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Nēthrā

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SAMSKARA

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Regi Siriwardena



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Nēthrā welcomes contributions from scholars and writers. Since the journal's interests are omnivorous, there is no restriction on subject-matter. Ideally, however, Nēthrā looks for material that is serious without being ponderous, readable and interesting without being superficial, and comprehensible even to readers who are not specialists in the intellectual field in which the subject is situated.

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C. W. Thamothersampillai, Tamil Revivalist: The Man behind the Legend of Tamil Nationalism

S. Ratnajeewan H. Hoole

This is an edited and abridged version of a lecture delivered by Professor Hoole at ICES on 17th November, 1997. The full text was published by ICES as a pamphlet and distributed to the lecture audience.

1. Introduction

“Oh Lord of Jerusalem
When will I see you.”

Christian devotional lyric by C. W. Thamothersampillai.

It is little known that Thamothersampillai spent the early part of his life in Christian devotion and even trying to spread the Good News, as we Christians put it. Thamothersampillai Christian evangelist and teacher, newspaper editor, pandit, poet and lyricist, university lecturer and examiner, accountant, Tamil textual critic, publisher, regent to a prince, Hindu revivalist, and lawyer and judge, was clearly a multi-faceted man of variegated talents. But if he is to be remembered for one thing, it must surely be for his contributions to Tamil literature as a textual critic, editor of early Tamil texts and publisher. He was a man of the most singular dedication to Tamil studies to which he gave generously of his time, energy and wealth. It might be said that he dominated Tamil studies during the last quarter of the nineteenth century in both India and Ceylon.

A man of his accomplishments, naturally has had several biographies written about him.^{1,2,3,4)} So you might ask in all fairness, why one more? Let me therefore devote some space to justifying the need for this paper.

I believe that the chief contribution of this paper is in describing Thamotharampillai, the man, outside the framework of Tamil-Hindu nationalism. This contribution will be in two areas. First and foremost, I expect to make the case that a good part of what is written of Thamotharampillai the man is hysterical religious propaganda and needs to be corrected. I make the case that Thamotharampillai was simply a man of his times, the period of the Hindu revival in Jaffna, characterised by heavy tension between Hindu and Christian and indeed between members of the same family as they took on different faiths. It was perhaps a period of Tamil intellectual dynamism unsurpassed since the Hindu-Buddhist-Jain debates among Tamils 1400 years ago. From an intellectual perspective, I concur with the late Bishop Sabapathy Kulandran who has characterised 19th century Jaffna as the best time for a Tamil to have lived.

As a result, Thamotharampillai, who was born a Christian and took on the Hindu Saivite faith in his later years, was a violently anti-Christian Hindu.⁵ Naturally, he was co-opted by Hindu nationalists as a born Hindu and history accordingly rewritten. It is therefore absolutely essential that the record be set straight. In this regard, Manonmany Sanmugathas⁶ is to be credited as the first Hindu academic to admit that Thamotharampillai was born a Christian and a Kingsbury, and is to be very much praised for this.

And second, as a member of Thamotharampillai's family, I expect to add to the corpus of literature material that has not been reported hitherto, drawing from family lore and Church records. For those of you who are interested, Neelan Tiruchelvam, Bahirathan

Devarajan and Devanesan Nesiah who are here today are descended from Cyrus Kingsbury and Mary Dayton, the parents of Thamotharampillai. But most importantly, we are privileged to have with us today Leela Solomons, Thamotharampillai's great-granddaughter and her own two daughters.

In this paper, we will also assess Thamotharampillai's works in relation to Navalar's since the claim is often made that Thamotharampillai followed in Navalar's foot-steps. It will be shown that Thamotharampillai's work was independent.

2. Thamotharampillai: His Life

(i) Family History

Thamotharampillai, or Charles Winslow Kingsbury, was the son of Cyrus Kingsbury (born in 1808) and Mary Dayton (b. 1812)⁷ who were both first generation Christians.⁸ They were married on 8 Nov. 1831.⁹ In place of the old Hindu name Gurunathar Vayiravi,¹⁰ the name Cyrus Kingsbury was taken on at baptism after an American Board missionary who was doing work among American Indians.¹¹ Cyrus was a minor ecclesiastical official¹² who later joined the Inspectorate of Schools.¹³

⁷ Uduvil, 1839; ACM-a, 1839; ACM-b, 1846.

⁸ Somasundaram, 1992; Young and Jebanesan, 1995, p. 154.

⁹ ACM-b, 1846.

¹⁰ ACM-b, 1846. Wairavanather is incorrectly given in many works.

¹¹ Somasundaram, 1992, Note N15 citing Dr. Fred Field Goodsall's book *They Lived their Lives*.

¹² Sivalingarajah (1983, p.3) appears to confuse Cyrus with his fourth son Appukutti and lists Cyrus as a Professor at Batticotta, which position Appukutti occupied much later when Batticotta was reconstituted as Jaffna College. Cyrus himself studied briefly at Batticotta before its collegiate days from 1826 to 1827 and first joined the Church as an Assistant at the Tellipalai mission (ACM-a, 1839).

¹³ Young and Jebanesan, 1995, p. 154.

¹ Karalasingham, 1993.

² Muthukumarasuvamipillai, Koo, 1974.

³ (a) Manonmany Sanmugathas, in NCC, 1979.

(b) Manonmany Sanmugathas, 1983.

⁴ Sivalingarajah, 1983.

⁵ Kulandran, 1970, p. 14.

⁶ 1983.

Thamotharampillai was born on 12 September, 1832 and received infant baptism on 24 Feb. 1833 at the American Mission parish of Tellipalai with the name Charles Winslow. Recently my wife and I had a son and almost every Ceylonese, instead of asking if he was well, asked if he was dark or "fair." Since that seems to be of cultural interest, let me also say that Thamotharampillai was quite dark and his first two wives were quite light skinned.¹⁴

Thamotharampillai was the eldest of seven children, his siblings being Chinnathamby Benjamin Kingsbury, Elayathamby Kingsbury, Appukutty Kingsbury (native Professor of Mathematics and Tamil at the revived Batticotta Seminary, Neelan Tiruchelvam's great-grandfather and my great-great-grandfather), Chinnappa, Chinnakutty and Nallathamby (the grandfather of Bahirathan Devarajan). The line of Kingsburies is now a dying line in that those who survive today are descended from the women, and the last true Kingsbury today is Robert Vibishnan Booker-Washington Kingsbury, the grandson of Thamotharampillai through his son Francis.¹⁵ He is today 87 years old and has no biological children.

(ii) Education

Thamotharampillai started studying Tamil under his father Cyrus, who valued Tamil learning and combined this with sending him for tuition in Tamil to Muttukuamark Kavirayar. The father's love for Tamil might have been a later development, since, after naming his eldest son Charles Winslow, subsequent children are given classic non-Sanskritic Tamil names.

¹⁴ Kingsbury, 1982..

¹⁵ Young and Jebanesan (1995, p. 156) err in saying that Francis Kingsbury resurrected the name when he returned to the Christian fold and took on the name Kingsbury. At the time, 1893, there were many other Kingsburies alive, such as Appukutti Kingsbury, Thamotharampillai's brother.

Thamotharampillai joined Batticotta Seminary in 1842 where his teachers included Daniel Carroll, whom we shall refer to again.¹⁶ At Batticotta Thamotharampillai is said to have been particularly fascinated with the *Book of Genesis*, of which he produced a Tamil translation in lyrical form, *Athiyahamak Keerthanai*, which has been described as a fine work of poetry. Unfortunately, this is no longer available. After finishing his college education, he graduated in 1852 from Batticotta Seminary at the age of 20, having come first in such subjects as mathematics and science.¹⁷ Batticotta is said to be the first modern educational institution in Asia up to tertiary level. The reputation of the college may be measured by the statement of Sir Charles Trevelyan, Governor of Madras, that "he found no young men so useful to him in the administration of affairs as those trained in the college (Seminary) at Jaffna."¹⁸ Subsequently Thamotharampillai would earn the B.A. degree from Madras without following courses based on a sort of equivalency examination and then the B.L., the bachelor's degree in law.

(iii) Literary and Evangelical Work - The Beginnings

Graduating from Batticotta, Thamotharampillai took up employment at Kopay Christian Teachers' College as the first Headmaster.¹⁹ Thamotharampillai's first effort at editing an old manuscript and publishing it with a commentary on it was in Jaffna. This work was the *Neethineri Vilakkam* (Righteous Path Explained) published by

¹⁶ Every biography I have seen of Thamotharampillai lists only his teachers of Tamil descent (Nevins, Mills, etc.) but says nothing of the Americans who were eminent academics who had held or would go on to hold positions at Dartmouth, Cornell, Williams and so on in the US and had trained those like Carroll, Nevins and Mills.

¹⁷ Kanapathipillai, 1964, p. 129.

¹⁸ Leitch and Leitch, 1890, p. 143.

¹⁹ G. D. Somasunadaram, 1983; also Kingsbury, 1972; However, Kanapathipillai (1964) and Jebanesan (1994, p. 25) say it was as teacher. But his status as a college graduate would have made him overqualified to be a mere teacher at the time.

the American Mission Press. Its author was stated to be C.W. Kingsbury.²⁰

The period at Kopay also saw much evangelistic and Christian pietistic work by Thamothersampillai. This included the composition of the lyric, "Oh Lord of Jerusalem, When will I see you?", still sung in churches today in the same tune to which he set it. This period also saw his helping in editing the *Morning Star* for the Church, the first newspaper in the Tamil language and the second newspaper in Ceylon after the Observer.

(iv) *Move to Madras*

Jaffna, like today, always had limited scope for the employment of the educated. Out of every 20 completing English high school in Jaffna, only 2-3 found a place at Batticotta. For a graduate like Thamothersampillai, therefore, there were few opportunities. A man with his mind had to move to an intellectually more invigorating place. Peter Percival, whom he had known in Jaffna, was now at the University of Madras, and was running for the Church the Tamil daily *Thinavarthamani*. He invited Thamothersampillai to come to Madras and be his assistant.²¹ It was the time when Madras saw much intellectual activity. Thamothersampillai accepted the offer and moved to Madras. While editing the paper, he received appointment as Tamil Pandit at the Madras Presidency College and became well known to colonial high-ups, including governors, by giving them Tamil tuition outside working hours. By 1855 he had become highly influential in Madras.²²

²⁰ Sanmugathas (1983, p. 71) gives the name as C.L.W. Kingsbury although it is not clear where the initial L comes from, if it is not a mistake.

