down, for **posterity**, their impressions. Regular readers of the Vadalee are also aware that there is even reference in the Christian Bible to our history.

We have the works of Ptolemy, *The Geography of the World* (150 AD); the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* by an unknown author; Pliny's *Natural History*; The works of Cosmas

Indico-pleustes (an Egyptian monk) and even the writings of Megasthenes who, 20 years after the death of Alexander the Great was accredited ambassador to the court of Chandra Gupta by Seleucus Nicator, to name but a few.

We also have the evidence of Roman and Indian coins of a period extending from 500 BC or earlier to about the fourth or fifth century AD, found in Kanterodai (Kadiramalai) that testify to the commercial importance of that city. This covers a period of prosperity of the Tamil country that coincides with the peak period of Tamil literature during the third Sangam of Madurai.

## NOTE FOURTEEN

### **Sinhala and Dravidian Influence**

Most writings on Eelam history assume that 'civilization' and the art of writing came with the Aryans and the introduction of Buddhism. The Nagas and Yakshas, long time occupants of the island, are ignored as 'primitive underworld spirits'. The Dravidians, also long time residents of the island, are dismissed – by the authors of the 'vamsa texts' as later arrivals and as enemies of Buddhism. The ruins of Buddhist temples and the presence of Sinhala place names in the Tamil homeland are assumed to be proof that these were Sinhala lands that the Tamils had conquered. This historical bias and prejudice is due to the fact that historians and commentators tend to rely too much on the 'vamsa texts' – Mahavamsa, Culavamsa, Dipavamsa – Prof S J Tambiah refers to these as 'mytho-historical' works.

These records were written in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD (Dipavamsa) and the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD (Mahavamsa) by ordinary Buddhist monks, not by academics or historians, as day-to-day journals, to maintain their Sinhala Buddhist interests and not as a historical record. These were written many centuries after the earliest events recorded in them. A reading of these texts, indicate a 'glossing' over of the deeds of kings who helped the Sangha and a cursory reference to those kings who did not help the Sangha or were opposed to it. As Prof. Tambiah puts it, they show an 'amnesiac silence' on events that did not interest them.

Rev Kanagaratnam (see Note Nine) has stated that Prof Kamil Zvalebil of (former) Czechoslovakia, on examining the pictorial signs on urns and pottery fragments discovered in ancient burial

sites, has observed that they are the survivors of signs introduced by the people of the Harappan (Dravidian) civilization. Many of the symbols of these ancient Tamil script can be related to those of the Indus Valley that in turn can be related to the Semetic script of the near eastern people. Rev Kanagaratnam says that though the latter has not yet been proved, the resemblances are obvious. Urn burials and Dolmens and Cists are very much connected with the burial customs of the Dravidian peoples. Dravidian burial practices are referred to in early Tamil literature. As Dr Paranavitane says:

*"The Dravidian peoples influenced the course of the island's history about the same time they gained mastery over the South Indian kingdoms".*

In later years, the Muslim invasion of Southern India led to a large influx of South Indians into Sri Lanka – the island closest to them. The most interesting aspect of this influx is the large number of Pandarams or non-Brahmin priests among these new immigrants. They were usually of the Vellala caste and came from various parts of Southern India in the reign of Bhuvaneka Bahu I (1272 – 84). A further influx came in the reign of Bhuvaneka Bahu VI (1470 – 78). They were welcomed both by the Sinhala kings in the south of the island and by the Tamil kings in the north. The bulk of these new immigrants however, went to Sinhala lands in the south since the new prosperity of the island lay there and not in the north. The north was beginning to lose its worldwide trade, both due to the silting of the traditional harbors and waterways coupled with the use of bigger ships by the traders and due to political changes in the lands of their traditional trading partners the Greeks, Romans, Persians and Arabs. Colombo and Galle - both directly on the Indian Ocean - were more attractive to the sea-borne trade of the new European traders who now approached the East via the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of Africa and across the Indian Ocean.

The Sinhala Kings gave the Pandarams, villages for their main-

tenance along with radala and mudalai titles. The Sinhala title of Bandara taken by princes and nobles is derived from these immigrant Pandarams. The Pandarams were made welcome not only because of their ritual (religious) skills but also because of their scribal (ability to write and do accounts) skills that were useful to a population that was mostly illiterate.