²¹ Family memory buttressed by Young and Jebanesan (1995, p. 155). Jebanesan (1995, p. 25) contradicts this by saying he was editor. Kanapathipillai (1964, p. 130) also says he was editor. What is likely is that he started as an assistant and then rose to be the editor.

²² Kanapathipillai, 1964, p. 130.

In 1857 when Madras University opened its doors, he with his teacher from Batticotta, Daniel Carroll,²³ successfully sat, first, the entrance examination and, then four months later, the Bachelor of Arts certification examination in 1858. Thus Carroll and Thamothersampillai became the first two graduates of Madras.²⁴ It is perhaps Carroll's ambiguous position in Saivism that allows Thamothersampillai to be cited as *the* first graduate of Madras (Vythilingam, 1971, p. 83; also Meenatchi Suntharanaar in his essay Ceylon and Tamil as cited by Jebanesan, 1994, p. 30), to the exclusion of Carroll. Later he would be a fellow and member of Madras University's examining board and would use nearly all his income for uplifting the Tamil language.

(v) *Religious Conversion*

When Thamothersampillai went to Madras, there was an immediate likelihood that he would convert to Hinduism. For in Madras, Pariah and Christian were synonymous terms.²⁵ We also find the missions in Jaffna arguing on this basis for greater funds from the US and

²³ Daniel Carroll's name is nearly always given as Carroll Viswanathapillai. It is claimed that he, after losing a religious debate with Navalur, pricked his tongue with a golden needle and renounced Christianity. While Carroll had back-slid from Christianity, that he took to Saivism is shown to be false by Solomon Johnpulle (Ceylon Patriot, 11 Dec. 1880) based on no Saivite (or Christian) rites being used at his cremation and his having brought up his children as Christians (Young and Jebanesan, 1995, p. 142).

²⁴ Only these two sat the examination (Young and Jebanesan, 1995, p. 139). Madras was not yet a teaching institution and merely certified degrees attained elsewhere. Kanapathipillai (1964, p. 131) says Thamothersampillai came first in the examination. If so, he must have surpassed his teacher. Unlike other biographers who leave out only Daniel, Kanapathipillai gives Carroll's name as Suthumalai Visvanathapillai, a name that will not appear on the rolls of Batticotta or Madras even in part!

²⁵ Young and Jebanesan, 1995, p. 142, citing Solomon Johnpulle in the Ceylon Patriot, 11 Dec. 1880.

England so as to permit their students to continue their studies at tertiary level without having to go to India²⁶ where many converted to Saivism. The reasons for these conversions include the competition of ideas, but the presumed low-caste status of Christians in India is certainly one.

What happened to many happened also to Thamotharampillai. That his presumed caste was a disability in his work is also clear. One biographer says that his Christian background subjected him to insults and teasing.²⁷ We also learn that when he advertised for manuscripts, many refused to give them to him because of his presumed caste status. Religious establishments like *madams* that housed some texts were closed to him. His great-grand-daughter firmly attributes his conversion to his caste-consciousness.²⁸ Whatever the reason, he did convert to Saivism.

Conversion to Christianity is always associated with a date, the date of baptism. But falling out of Christianity perhaps is a process. As to when he got disillusioned we cannot tell, but by the 1860s his writings appear under his new assumed name Cirupitty Wyravanathar Thamotharampillai. The initials C.W.²⁹ were by contrived design so as to keep his old initials C.W. It is contrived in that his father's pre-baptismal name Vayiravi was Sanskritised some more and revived with a W. replacing the naturally Tamil V. The name Thamotharampillai appears to be based on a private family name, Thamothari, that appears only once in Church records.³⁰ The pillai suffix of Thamotharampillai laid claims to high Vellala status. Cirupitty was his father's village, a village in which Thamotharampillai owned no property and with which the family had ceased to be connected. His choice of a new name, and his close

association with Navalar (who addressed his "reforms" to Vellalaks and described others as "low-caste"³¹), also tell us that Thamotharampillai was caste-conscious.

With his modern training and Christian theological mind-set, a man like him could not simply convert and not make a statement about it. So we have his publications *The Greatness of Saivism* (Madras: River of News Press, 1867 in Tamil prose: Saiva Mahaththuvam) and *Against the Bible* (in Tamil: Vivilia Virotham), a short collection of poems dated slightly after the prose book. In *The Greatness of Saivism* he makes the explicit statement

"When a man realises which religion is the true religion, it is but right for him to enter that religion. That is duty. If he fails to enter the religion he sees to be true, then he is not a man."³²

This clearly shows that although Thamotharampillai's initial estrangement with Christianity was based on caste, Thamotharampillai the intellectual had constructed arguments in his own mind as to which religion was true. It has been argued, however, that Thamotharampillai never ceased to be troubled by the Bible.³³ It is also noteworthy that according to his son Francis, Thamotharampillai continued to concede that there was salvation in Jesus Christ.³⁴

To Thamotharampillai's conversion Young and Jebanesan³⁵ attribute the influence of J.W. Colenso, the Anglican Bishop of Natal, through his work *The Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua Critically Examined* (1865), where the historicity of the Old Testament is

³¹ Hellmann-Rajanayagam, 1989.

³² 1867, p. 10. (My translation). The text also reveals the intrinsic racism of many in Tamil society when Thamotharampillai explains the rapid growth of Christianity in the Sandwich Islands and Africa in contrast to the slow growth in Jaffna by saying "Showing a leaf to those have not seen a tree will work only for Africans and those of the Sandwich Islands who have not had the experience of having a good teacher." (my translation, p. 28).

³³ Young and Jebanesan, 1995, p. 159.

³⁴ Young and Jebanesan, 1995, p. 157.

³⁵ Ibid..

²⁶ See Leitch and Leitch, 1890, p. 147.

²⁷ Manonmany Sanmugathas, in NCC, 1979, p. 131.

²⁸ Source: Lila Solomon (*nee* Kadingamar) in an interview with the author in 1994. She is Francis Kingsbury's grand-daughter.

²⁹ Occasionally we see reference to C.Y. Thamotharampillai. This is on account of his Anglicised Tamil initials "See Vye" (more correctly Chee-anna Vye-anna) being rendered in English.

³⁰ ACM-b, 1846, p. 33.

questioned. I tend to be sceptical, considering that Thamotharampillai must have started on *The Greatness of Saivism* at least two years ahead in 1865 to bring it into print by 1867, and Calenso's 1865 book would not have come to his attention in India earlier than a year after its publication in London. It is far more likely that Thamotharampillai read Colenso after rejecting Christianity. A poem that goes

"The Bible trembled at the fierce battle engaged with
Muttukkumarak

Kavirayar [1780-1851],

The Bible fell down and lay unconscious when attacked by
Navalar [1822-1879]

And now it lay dead, smitten by

Thamotharampillai [1832-1901]"

was widely used by Hindu revivalists and is attributed to Sabapathy Navalar³⁶ who at one stage ridiculed Thamotharampillai. The line to do with Thamotharampillai is presumably an allusion to his *Against the Bible*.

(vi) *Life in India*

Following graduation from Madras, the already influential Thamotharampillai's career saw a meteoric rise. He was appointed to the high office of Accountant of the Madras Treasury from which position he rose to be Accountant General. In 1871, despite the commitments to his official work and his avocation for Tamil texts, he sat and passed the B.L. examination of Madras University, thereby qualifying himself as a lawyer.

A decade later, Thamotharampillai took his retirement in 1881 and left the hurly-burly of Madras to settle down to his pursuits in literature in Kumbakonam. There, because of their common love for Tamil, a friendship arose between Thamotharampillai and Seshyasastri, Minister to the Maharajah of Puthukkottai and regent. Seshyasastri therefore funded Thamotharampillai's publication in 1887

³⁶ Young and Jebanesan, 1995, p. 40.

of *Kalithohai*, a Sangam work, with commentary.³⁷ The relationship, however soon led to new duties as one of the three High Court Judges for Puthukottai, which he held from 1887 until 1890 when he stepped down as the chief judge. In 1895 he was given the title Rao Bahadur for acting briefly as regent³⁸ to the young king.

He used almost all his large earnings³⁹ as a judge to continue his publication of ancient Tamil manuscripts. At one point, after advising the move to Madras of Sir Ponnabalam Ramanathan and his elder brother Coomarasamy, he was their guardian in India while they were studying there.⁴⁰ Ramanathan is said to have acknowledged only three men - Thamotharampillai, Sir Richard Morgan and his uncle Sir Muthu Coomaraswamy - as his Gurus.⁴¹

With his now considerable earnings he founded a school in his late mother's village of Erlalai. This school also has produced Tamil poets for whose works also Thamotharampillai may claim some credit. Two notable products of the school were Ganeshaiyar and Tellipalai Chivananthaiyar.⁴²

He died on 1 January 1901.

3. His Works

Vythilingam gives the clearest description of Thamotharampillai's work:

"... recovering from obscurity and oblivion the manuscripts of many great Tamil classics which otherwise would have been lost to posterity, editing them with patient and laborious toil and giving them the light of publicity."⁴³

³⁸ According to Mr. P.S. Somasundaram who was very close to his grand uncle Francis Kingsbury. Sanmugathas (1983) adds that Thamotharampillai turned down the offer to be Diwan (First Minister) of the kingdom so as to devote more time to his literary work.

³⁹ See JCTPSA, 1970, for his appeals for funds and careful accounting thereof.

⁴⁰ Vythilingam, 1971, Vol. 1, pp. 82-3.

⁴¹ Vythilingam, 1971, Vol. 1, p. 84.

⁴² Kanapathipillai, 1964, p. 141.

⁴³ Vythilingam, 1971, Vol. 1, p. 84.

Thamotharampillai's work involved advertising for manuscripts, finding them, comparing them and then putting them together. The book *Thamotharam*,⁴⁴ with Thamotharampillai's own prefaces, gives a good idea of what he faced. The manuscripts of palm leaves were insect bored, with edges cracked, leaves dropping, fungus infested, threads loose, corners folded and penetrated by worms.

It was in 1868 that Thamotharampillai brought out his *magnum opus*, *Tholkapiyam Chollathikaram* with commentary. The *Tholkapiyam*, as we know, is considered the oldest of the available Tamil works. This was the second part of the *Tholkapiyam*, the first having been brought out 20 years earlier by one Mahalingaiyar. It was the first time that *Chollathiharam* was published. This brought much kudos to him from the men of eminence of the time from Maharajahs to governors to religious leaders.

The third part of the *Tholkapiyam*, *Porulathiharam*, is considered the most important part of the *Tholkapiyam*. It had been considered lost and there were only parts of the manuscript in *olas* here and there. Thamotharampillai undertook a search through several means, such as contacts and newspaper advertisements, and finally in 1885 brought it to light.⁴⁵ The 1887 publication of the Sangam work, *Kalithohai*, was another major effort and brought him many laurels. In 1891 he republished Mahalingaiyar's first part of the *Tholkapiyam* with corrections based on additional manuscripts he had discovered. 1889 saw him bringing out *Choolamany* (one of the epics in Tamil).

Besides these, Thamotharampillai has also published his own original metrical works, these being *Natchathiramalai*, and *Kattalaikalithurai*. In addition, his search for old manuscripts, begun in 1853, yielded material that he did not personally use. These he gave others. Swaminathaiyar's *Silappathikaram* and *Purananooru* both relied heavily on manuscripts ferreted out by our subject.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ JCTPSA, 1970. See p. xiii for instance.

⁴⁵ Kanapathipillai, 1964, p. 135.

⁴⁶ Sanmugathas, 1983, pp. 48B49.

His death came while working on bringing out another Sangam work, *Ahananooru*, part of *Ettuthohai*.

In summary, his principal works are *Athiyahamak Keerthanai*, *Neethineri Vilakkam*, *Tholkappiyam Chollathikaram* (1868), *Veerasoliyam* (1881), *Thanihaipuranam* (1883), *Tholkappiyam Porulathikaram* (1885), *Kalithohai* (1887), *Illakkana Vilakkam* (1888), *Tholkappiyam Eluthathikaram* (1891), *Saivamahathuvam*, *Natchathiramalai*, *Kalithurai*, *Illakkana Villakam*, *Iraiyanar Ahapporul* and *Choolamany*. The first two are often left out of lists because they reveal his Christian origins.⁴⁷ His Christian lyrics, although requiring less effort, are also important for being in continued use in churches to this day, a 150 years after their original composition.

Of his works, *Tholkapiyam Porulathikaram*, *Illakkana Vilakkam*, *Natchathiramalai*, *Kalithurai*, *Illakkana Villakam*, *Iraiyanar Ahapporul* and *Choolamany* are manuscripts that were considered totally lost before Thamotharampillai looked for and found them.⁴⁸ Some of the other texts existed only in parts.

4. Jealousy

A man from Jaffna and a man of questionable Hindu status at that⁴⁹ being so successful in Tamil revival would have been difficult for some in Madras to take.⁵⁰ Naturally there was jealousy and resentment. He was personally attacked in newspapers. One of his detractors bought a few copies of Thamotharampillai's *Tholkappiyam Chollathikaram*, changed the title page and a bit of text here and there and published it in November 1868, two months after the original. But Madras University's Tamil dons, including Viyapuripillai, were able to vindicate Thamotharampillai.⁵¹ A part of this jealousy might have been due to his non-Brahmin status.

⁴⁷ See Muthukumarasuvamipillai, 1974, for instance.

⁴⁸ Kulandran, 1970, p. 14; Kanapathipillai, 1964, p. 135.

⁴⁹ Because of caste issues, there is really no conversion into Hinduism, only conversion out of it.

⁵⁰ See Coomaraswamy, 1991 for the difficulties faced by Sir Muttu Coomaraswamy in India.

⁵¹ Kanapathipillai, 1964, p. 133.

Swaminathaiyar⁵² relates a story of how Thamotharampillai strongly persuaded him to part with a manuscript of the *Sinthamany* he had, and then refused to return it saying he had to publish it.⁵³ But he finally did return it only upon the intervention of others. The impression left is that Thamotharampillai wished to take credit for Swaminathaiyar's work. Thamotharampillai's defenders, however, say that, rather, Thamotharampillai felt he had to publish it properly since Swaminathaiyar was not equipped to bring out the manuscript with proper literary analysis. Cee Kanapathaipillai⁵⁴ shows these claims — that Thamotharampillai tried to copy Swaminathaiyar — to be untrue through the use of dates and Swaminathaiyar's own preface to his edition of *Jeevahasinthamani*, where he openly acknowledges his gratitude to Thamotharampillai. Sanmugathas⁵⁵ also vindicates him by saying that once Thamotharampillai knew that Swaminathaiyar was working on the *Sinthamany*, he gave his own versions to Swaminathaiyar and concentrated on the older work *Choolaamany* and brought it to light. It is noteworthy that this is a Jain work and therefore required extensive familiarisation with Jain thought to piece the various manuscripts together.

All the more significant about Thamotharampillai's work is the fact that at the time, it had been decreed by the Saivite *Atheenams* that Jain and Buddhist works were not to be studied.⁵⁶ Moreover, Thamotharampillai demonstrated his greater loyalty to Tamil than to Saivism in refuting the common argument by the leaders at the time that Agasthiyar, who supposedly introduced Brahmanical forms

to the South, wrote the Tamil grammar from which the Tamil language came to be. Thamotharampillai vociferously argued that grammar always follows the spoken language and that Tamil pre-dated Agasthiyar.

Thamotharampillai is now widely recognised as someone who gave of himself selflessly to the language. There is now revived interest in him and his contributions, especially from a Dravidian perspective. He is acknowledged as one who generously helped any one who endeavoured to bring out Tamil literary works, giving them all the information he had.⁵⁷

5. The Son: Francis Kingsbury (1873-1941)

Thamotharampillai's claim to glory may rest simply on having produced his son Francis. No biography of Thamotharampillai can therefore fail to mention Francis, an intellectual giant in his own right, having produced numerous books in Tamil as well as English.⁵⁸ The most admired of his works is *Hymns of the Tamil Saivite Saints*, his translations of the Saivite *Thevarams*, which he published with G.E. Phillips.⁵⁹ This book has seen several reprints. By his own admission he learned to love these songs of devotion at his father's feet.⁶⁰ It was therefore natural for him to compose Christian lyrics to the tune of the *Thevarams* (*pun issai*) several of which still appear in the Church's *Book of Lyrics*.

More than the value of his particular works, Francis Kingsbury, made his most valuable contribution to Tamil as Lecturer in Tamil at University College, Colombo (now the University of Colombo⁶¹). Not only did he give root to Tamil studies in Ceylon by founding it

⁵² In his book *My Story* (in Tamil: *En Kathai*), quoting a personal communication from S. Jebanesan. Sanmugathas (1983, p. 49) gives this as *My History* (Enn Charithiram).

⁵³ Swaminathaiyar also claims that Thamotharampillai had attempted effectively to bribe him by saying that if he agreed to let Thamotharampillai publish *Sinthamany* and concentrated on the *Ramayanam*, he, Thamotharampillai, would meet all expenses in publishing it (Sanmugathas, 1983, p. 49)

⁵⁴ 1964, p. 139.

⁵⁵ 1983, p. 49.

⁵⁶ Sanmugathas, 1983, p. 149.

⁵⁷ Sanmugathas, 1983, in several places.

⁵⁸ National Memorial Issue (in Tamil: *Thesiya Ninaivu Malar*), Colombo, 1941, by his students on his demise.

⁵⁹ 1921, London: Oxford University Press.

⁶⁰ Young and Jebanesan, 1995, p. 156.

⁶¹ Like all professors, he too had a nickname. It was a twist on Kingsbury, *Kunjupori*, meaning chick-hatcher. This was related to me by his student, the late District Judge Thambithurai of Thinnavelly.

as a modern discipline subject to the critical methods of western thought, but he also trained a generation of scholars who in turn made their lasting contributions. I am told that Professor Kanapathipillai has widely acknowledged Francis' influence on his growth as a scholar.⁶²

Unlike most professors who write obscure books and papers, Francis took the language to the people, writing folk-dramas and pioneering plays on Ceylon Radio. This way he infected many with a love for Tamil. His plays include *Chandrasaham*, *Rama's Story*, *Pandava's Story*, and *Manonmany*, all in Tamil. The more formal texts are *Praises to God* (in Tamil: Kadavul Valthup Pa) and *Hymns of Inner Meaning* (In Tamil: Ahapporutkural).

Many today will not know who Francis Kingsbury was, because Tamil nationalism has ensured that his Christian connexions are forgotten by constantly referring to him as Alahasundara Desihar,⁶³ a name that is now more familiar to many because many of his biographers simply refer to Francis as Alahasundaram and say no more about him.⁶⁴ As it turns out Alahasundaram, his pre-Baptismal name, was used only at home⁶⁵ and Francis himself never used it in his numerous publications in Tamil or English, in all of which he consistently went as Francis Kingsbury.

Born on 8th August 1873 after the father's renunciation of Christianity, he was given the name Alahasundaram and brought up as a Hindu in India where his father was now domiciled. Taking after his mother's complexion, he was light-skinned.⁶⁶ Francis received a strict Hindu upbringing that included a study of Tamil and Saivite works. The story goes that upon being introduced to Navalar, Francis, a young lad then, was asked by his father to fall at Navalar's feet and worship him. Francis, with his irrepressible character that was to mark his life, had instead jumped on to Navalar's lap and started eating the orange that Navalar had in his hand and presented to him.

⁶² K. Sivathamby, personal communication, Oct. 1997.

⁶³ Karalasingham, 1993

⁶⁴ Karalasingam, 1993; Muthukumarasuvamipillai, 1974.

⁶⁵ This writer's mother addressed him as Alahuth-thahtha

⁶⁶ Kingsbury, 1972.