It is interesting to note that the apex of the Bandaranayake family tree according to Mrs Yasmin Dias Gooneratne (nee Bandaranayake), was a Pandaram bearing the name Neela Perumal who, seeking service under the King of Kandy, was made a high priest of the temple of the God Saman and commanded to take the name of Nayaka Pandaram (chief record keeper) in 1454. One does not have to dig deep, to discover a Dravidian-Tamil ancestry in the current Sri Lankan President (2002)!

The last wholly Sinhala king of Kandy was King Narendra Singhe (1707-39). As this king had no male heir of royal blood (he had a son called Unambuve, by a Sinhala concubine – a commoner), he was succeeded by his Kshatriya - Nayayakka queen's brother, Sri Vijaya Rajasinghe (1739-1747). The Nayakkars were warrior nobility from Madurai and their descent was matrilineal. As all subsequent kings married Nayakkar queens, all kings from 1739 to 1815, were wholly Nayakkars.

Sri Vijaya Rajasinghe's Nayakkar queen's brother, succeeded him, following the matrilineal descent, and took the name Kirti Sri Rajasinghe (1747-82). Rajadi Rajasinghe (1782-98) succeeded Kirti Sri Rajasinghe. The dynasty ended with Sri Wickrema Rajasinghe (1798-1815).

*Britain, on conquering the Kandyan kingdom in 1815 and taking the king prisoner, decided, for convenience of administration, to combine under one Governor the various kingdoms in the island that they had captured. The Tamils of Eelam, though they continued to retain their national*

*identity, were 'lumped' with the other kingdoms as one 'crown colony'. At independence in 1947, instead of giving the Tamils of Eelam their separate freedom, the British grouped the Tamils with the Sinhalas, as a single nation ruled by one parliament. The Tamils lost their freedom on the 4 February 1947.*

It should be noted that it was a wholly Nayakkar King, Kirti Sri Rajasinghe (1747-82), who sponsored the historic mission to Siam in 1753 that on its return, established the Malvatta and Asgiriya vihares that very soon became the predominant orthodox 'Siam Nikaya', to whose chief priest every single government formed after independence paid obeisance, regardless of their race or creed! It was also under this same king that the annual Esala Perahera, hitherto staged exclusively to honour the four guardian deities of the island, was made to accept the tooth relic as its centerpiece.

The Esala perahera does not have that ancient a history as claimed by the Sinhalas. It is very similar to the various 'ancient' ceremonials in Britain that were mostly begun in the reign of Queen Victoria!

## Glossary

**This glossary is provided for the benefit of those young people who may not be acquainted with some of the words used in this collection of articles**

Affliction –(n)	A state of pain, distress or grief
Antiquary (n) plural –	an expert in ancient things; a student or collector of antiquities
Aristocrats – (n)	members of a superior group or class
Baobab – (n)	a tree with an exceedingly thick trunk, native to tropical Africa. Baobab trees are to be found in the coastal areas of Mannar in Sri Lanka
Buffer - (n)	similar to the apparatus found on either side of a railway carriage designed to withstand shocks.
Calvinism - (n)	Named after John Calvin born in France and leader of the Protestant reform movement in Geneva
Climes – (n)	Used in a poetic sense to describe climate
Colonial Administration - (n)	Used to describe the administration of the crown colonies of Great Britain
Congenital – (adj)	Existing at or from ones birth
Conquistadors – (n) (pl)	Named after the Spanish conquerors of Mexico and Peru in the 16 <sup>th</sup> Century