His mother's death when he was seven and his father's subsequent marriage only in 1890 when Francis was seventeen,⁶⁷ meant that Thamotharampillai had to depend heavily on his brother Appukutti for help since he was not only doing well but was also married to Francis' mother's sister. It is said that Francis grew up in Madras and in his relatives' homes in Jaffna "subject to no control."⁶⁸ This may explain his being described as a "mischievous, fearless and brave ideologue and pet child."⁶⁹

Thamotharampillai's mistake was in enrolling Francis, then Alahasundaram, at Madras Christian College in 1887, whereas there were secular colleges as well as Hindu ones such as Pachayappah's famous institution. It is a fact that indicates Thamotharampillai's belief in westernisation.⁷⁰ There, believing that as a Jaffna boy he, Francis, ought to know the Bible better than the average Indian boy, he avidly studied it. At this point, Thamotharampillai panicked and transferred him to the secular Presidency College where he ceased to be a Hindu, disturbed that the *anusthana* lacked an explicit rationale: "Why should I face East or North (and not West or South) when I smear holy ashes on my forehead?" he had asked.⁷¹ What role his father's third marriage in 1890 played in the widening chasm between father and son is unassessed to date, but at the sensitive age of 17, it must have been great.

From then onwards, his Christian faith had gradually awakened. A turning point was 26 February, 1892 when he was deeply moved by the sermon of an American missionary⁷² Dr. Pentecost, at the

⁶⁷ Francis was quite grown up at 17 when his father re-remarried and not a small boy as Sanmugathas (1983, p. 27) explains. It is the younger sister who needed a mother at the time.

⁶⁸ Jebanesan, 1994, p. 43.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 42.

⁷⁰ It has been claimed that Thamotharampillai as a boy went to Batticotta for want of a good Hindu institution (see Section 7.ii below for a discussion). But here we see Thamotharampillai the ardent Hindu sending his Hindu son to a Christian school.

⁷¹ Citing Young and Jebanesan, 1995, p. 157.

⁷² Jebanesan, 1994, p. 43.

Madras YMCA.⁷³ But he avoided the ultimate step of baptism to avoid scandal to his father.

The issue could not be avoided for long. On Christmas eve, 1892, the father and son were in their house in Madras down Vellala Street, each clad in a white *verty* and white shirt. The father told his son that the next day, Christmas day, was his mother's anniversary according to the "Tamil calendar" and the son should prepare himself for the ceremony at 9:00 am for which the barber would come at 6:00 am. The son looked the father in the eye, told him of his new faith and that the ceremony would not benefit his mother's soul. He planned to return to his grandparents' faith he added. The proud father's only words were: "You will perform the ceremony at 9:00 am or you will leave my house and inherit nothing from me." Saying this, the father turned his head away and the son left the room.⁷⁴

The son prayed in his room until close to midnight, and then wrote a letter which he weighted down with the silver chain he wore at his waist and left as the clock struck midnight, taking with him only the clothes he wore and the Bible presented to him by Dr. David Mc Cononghy in whose Bible study class he was.

Baptism finally occurred while staying with his maternal and paternal uncle (father in Tamil terms), Appukutti Kingsbury in Jaffna. Prepared by Appukutti, he went for baptism on 19 Feb. 1893 at the Batticotta parish, which was followed by lunch for the whole congregation at Appukutti's house.

Having walked out of his father's house, he first went to his cousins' (one of whom, Rathinam, was very dear to him and would soon become his wife) for the night and, since he could not stay there, the next morning, Christmas day, to the Rev. Dr. William Miller, the President of Madras Christian College.⁷⁵ Upon being told that Francis was dropping out of college for want of support, Miller gave him breakfast, took him to town for clothes and provided Francis

with a part-time teaching appointment in the secondary section, for which he was paid Rs. 20 a month. Francis left Madras Christian College in 1896 without earning a degree, which he would do much later, at the age of 40 while a priest at Pasumalai Church.⁷⁶

Marriage to his close relative, Mary Rathinam followed on 14 August, 1893. Mary's brother had just married his sister Sivapakkiam the previous year. Her father, Sithamparapillai who had been born in Tellippalai, had been working in Nallur, Andhra, as a doctor and Francis had been in love with her from his days as a student. He formally requested permission from Thamothersampillai, and upon being refused, he proudly held a low-key marriage according to Christian rites, paying Rs. 3 to the registrar, Rs. 1 to the horseman, Rs. 1 to the sexton who rang the bell, and Rs. 1 for the refreshments, at a total cost of Rs. 6!

Francis went on to become an assistant priest at Pasumalai Church in 1898 and was ordained priest and took charge of the parish the next year. His eldest daughter died just after her first birthday. His second daughter, Catherine Katpaham, fell in love, married and died shortly after giving birth to Leela. Like his father, Francis was to live with the tragic early loss of his wife and children.

In 1910 Francis joined the academic staff of Union Theological College in Bangalore. However, his short intervening stint as a chaplain⁷⁷ in the British Army took him to Mesopotamia in the early 1920s where, with a lot of time on his hands, he came under the influence of German thinkers through their writings. As a result, he developed the view that "Jesus was merely a man."⁷⁸ He resumed duties at Bangalore and stepped down in 1923, perhaps because of conscience issues. In 1924 he assumed duties at Madras University as Assistant Editor working on a Tamil Lexicon and held this position until 1926.

⁷⁶ Source: Leela Solomons. Jebanesan (1994, p. 43) gives the year of graduation as his 41st year.

⁷⁷ Jebanesan's characterisation of him as a brave soldier (yuththa veeran, 1994, p. 46) is not tenable since chaplains do not carry arms. Jebanesan also adds that for his services to the army he was awarded a blue stone which he wore on a ring to his death.

⁷⁸ Words of Leela Solomons.

⁷³ Kingsbury, 1972.

⁷⁴ Based on Kingsbury, 1972.

⁷⁵ Jebanesan, (1994, p. 43) says he stayed with a friend but his granddaughter Leela Solomons is emphatic it was with Miller. This is also buttressed by Francis' son (Kingsbury, 1972).

His controversial 1924 book *Jesus of Nazareth*⁷⁹ ended at the Cross and did not mention anything of the resurrection. This resulted in Francis' trial⁸⁰ in 1925, conducted by Dr. Larson, Principal of Bangalore Theological College and consequent defrocking. He was subsequently accepted as a priest in the Unitarian Church. This entitled him to continue to carry the title Rev. India was now no longer a comfortable place for Francis. He joined University College Colombo in August 1926. A colourful man, he continued to shock people through his heterodoxy such as by throwing the sacraments to the crows to make the point they remained unchanged as bread.⁸¹ A.M.K. Cumarasamy,⁸² in his preface to a posthumous edition of *Manonmany*, refers to his dancing at a children's party, singing a song that went: "Taking a sip out of a bottle of toddy, and biting a bit out of dry fish."⁸³ Kallulai Oru Kudi Kudichukondu

Karuvaatilai Oru Kadi Kadichukondu.

The competition in metaphysical thought between Thamotharampillai and his brother Appukutti was not over. When two of Appukutti's great-grandsons stayed with Francis while at University College, Francis was instrumental in making them atheists.

Francis retired from Colombo in 1936 and passed away on 12 April 1941.

6. Personal Glimpses

Thamotharampillai, like all of us, had his noble side and his not-so-noble side. Much of the admirable side of his personality reveals itself in his relationship with his son Francis. Stories abound of

⁷⁹ A Colombo edition was published in 1932 by Cave and Co. in 1932.

⁸⁰ At the Pasumali church according to his grand-daughter and at the Purasivakkam church in Madras according to Jebanesan (1994, p. 45)

⁸¹ Source: Jeevamany Hoole, his grand-niece.

⁸² A.M.K. Cumarasamy's daughter Amirtham is married to Appukutti's descendant Bahirathan Devarajan.

⁸³ The alliterative verse reads as follows:

Kallulai Our Kudi Kudichukondu

Karuvaatilai Our Kadi Kadichukondu.

Thamotharampillai's relationship with Francis; both were stubborn men who did not speak to each other since Francis' refusal to officiate at Hindu rites following his mother's death. Francis having a mind of his own, the relationship even had comical aspects. Once when Thamotharampillai had Francis' frontal hair shaved in the Hindu fashion, Francis went and had his entire head shaved.⁸⁴ It is in this relationship with his son that we see Thamotharampillai's kind side.

It would have been natural for a man of Thamotharampillai's station, who had carefully cultivated a Hindu identity, to be angry when his son Francis apostasised. Outwardly he maintained that he was angry. As related by Francis, Thamotharampillai had issued strict injunctions to his servant not to let Francis into the house unless he had holy ashes on his forehead.⁸⁵ Thamotharampillai always had a gun at home saying it was for shooting Francis with should he chance to come home.⁸⁶

But was he really angry or was he more hurt and only pretending to be angry for social reasons? As pointed out earlier, a marriage between Francis' niece Bapa and Thamotharampillai's son Singaravelu through his third wife, a Hindu, occurred. How did that happen if they were truly angry? Thamotharampillai's true state of mind is revealed when Francis says that his father was sorry that the social laws of India forbade him to have a Christian in his house."⁸⁷ According to Francis' grand-daughter, when he walked out of the father's house at 21 and started living with William Miller, the

⁸⁴ Source: Dr. Devanesan Nesiah.

⁸⁵ A note to family members by William Kingsbury, Thamotharampillai's grandson (Kingsbury, 1972). Also see Young and Jebanesan, 1995, p. 157.

⁸⁶ As related by Benjamin Vijayararatnam Kingsbury (Thamotharampillai's nephew who went as Benjamin Kingsbury Vijaya in Malaya) to his daughter Gnanapoopathy Alfreds of Singapore.

⁸⁷ Young and Jebanesan, 1995, p. 157. But we do know that Thamotharampillai sent his daughter to his brother's house in Jaffna and Christian relations from Jaffna also visited him in Madras. It would appear that it is a rule he observed only with Francis from whom he expected total obedience.

latter helped, feeling immensely attracted to Francis by Francis' revolutionary idealism. It was out of this gratitude to Miller that Francis' eldest was named William. Jebanesan, perhaps the foremost expert on 19th century Jaffna living today,⁸⁸ adds that Francis who had walked out only with his shirt and trousers he was wearing, promptly returned these to his father as soon as he got a change!⁸⁹

But Thamotharampillai, to protect the "family honour" according to his great-granddaughter, had apparently sent Miller a monthly sum lest it be said that his son was living on charity. The equally proud Francis was not told because it was assumed that he would walk out of Miller's house too rather than accept his father's largesse. We also know that Thamotharampillai felt a deep connexion to Francis' daughter (Catherine Katpaham Kingsbury⁹⁰) and had given a pair of bangles to her at birth with strict injunctions to Francis' wife that she should not divulge that it was he who had made the gift: he feared that the bangles would be returned by the proud son.⁹¹ We further know that although to all appearances Thamotharampillai was angry with Francis and they never set eyes on each other after his leaving, except at Thamotharampillai's death-bed, they regularly corresponded with each other.

Thus it would appear that Thamotharampillai was also playing a little game so as to uphold his station in India and to be able to proceed with his work. This may also explain the reports that Thamotharampillai gave his name as Charles Winslow to missionaries and as Thamotharampillai to Hindus.⁹² The view that

⁸⁸ Jebanesan, 1987.

⁸⁹ Jebanesan, 1994, p. 43.

⁹⁰ Notice the nice Tamil alliteration so necessary of a man who lived on poetry.

⁹¹ Source: Leela Solomons, Francis= grand-daughter.

⁹² Personal communication from Prof. Sivathamby that such reports do exist. The Rt. Rev. Dr. Jebanesan in a personal communication says that Fr. Gnappagasar has said in a leaflet titled Honesty and Religious Research (in Tamil: Samaya Araychiyum Nermaiym) that the best counter example to the claim that a good Hindu does not lie is Thamotharampillai, based on his habit of using the two names as convenient according to whether his associates were Tamils or English. Also see Sanmugathas (1979, p. 12).

Thamotharampillai's anger was mixed-up is further confirmed by Leela Solomons: when Thamotharampillai was on his deathbed, Francis did go and meet the father and fed him medicine with a spoon, and the semi-conscious Thamotharampillai did imbibe it from his son's hand.

As a man of his times, however, Thamotharampillai, the Hindu, hated Christians in general at least in an ideological sense. As his son Francis Kingsbury has testified, he learnt at his father's feet that "to be a true Hindu I must not only cherish reverence to the *Shastras* and *Puranas*, but that I must hate Christianity and Christians."⁹³ How awkward it must have been for Thamotharampillai to deal with the other Kingsburys whom he was deeply tied into in multiple ways. Particularly his two brothers' families were indistinguishably co-sanguine since they had married the Levins sisters. It was awkward because he certainly felt kinship with them and did not break his relationship with them.

Naturally their lives were lived in tension. His daughter Sivapakiam who had stayed behind in Vaddukodai with his Christian brother Appukutti Kingsbury (and wife's sister Atchikutti) had, on her own wishes converted to Christianity and had a Christian marriage arranged for her. This was in 1892 to the brother of Mary Rathinam whom she knew Francis was planning to marry. Thamotharampillai had suddenly turned up from India, and the daughter, fearing that the father would put a stop to her marriage, ran out through a hole in the back fence and eloped with her fiancée (her cousin) on a bullock-cart.

Missing the daughter, Thamotharampillai started going through each room of Appukutti's house looking for her, slapping his sister-

⁹³ Cited in Young and Jebanesan, 1995, p. 156. This is in keeping with Navalar's hatred for Christians who were making Christians out of Saivites. In his commentary on *Caivacamayaneri*, he says that: "it is the duty of every Saivite to kill those who steal Sivan's property or revile him. If one is not strong enough to kill the blasphemer, one must hire another to do it. If one has nothing to hire with, one must leave the country where the sinner lives. By remaining in the country one becomes a participator in the sin." (Young and Jebanesan, 1995, p. 80).

in-law Atchikutti on not getting a satisfactory answer as to Sivapakiam's whereabouts. Finally he came to one room where his triple niece⁹⁴ Sundaram Hemphil, was breast-feeding her child. He asked Sundaram where the daughter was, and getting the evasive reply that she must be somewhere about,⁹⁵ he promptly slapped her even as she was breast-feeding.⁹⁶ When this was followed by Francis' baptism at Appukutti's place, Appukutti's relationship with Thamotharampillai became strained. Appukutti tried visiting the brother in India later but was asked to get out by a pistol brandishing Thamotharampillai,⁹⁷ presumably the same pistol he had for Francis.

Again we see Thamotharampillai's hatred for Christians to whom he felt a social responsibility in the case of the Rev. Canon S. S. Somasundaram, a Christian convert and younger brother of Viswanatha Mudaliyar who was also known as Kodimara Sangarar Mudaliyapillai because of his right to hoist the flag at Maviddapuram.⁹⁸ Mudaliyarpillai was a close friend of Thamotharampillai's. Somasundaram, just like with Francis, was pulled out of Jaffna College (Batticotta's successor) by Mudaliyapillai because of his interest in Christianity and sent to the secular Calcutta

⁹⁴ Brother's daughter, and daughter of his first and second wives' sister.

⁹⁵ *Oongai engaiyo thahn irukkavenum.*

⁹⁶ Somasundaram (1983). Somasundaram is Sundaram Hemphil's grandson and headed the Department of Mechanical Engineering, University of Ceylon, Colombo in the 1950s. As eldest of the Kingsbury brothers, Thamotharampillai's right to slap Sundaram went unchallenged by Appukutti.

⁹⁷ Somasundaram, 1983.

⁹⁸ Maviddapuram is a strange temple for being the only one in Jaffna controlled by a Brahmin. It is said that Mudaliyapillai's 19th century ancestor who once controlled the temple was a forgetful man and on several occasions had been occupied in the fields and forgot to open the doors for the Brahmin in time for *poojas* and other ceremonies. After several such incidents, he had given the key to the Brahmin and since then the family had slowly lost control of the temple in part.. This became total when Mudaliyapillai's only brother Somasundaram converted to Christianity and refused the childless Mudaliyapillai's request to have his son Peter brought up as a Hindu.

University. Because of his connections to his mathematics and Tamil professor Appukutti (whose grand-daughter Ponnammah he would later marry) and Mudaliyarpillai's friendship, it was arranged for him to stay with Thamotharampillai in Madras on his way. Thamotharampillai was, however, angry with Somasundaram for showing signs of rejecting Hinduism. When Somasundaram arrived at Thamotharampillai's house in Madras, unknown to Somasundaram, the railway to Calcutta from Madras had just begun the previous day with big fanfare. It is said that Thamotharampillai, who had hardly spoken to Somasundaram on that visit except to lecture him "on the heinousness of becoming a Christian,"⁹⁹ intentionally loaded him on the ship to Calcutta, which was considered an arduous and tiring way of getting there. Somasundaram was deeply upset by this when he got to Calcutta and found out about the train.¹⁰⁰

As we see from his will, Thamotharampillai never gave up trying to make good Saivites out of his Christian relatives. Karalasingham¹⁰¹ simply says that Francis was left out of it because he had enough money of his own. But, also as reported by Mrs. Alfreds, quoting her father (Thamotharampillai's nephew Kingsbury Vijaya), the will stipulated that Francis or his Christian relatives could claim his by then extensive properties if they renounced Christianity and returned to Saivism. Kingsbury Vijaya had been asked to do this and claim the properties for his four daughters, but he politely declined. Likewise Thamotharampillai also tried (not always successfully) to arrange Hindu marriages for his Christian relatives. One example of his success, was to the ancestor of Punitham Tiruchelvam, Neelan Tiruchelvam's mother — i.e., Appukutti's second daughter Amirtham. It is said that when Amirtham was visiting her uncle Thamotharampillai in India, he produced the *tali* from a drawer in his house and ordered the groom, Veerasamy who was a regular visitor and who happened to call there and was immensely respectful towards Thamotharampillai, to tie it on his niece. "Tie it,"

⁹⁹ Kulandran, 1970, p. 14.

¹⁰⁰ Source: Jeevamany Hoole, The Rev. Canon Somasundaram's daughter. Also see Kulandran, 1970.

¹⁰¹ Karalasingham, 1993

he had ordered him. Since he was a judge at the time, he signed the papers himself legalising the marriage.¹⁰² Thomotherampillai had paid back for his daughter's marriage to a Christian arranged by Appukutti, by arranging a Hindu marriage for Appukutti's daughter.

This account would not be complete without mentioning his stamp. In 1982 or thereabouts when the District Council Scheme was inaugurated, the Jaffna Council pressed for and got a stamp issued to commemorate our subject. Unfortunately, there was a mishap and the stamp was printed with a different person's visage. Jaffna was ready for a big ceremony and the eve before release, national TV news announced it. Thamotharampillai's grandson, William Kingsbury, who had chanced to see the news in Colombo managed to call up the Post Master General that night and told him it was not his grandfather. Devanesan Nesiah who was GA Jaffna and Secretary to the Council in turn got a call that someone "claiming to be" Thamotharampillai's grandson was alleging that the stamp had someone else's picture. In the event, the ceremony was postponed and the government was good enough to reissue the stamp with the right picture.

7. Tamil-Hindu Nationalist Propaganda¹⁰³

(i) *Roots of Propaganda*

The areas of Tamil-Hindu nationalist propaganda in Thamotharampillai's case have to do mainly with his caste and religion. With few exceptions, his Christian origins are suppressed and his caste is stated to be Vellala.¹⁰⁴ Even the great Professor

¹⁰³ A parallel development among the Sinhalese may be aptly pointed out. Prof. Leslie Gunawardana (1995) has looked at changes made to history so as to serve Sinhalese nationalism. Similarly Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere (1988, p. 214-215) have pointed out the carefully suppressed unsavoury side of Anagarika Dharmapala who specified that a good Sinhalese must eat with a fork and knife and use toilet paper, besides some 200 other rules. This parallels Tamils efforts over Navalar.

¹⁰⁴ Muthukumarasuvamipillai, 1974.

Vaiyapuripillai makes the claim that Thamotharampillai was born into the Saivite tradition.¹⁰⁵ Interestingly while today's nationalists claim him as Hindu and Tamil, nationalists last century accused him of being "a Christian, an opportunist and a devotee of the English language."¹⁰⁶

In examining the roots of today's nationalist claims, it is relevant to start with Lord Macaulay's now famous and acerbic minute about our "false history, false astronomy, false metaphysics," during the great debate about whether Indians should be educated in English or the vernacular. I believe the point he was trying to make is that somehow accuracy is absent in writings in the vernacular tongues of India. While not endorsing his position completely, in Thamotharampillai's case, it is generally true that biographies in English or by the western-educated,¹⁰⁷ are more reliable than those in Tamil. What are the roots of this tendency? In Tamil culture, nay, Indian culture, there is a tendency to extol the great regardless of accuracy. Consequently learning and research become a tool in the service of nationalism and obsequiousness for upholding the effete social order rather than an end in itself.