Cosmopolitan – (adj)	Belonging to all parts of the world; not limited to one part of the social, political, commercial or intellectual world
Crop Dusting – (n)	The spraying of insecticides or fungicides on crops usually by aero plane. Used in this instance, in a satirical sense
Diaspora – (n)	Used originally to describe the whole body of Jews living scattered among the Gentiles after the Babylonian captivity. Used here to describe the Tamils of North and East Sri Lanka, similarly scattered among strange people in strange climes (see above for <b>climes</b> )
Digress – (v)	To deviate or wander away from the main purpose in speaking or writing
Eelam - (n)	The name by which the homeland the Tamils are fighting for, is called See Note Two for history of this name
Elucidates – (v)	To make lucid or clear
Endeavour - (v)	To exert oneself to do or effect something; to make an effort US spelling – 'Endeavor'
Esplanade – (n)	Any open, level space serving for public walks or drives particularly by the sea
Etymology – (n) T	he study of historical linguistic changes esp. as applied to individual words
Fathom – (n)	Unit of depth equal to 6 ft. used in nautical measurements, to get to the bottom of; to understand thoroughly
Fodder – (n)	food for livestock like straw, hay etc
Fortification – (n)	The act of fortifying, the science of constructing defensive military works

Heyday – (n)	Stage or period of highest vigour or fullest strength
Horticulture – (n)	The cultivation of a garden; the art and science of cultivating garden plants
Idiom – (n)	The form of expression peculiar to a language
Indignation – (n)	Strong displeasure at something deemed unworthy, unjust or base
Jataka – (n)	A collection of stories relating to the life and times of the Buddha
Mahabaratha – (n)	One of the two chief epics of ancient India (the other being the Ramanayana) Its main story is the war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas
Nehru –	Jawaharlal Nehru - the first Prime Minister of independent India and father and grandfather of two subsequent Prime Ministers
Pen Pushers - (n)	Used in a derogatory sense to describe a person who devotes his time to routine clerical tasks requiring little mental exertion
Posterity – (n)	Succeeding generations collectively; descendants collectively
Profusion – (n)	abundance; great quantity or amount often to excess
Propagation – (v)	to multiply by any process of reproducing from parent stock; to reproduce itself as a plant or animal does
Proselytize – (v)	To change over from one opinion, religious belief, sect or the like; one who persuades another to do so

Prudent – (adj)	Wise, cautious or wisely cautious in practical affairs
Ramayana – (n)	One of the two great epics of India (the other being the Mahabaratha) ascribed to poet Valmiki
Regal – (adj)	Pertaining to a king; royal; befitting or resembling a king
Retinue – (n)	A body of retainers attending an important personage
Scion – (n)	A descendant
Serendib – (n)	(sometimes spelt Serendip) One of the names by which Sri Lanka was referred to in old writings.
Snorkels – (n)	A tube enabling a person swimming face downward in the water to breathe, consisting of a tube at one end put in the mouth while the other projects above the water
Tidbits – (n)	A choice delicacy or item (sometimes referred to a titbit)
Vicinity – (n)	The region near or about the place; the neighborhood

# THESAM SIRUVAR

*The new section in THESAM, designed for young  
Tamil children all over the world.*

*Contains poems, news, short stories, drawings, events and many  
others created by children.*

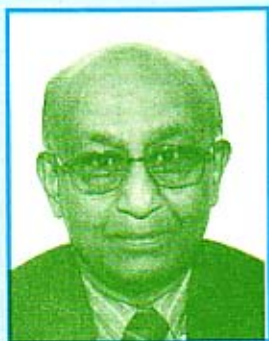
*Send your contributions, in any European language,  
that you would like to see published.*

**தேசம்**

**An International Tamil  
Periodical Published in  
London**

**THESAM PUBLISHERS, PO BOX 35806, London E11 3JX, UK**





Charles Somasundrum graduated from the University of Ceylon at Peradeniya in 1956. He taught for a year at Richmond College, Galle before joining the Ceylon Transport Board as it came into being under Vere de Mel. He served in Tiruconamalai (Trincomalee), Batticaloa and Anuradhapura before moving to the head-office in 1962.

He held a number of posts in the head-office till he finally resigned as Assistant Manager (Traffic) in 1971 to proceed to Britain. In Britain, he joined the civil service and worked in a number of departments till he retired from the Office of Fair Trading in 1992.

He has since, worked in a voluntary capacity with Tamil social and political organizations in London.

He has contributed a number of articles to journals and magazines. This collection of articles is from his contribution over a year to the Vadalee newspaper.

He has completed a novel and is currently working on a second. Both involve the recent political history of Sri Lanka with emphasis on Eelam.