Accordingly following Professor K. Sivathamby's paper in the Navalar commemorative volume where some less attractive sides of Navalar are brought out,¹⁰⁸ a leading member of the committee with an O.B.E. had commented that "it is high-time to stop researches of this type on Navalar."¹⁰⁹ Similarly when a recent Jaffna University doctoral thesis had extensive quotations showing the dark state of Jaffna society early in the 19th century, one of the three examiners

¹⁰⁵ Vaiyapuripillai, 1952, p. 229. Also the newspaper *Eela Nadu* of 28 Nov. 1976 as part of its series on Thamotharampillai.

¹⁰⁶ Jebanesan, 1994, p. 27.

¹⁰⁷ Here I include those educated in our universities

¹⁰⁸ K. Sivathamby, pp. 48-59 in NCC, 1979. While Sivathamby has called Navalar "The Best Methodist" (Young and Jebanesan, 1995) for puritanically excising the sexual symbols of Hinduism (personal communication), Obeyesekere (1975, p. 25) has called Anagarika Dharmapala a "Protestant Buddhist."

¹⁰⁹ Personal communication from Prof. K. Sivathamby, Oct. 1997.

insisted on a good part of it being removed before approval.¹¹⁰ Even Manonmany Sanmugathas, perhaps the best informed of Thamotherspillai's biographers, makes the unsupported claim in her M.A. thesis (one of the first five from Jaffna University) that Saivism is the true religion¹¹¹ and that many had to become Christians in their "incomplete wisdom"¹¹² because of missionary efforts. She also seemingly apologises on behalf of our subject for having had to live the life of a Christian for lack of choice.

This may be only part of the explanation in Thamotherspillai's case. I think the more dominant explanation is the belief of many Tamils that unless one is Saivite, he is not Tamil and unless one is Vellala, he is worth nothing. Accordingly, if Thamotherspillai was Christian, then he could not have contributed to Tamil, and if he had not been Vellala then no good could have come from him.¹¹³ So he must have been both Saivite and Vellala!¹¹⁴

This thinking has its roots in the idea expressed by Professor Pathmanathan that "the Hindu tradition, along with the Tamil language, forms the basis of Tamil identity."¹¹⁵ By extrapolation, if Thamotherspillai had been a Christian, he could not have been a

¹¹⁰ Personal communication from the candidate.

¹¹¹ "Recognising which the true religion is, many converted to Saivism." (my translation) Manonmany Sanmugathas (1983, p.11). This is a reproduction of her M.A. thesis. To her credit, she is the first Hindu scholar to acknowledge our subject's Christian roots.

¹¹² Ibid., *Putthi-poorvam attu*

¹¹³ Gynaecologist Sinnathamby used to tell his visitors, including Christians, that all the "good" Tamils have come back to Saivism and the others have remained Christian.

¹¹⁴ Peter Percival the great Tamil scholar and one time principal of Jaffna Central College who occupied the Tamil chair at Madras in his later years is also made to distance himself from Christianity when Cee Kanapathipillai (1964, p. 30) claims that he gave up the priesthood to run a Tamil newspaper from Madras! The truth is that it was a period of Anglo-Catholic revival in England, and he gave up the Methodist Church (to which he had moved from the Church of England) and became an Anglican priest. But he continued to be a Christian priest.

¹¹⁵ S. Pathmanathan, (n.d.), p. 158.

Tamil.¹¹⁶ This same thinking appears to be echoed by the late Justice H. W. Tambiah, a Christian and the Vice Chairman of the Naval Commemoration Society, when he says that without Navalar, what he calls the Tamil "Race" (*inam*) would have been destroyed, as though conversion to Christianity meant loss of Tamilness. On objective reflection, however, most of us would concede that the Tamil identity is linguistic and neither religious nor racial.

(ii) *Thamotherspillai's Religion at Birth*

Few of Thamotherspillai's biographers concede that he was a Christian at birth.¹¹⁷ The most egregious of propaganda efforts in this regard is directed at our children through government school texts.¹¹⁸

As a preamble to this section, it is worth remarking on Tamil nationalism's myopia; its tendency to get worked up only when its own rights are at stake. When Muslims from Jaffna were asked to leave simply on the basis of their ethnicity, Tamil nationalism said they were being ejected for giving information to the army. The most we could bring ourselves to say was that it was a "mistake." On the other hand, when Tamils are rounded up in Colombo as informants on the basis of ethnicity, Tamil nationalism discovered human rights. When the Dravidian contribution to Sri Lankan culture is ignored in our school texts, we Tamils get fired up. "Foul!" we rightly cry in unison.

With that provocation as preamble, let us look at what Tamil nationalism has cooked up for my daughter's Year Six text on Tamil.

¹¹⁶ This has been dealt with at length in S. R. H. Hoole, 1992 in response to claims at several public meetings and the Saturday Review by N. Satyendra that Tamil and Saivism are one.

¹¹⁷ E. Sangarapillai, Universal Teacher [sic], has stated as recently as 1995 (*Tamil Times*, Feb. 1995, pp. 25-26) that "Thamotherspillai was a Hindu by descent as well as conviction, but for reasons of English education pretended to be a Christian."

¹¹⁸ Tamil-Year Six, Educational Publications Department, Isurupaya, Bataramulle, 1993.

I say cooked up by Tamil nationalism, because, being a text on Tamil, it was certainly not written by an "Aryan Sinhalese communalist." It was almost certainly written by a Tamil Vellala.

Lesson 39 of the government school text just referenced from Isurupaya, Bataramulle, is on Thamotheampillai. The title is "C.W. Thamotheampillai who Nurtured Tamil." His father's name is given as Wyravanather as in nearly all biographies, whereas we know that his father was Cyrus Kingsbury and that Vayiravi was a name he had stopped using at his baptism in 1925, seven full years before Thamotheampillai's birth. To call Cyrus Kingsbury Wairavanather (indeed with a W rather than the correct V) is like insisting on calling Thamotheampillai Chalres Winslow Kingsbury, a name that he rejected. Indeed, a book by Christians does do it and refers to him repeatedly as Winslow¹¹⁹ - perhaps a point was sought to be made. Similarly, Thamotheampillai's mother is referred to as Perunthevi rather than as Mary Dayton. The text goes on to say that Thamotheampillai had to go to Batticotta Seminary because there were only Christian institutions, forgetting that he was at the time a Christian with particular devotion to the Bible and the son of a Christian who considered admission to Batticotta not only desirable but a privilege. Many other texts are at least silent on his religion.¹²⁰ But this school text, by saying that he went to Batticotta for lack of choice, subtly insinuates that he was a Hindu at the time who would have gone to a Hindu school had there been one. Thamotheampillai's evangelical work at Kopay is excised in the text and he is made to proceed straight from Batticotta to India.¹²¹ In India he undergoes his tertiary education (*uyar kalvi*) whereas he had already had his collegiate education at Batticotta, the first collegiate institution in Asia, and merely sat the examinations at Madras without attending classes simply to establish equivalency.¹²² The school text, apparently

refuses to acknowledge the level of education introduced in Jaffna by the Christian missions.

I am therefore publicly calling on Thamotheampillai's illustrious great-grand nephew present here who is a Member of Parliament to use his good offices to set the school text right.

(iii) *Thamotheampillai's Caste*

I intentionally raise this as an issue because to many Tamils caste is important, although they would vociferously deny it. To them, alas, Thamotheampillai would lose his value if he were not Vellala.

Muthukumarasuvamipillai¹²³ explicitly says he was Vellala. According to the biographer Karalasingham,¹²⁴ "Thamotheampillai comes from an illustrious farming stock." What Karalasingham means is that Thamotheampillai was a Vellala. Another typical ploy used by biographers is the phrase "He was from an orthodox family." What is meant is obvious. It is the phraseology of almost every upper-class Tamil for whom caste is important, but whose western veneer (which must be maintained at any cost as a sign of modern class status) prevents him from being direct. We really have, in V.S. Naipaul's words, left the village, but the village refuses to leave us.

The Vellala label is certainly a caste association that Thamotheampillai wanted, as clearly indicated by his appending the Vellala title Pillai to himself. He also chose to build a palatial house for himself down Vellala Street in Madras.¹²⁵ We do know that he was poked fun at for being low caste because he was a Christian and had to hide his Christian roots since those who knew him to be Christian refused to share their precious manuscripts with him. The story goes that when he met his Jaffna Friend John Hensman, who was heading the boarding school at Kodai Canal, he pleaded with Hensman not to let anyone that he was a Christian now. But we do not know whether the hate was a general anti-Christian bias or because they knew something particular about his caste.

¹²³ 1974.

¹²⁴ Karalasingham, 1993.

¹²⁵ Kingsbury, 1972.

¹¹⁹ Young and Jebanesan, 1995.

¹²⁰ See Sivalingarajah (1983) or almost any other biography.

¹²¹ This lapse is corrected in a later section without explanation.

¹²² Kanapthipillai, 1964, also makes the same mistake (p. 128) by saying that after Batticotta, there was no place in Jaffna for Thamotheampillai to do collegiate studies.

Was Thamothersampillai, then, really of Vellala stock? Indeed, it is my asking the question "Am I a Vellala?", since I am a direct descendant of Cyrus Kingsbury and his wife Mary Dayton. Cyrus Kingsbury, as we know, was a Vellala within the limits of this label that almost everyone in or from Jaffna sneakily tries to append to himself. He was descended from Mapana Mudali of Cirrupidy, his son, Valayuthar, the latter's son Ambalavanar, the latter's son Moothathamby and the latter's son Gurunathar, the father of Cyrus.¹²⁶ What then of Thamothersampillai's mother, Mary Dayton? Was she also Vellala? The available evidence indicates no finality, no definitiveness, on it until we unearth more information on her. But there is a strong likelihood that she was no Vellala.

What we do know of her is that, according to the Report of the American Ceylon Mission,¹²⁷ she was taken into the family of the American missionary Daniel Poor in 1822 at the age of 10 to be educated, and was supported by the Juvenile Society of Granville, NY.¹²⁸ She who went by her Hindu name Periyai Mayilar at the time, to Daniel Poor's credit, was baptised as Mary Dayton only in her 18th year as an adult. We also know that her father was Mayilar of the Parish of Tellippalai.¹²⁹ She had joined Daniel Poor's household by 1822 before Uduvil Girls' School started and was therefore one of the first class in 1824 when the school opened.¹³⁰ Little else is known of her for now.

It is no accident that all publications from this century without exception name Periyai Mayilar as Perunthevi Mylvaganam, a clearly high caste name.¹³¹ This deception alone ought to arouse suspicion.

¹²⁶ Somasundaram, 1992, p. 36.

¹²⁷ ACM-b, 1846

¹²⁸ Ibid.; Young and Jebanesan, 1995, p. 154. The same records say Cyrus and Mary were members of the Church from the ages of 17 and 12. Mary really became a formal baptised member later.

¹²⁹ Somasundaram, p. 36.

¹³⁰ Uduvil, 1839.

¹³¹ K. Sivathamby in a personal communication informs me that "the name Perunthevi is clearly one used by those who are culture conscious - culture within quotations".

To understand the implications of this little that we know, we need to look at some Church history. In the early years of Protestant Christianity in Sri Lanka, the Christians were militantly against caste. For example, The Rt. Rev. Daniel Wilson, Bishop of Calcutta, whose diocese included Ceylon early the last century, insisted on a long period as catechumen and proof of having rejected caste as a requirement for baptism.¹³² This proof often involved marrying across caste. Because Christian wives were considered important in upholding Christianity in the newly Christian homes,¹³³ the missions' boarding schools for girls were considered important in supplying Christian brides. We know from records that the earliest inmates at Uduvil were, in keeping with mission policy, from the lower castes or poor. Some were from such poor homes that they had been handed over, like Mary Dayton, to the missions by their parents.¹³⁴ Others from the descriptions in old records were clearly of Kovich and Pandaram origin.¹³⁵ That the students were, in terms of caste, a mixed bag is clear from i) objections of Vellala parents to their child's eating with the other children in the boarding, and ii) the school's having to look after the student until a Christian marriage could be arranged for the student.¹³⁶ It was only in 1826 that the American Ceylon Mission took the controversial decision "that they would admit only girls of good caste 'who have some property; such girls as would

¹³² Bateman, 1860. p. 438.

¹³³ Schwartz of Travancore: "The conversion of one woman is of more importance than of six men." Harrison, 1925, p.4.

¹³⁴ Tennent, 1850; p. 160. The Rev. Dr. D. T. Niles was one of the few persons to speak with pride in his sermon about the first Niles' wife who was given by her poor mother to a missionary lady.

¹³⁵ The Kovichs are household cooks ritually equal to the Vellalaks and probably the descendants of Sinhalese agriculturists captured in war. The Pandarams are temple cooks.

¹³⁶ So great must have been the attendant financial burden that the decision was taken that "the girls must be induced to accept the first eligible offer [of marriage]." Harrison, 1925, p. 12.

make suitable companions for the boys' in Batticotta."¹³⁷ Were the students up to then poor or of low caste? We can only conjecture.

Mary Dayton having been born in 1812, was admitted to Uduvil long before this pernicious rule was in place and when Uduvil had a mixture of castes. Cyrus Kingsbury, like many early Christians of his time, took his bride from the Uduvil boarding during this time of transition. While we know nothing explicitly of Mrs. Cyrus Kingsbury's caste background, that she was given to the missionaries might indicate that her parents were poor. It is also significant that although there were poor Vellalas, most of the poor were not Vellalas. But not all girls handed over to the missions were non-Vellala. For there is on record the story of a Vellala girl who sheltered at the mission during a storm at which time she accepted some bananas and bread. As a result, the parents asked the mission to keep her because they would be unable to arrange a marriage for her because of her pollution.¹³⁸ On the obverse, we have every reason to believe that Cyrus Kingsbury, like other Christians of his day, militantly rejected caste. For that time, marrying outside the caste was a way of proving one's Christian faith and thumbing one's nose at the faith just rejected. It has been held by the Rt. Rev. Dr. Jebanesan that a mixed caste marriage would have elicited a commotion when it occurred and it just cannot have been.¹³⁹ However, we do know of many mixed caste marriages that elicited no commotion, particularly when the caste strata were close to each other.

Indeed therefore, there can be no finality on the matter and only strong likelihood. But whether Mary Kingsbury was Vellala or not, it is the Kingsbury heritage to find greater dignity in being an out-caste untouchable Christian than in the pitiable spectacle of a Sudra Vellala¹⁴⁰ arguing for his untenable high status in relation to

¹³⁷ Harrison, 1925, p. 12. The issue of property arose because the girls were married off by the mission with a dowry of 50 Rix Dollars. Note that The Church Missionary Society's boarding school for girls at Nallur- later moved to Chundikuli- was not ready until 1842.

¹³⁸ See p. 118 of Leitch and Leitch, 1890.

¹³⁹ Personal communication.

¹⁴⁰ Except for the Vellalals themselves, all authorities agree that they are Sudra. For a complete listing of authorities who say the Vellalals are Sundra, see S. R. H. Hoole, 1992. Sivathamby (1995, p. 49) also refers to the Sudra character of the dominant caste of Jaffna and points out that Arumuga Navalar himself has referred to them Sudras (p.66).

others. Truly, even if we grant that Thamotharampillai was low-caste, whom would we rather be: a Thamotharampillai with his accomplishments or a dubious Vellala of an illusory high status with little else to his credit?

If you recall, I have described caste status as dubious and illusory. Why do I say that? It is a point that I feel compelled to make as a descendant of Cyrus and Mary Kingsbury. Citing the growth in Vellalas from the census conducted by the Dutch to the present day, the proportion of Vellalas is said to have risen from 30% in 1790 to roughly a half.¹⁴¹ This is said to have been on account of persons of other castes declaring themselves also as Vellala because of the new status that came with it. Raghavan¹⁴² has referred to a Tamil proverb that a Kallan, a member of the caste of thieves, a Maravan, a warrior, and an Ahampadiyan may by slow degrees become a Vellala. Raghavan also refers to another proverb that avers that the Vellalas are like brinjals/eggplant because they mix "palatably with any ingredient." When we consider that most Tamils professed to be Christian in the Dutch period and that the so-called best Vellala families married into the Portuguese in an earlier period, and are today the Periya-Vellalas proud of their light skin, the true caste picture is complete. I refer the more interested reader to my paper on this topic.¹⁴³

8. An Assessment of his Work Relative to Navalar's

(i) *Thamotharampillai: Navalar's Protege?*

Thamotharampillai's contributions to the Tamil language in discovering and publishing lost manuscripts are unquestioned. That he was a giant on the literary scene towards the end of the last century is also conceded by all. However, many works tend to say that

¹⁴¹ Pfaffenberger, 1990, p. 82, citing Banks, 1960, pp. 73-74.

¹⁴² n.d., pp. 131-132

¹⁴³ Hoole, S.R.H., 1995.

Thamotharampillai was a follower of Navalar¹⁴⁴ - one who followed in his footsteps. One writer has stated that Thamotharampillai earned for himself a place as Navalar's descendant."¹⁴⁵ She, the best informed of Thamotharampillai's biographers, also says that "no one denies that Navalar started the service of publishing" and that "it was Navalar who induced Thamotharampillai into the publishing field."¹⁴⁶

I firmly disagree. To assess Thamotharampillai correctly, one must critically examine the claims made for Navalar.¹⁴⁷ Did Thamotharampillai's work follow from Navalar's? Did Navalar start the publishing service in Tamil?

(ii) *Evidence for Thamotharampillai's Independence*

On the evidence that Thamotharampillai began independently alone, we can dismiss the claim that he followed Navalar.

Thamotharampillai's first literary work, *Athiyahamak Kirthanai*, was published much before he even came into contact with Navalar¹⁴⁸ and his second, the old *Neethi Neri Vilakkam* published under the Kingsbury name, was also done far before he had begun associating with Navalar, who had just ceased working for Peter Percival at the time and had begun his printing works around then. *Neethi Neri Vilakkam* was published by the American Ceylon Press around the same time as Navalar's best literary work,

¹⁴⁴ JCTPSA (1970, p. xiv) says Thamotharampillai continued Navalar's work.

¹⁴⁵ (a) Manonmany Sanmugathas, Navalar and Thamotharampillai, p. 134 in NCC 1979.

¹⁴⁶ Sanmugathas, 1983, p. 164.

¹⁴⁷ Prof. K. Sivathamby in a personal communication has pointed out that in an attempt to upgrade Navalar, the fact that his father was an aratchy is cited without realising that an aratchy in the British administration was a chief peon, whereas it was a title of rank only in the Portuguese period! Sivathamby adds that aratchy might also have been a personal attendant. Young and Jebanesan (1995, p. 109) make a subtle reference to Navalar's father holding a "middling rank"

¹⁴⁸ Sivalingarajah (1983, p. 4) is one who acknowledges this.

Periyapuranam, came out of his press. The independence of the works is therefore self-evident. This assignment of Thamotharampillai as a dependant of Navalar's is a necessary corollary of the equally atrocious claim of Tamil nationalism that Navalar started prose printing in Tamil, which we know was really an endeavour of the Christian missions who had printed the Bible, several tracts and even translations of Tamil works, much before Navalar imported his press in 1849. It would be more correct to say, that both Navalar and Thamotharampillai followed in the footsteps of the missionaries who taught them the power of the written word and gave them a critical scientific mind-set.

Although Sanmugathas' claims are made in an approved postgraduate thesis and she must be credited as the first Hindu scholar to acknowledge Thamotharampillai's Christian roots publicly, we must dismiss some of her other claims as the pull of vestigial sectarianism occasionally surfacing in a scholar who was in the process of shaking off the shackles of nationalism.¹⁴⁹

Navalar and Thamotharampillai were contemporaneous and good friends and at times even cooperated. But their efforts were complementary and not dependent one way or the other.

(iii) *Distinct Specialities of Navalar and Thamotharampillai*

The distinct specialities of the two also tell us that Thamotharampillai just was not Navalar's follower or protege. There is a clear difference in how the two specialised. To put it succinctly, Thamotharampillai's contributions were almost exclusively towards the Tamil language, his focus being on the pre-Saivite literature of the Tamils. He made occasional forays into writing on and for Saivism. But his dedication was to Tamil literature. He was the first to discover and publish the oldest of existing Tamil works, the *Tolkappiyam*, and the first to publish other Sangam works such as *Kaliththohai*. His academic qualifications were unmatched for the period except by a handful of

¹⁴⁹ The enlightenment in her works is attributed to committed secular academics at Jaffna at the time, especially Kailasapathy and K. Indrapala.

Tamils. His methodology in textual criticism was modern and impeccable. Navalar's efforts at producing Saivite manuscripts "lacked critical perspective and mainly served revivalist needs. [Thamotharampillai] on the contrary, collated manuscripts, noted variant readings and his approach was philological and historicist rather than devotional."¹⁵⁰ Thamotharampillai's works were truly catholic in that any Tamil, of any religion, of any caste, could take pride in what was being discovered.

In contrast, Navalar's works focused almost exclusively on Saivite revival and the texts¹⁵¹ that he published, such as the *Kanthapurānam*, which were widely known and recited daily in the temples. These works by Navalar complemented his work for Saivite revival and the upliftment of the Vellala. The contributions of Navalar were narrow and sectarian. Indirectly Navalar certainly contributed to the revival of Tamil. His commentaries on grammars such as his famous *Kandihai Urai* on the *Nannool*, although meant only for Vellalas in the schools, helped widen reading. His prose readings of religious works like the *Periyapurānam*, *Thiruvilayadal*, and the *Kanthapurānam*, although they are not regarded as classical texts, helped spur literary activity. His schools, although for Vellalas only, also promoted literacy and, with it, Tamil studies. But his focus was not on Tamil revival. That this is so is admitted by S. Kanapathipillai who says that Navalar focused on the lot of the people about him, while Thamotharampillai turned his attention to the decay that ancient Tamil treasure was subject to.¹⁵²

(iv) *Overrating of Navalar*

Although Thamotharampillai's contributions are seen to be solid, a good case can be made that Navalar's contributions are overrated because of his role as a Hindu revivalist leader.

In this overrating of Navalar there is a little reverse thinking vis-a-vis the thought that a Tamil revivalist is necessarily a Saivite.

Here, Navalar, a Saivite revivalist, must be a Tamil revivalist. Even men of distinction like Justice H. W. Tambiah¹⁵³ and Professor S. Pathmanathan¹⁵⁴ appear to be allowing their nationalism to cloud their objectivity in claiming Navalar to be the father of modern Tamil prose (whereas prose writing was first used on a large and consistent scale much earlier by the Christian missions in their translations of the Bible, tracts and stories¹⁵⁵). Parallel to this claim on his contributions to Tamil prose, is the claim that Navalar wrote the Bible!¹⁵⁶ We may note that another biography by Varathar, commended to us by no less an authority than the late Professor Kanapathipillai in the foreword, tells us¹⁵⁷ that the Bible was translated by Navalar. But what is the truth? The so-called Bible translation by Navalar really involved the revision of a long-existing Tamil translation. And the revising team was under the Rev. Percival¹⁵⁸ who headed a team of Tamil scholars including the Rev. Pandit Elijah Hoole and others who worked full-time under Percival.¹⁵⁹ Navalar was but one member of this team!¹⁶⁰

¹⁵³ H. W. Tambiah, p. ii of NCC, 1979.

¹⁵⁴ S. Pathmanathan, "The Hindu Society in Sri Lanka: Changed and Changing," in J. R. Carter (Ed.), n.d., p. 153

¹⁵⁵ The Jesuit Fr. Robert de Nobili (Tatuvā Podagar Swami, who died in 1656) is regarded as the father of Tamil prose (D. Rajarigam, 1958, p. 19)

¹⁵⁶ Swaminathaiyar, p. 62.

¹⁵⁷ Varathar, 1979, pp. 13-4; this propaganda is widely taught in schools as we have seen.

¹⁵⁸ See testimonials in File No. C. CE 071/1-12 on The Rev. Fr. Elijah Hoole, Church Missionary Society Archives, University of Birmingham. Also Sir James Emerson Tennent (*Christianity in Ceylon*, London: John Murray, 1850; p. 174) makes clear that The Rev. P. Percival, "the best English Tamil scholar in Ceylon" was in charge of and engaged in "a revision of the Tamil Version of the Scriptures."

¹⁵⁹ At the end of the project, on Percival's recommendation, Hoole was hired as a Tamil Pandit by the Rev. Pargiter at St. John's.

¹⁶⁰ Young and Jebanesan (1995) also appear to have swallowed this propaganda in part. While insisting that it is not Navalar's version but Percival's, they say (p. 111) that Navalar "stylistically crafted the textual meaning conveyed to him," and thereby fail to acknowledge the many translators who worked under Percival.

¹⁵⁰ Young and Jebanesan, 1995, p. 155.

¹⁵¹ Sivathamby, 1995, p. 67.

¹⁵² Kanapathipillai, 1964

Varathar¹⁶¹ also tells us that this translation was praised in India and put into use. But the truth? After 50 years of use only in Jaffna, it fell into disuse because it was deemed to lack the “excellences” of the Indian translation¹⁶² which is what is in use in our churches today!

(v) *Damage to Tamil Society and Language by Navalar*

Navalar's contributions have been shown to be clearly over-stated. But is it all? There appears to be evidence that he even caused much damage to Tamil society and the Tamil language. If this is so, then clearly, Navalar did not set the direction for Thamotharampillai's works.

As we have seen, Kanapathipillai has assessed Navalar's contributions as being in the social sphere. This perhaps is correct from a Vellala-Saivite perspective since he gave them the foremost position of authority over all the Tamils of Sri Lanka and a confidence in themselves and their religion that they previously lacked. But is his assessment correct from a Catholic Tamil perspective? I would think not. When Navalar preached charity, he emphatically stated that charity ought to be towards the Vellala and the Brahmin.¹⁶³ When Navalar appealed to the British government that Tamils were willing to learn English but wished to be allowed to remain Hindus, his objections were to the lower castes sitting in the same classroom with Vellalas. When he supported the candidature of Sir Pon Ramanathan against Brito's for the legislature, he firmly came out in favour of the man who opposed commensality and equal seating for non-Vellalas in school,¹⁶⁴ and one who opposed education for the low castes because it would lead to suffrage for the lower-castes.¹⁶⁵

Navalar's Hindu College, for example, did not admit a non-Vellala until the 1960s.

In this regard, Navalar's contributions to the Tamil language also are overrated and even damaging as a part of the Hindu nationalism referred to earlier. According to Professor Sivathamby, the claim that Navalar worked for Tamil revival was first made in 1960.¹⁶⁶ “It was since the 1960s that Navalar was taken as the fountainhead of a specifically Sri Lankan and Tamil tradition. This was the slogan put up by the Progressive Writers' Association. It campaigned for a Sri Lankan nationalist literature. This movement took Navalar out of the religious framework within which he was seen as cast. The ‘nationalist’ stance taken by the progressive writers included both Tamil and Sinhalese.”¹⁶⁷ He has since then been entrenched as a Tamil revivalist by “progressive writers” who sought to present his works as independent contributions to Tamil outside the framework of Hinduism. Sivathamby adds that Navalar saw the protection of Jaffna's upper classes as the means to protecting Saivism.¹⁶⁸ In saying this Sivathamby builds on the late Professor Kailasapathy's thesis that Chola Tamil society's authority rested on and flowed from Saivasidhanta precepts.¹⁶⁹ As such, Navalar pushed for Saivasiddhanta and upheld the authority of the upper classes. Navalar's symbiotic reliance on usurious Chetties whom he promoted while they gave lavishly to his temple building efforts are also brought to light.¹⁷⁰ In light of these findings, Navalar appears more a reactionary than the social reformer he is acclaimed as. Indeed, as Sivathamby points out, “Navalar and his followers, in their anxiety to prove beyond doubt the indivisibility of the Saiva-Tamil character [...] underplayed if not openly kept away from public attention the secular literature that was produced in Jaffna. [...] This underplaying of the secular literary tradition was to show that no major literary

¹⁶¹ 1979

¹⁶² Kulandran, 1987.

¹⁶³ Hellmann-Rajanayagam, 1989.

¹⁶⁴ Sivathamby (1995, p. 69) gives Kopay Teachers' Training College, Thamotharampillai's first place of employment, as pertaining to where Ramanathan raised his objections.

¹⁶⁵ Personal communication from Prof. K. Sivathamby. Also see Sivathamby, 1979, p. 142 and Sivathamby, 1979, p. 137 citing Russell, 1976, p. 21.

¹⁶⁶ K. Sivathamby, *Navalar Examined Sociologically*, p. 40 NCC 1979.

¹⁶⁷ K. Sivathamby, in a personal note.

¹⁶⁸ Op. cit., p. 46.

¹⁶⁹ Op. cit. p. p. 45

¹⁷⁰ Op. cit., 39-40.

activity in Tamil is possible without Saiva inspiration."¹⁷¹ The damage done to Tamil by Navalar thereby is clear.

Navalar's work *Ilakkana Churukkam* (or a Summary of Grammar) is also cited as a lasting contribution to the Tamil language. But Professor A. Sanmugathas in a careful criticism has shown it to be a mixed bag, particularly weak for imposing unnecessary rules on writing.¹⁷²

9. Conclusion

In the final analysis therefore, to compare Navalar and Thamotharampillai is to compare apples with oranges. Thamotharampillai was unrivalled in his eminence and the most independent scholar of the entire 19th century who made a lasting contribution to the Tamil language.

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¹⁷² "Navalar looked at from a Linguistic Perspective," pp. 17-26, NCC, 1979.

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Hong Kong And Pathfinder

D. S. S. Mayadunne

In the first week of July 1997 there were two events that attracted the attention of the world. One was that the island of Hong Kong and the adjacent territories were handed back to China after more than a hundred years of British occupation. The other was that the spacecraft Pathfinder, sent by the United States of America to Mars, landed there successfully and started research. It happened on the 221st National Day of the United States.

These two events have a significance in two different but connected ways.

One of them signifies the end of the British empire except for 12 insignificant dependencies. (Other empires too have come to an end.) The other event shows how rich and powerful the present inhabitants of one of the countries in that empire have become after seizing that country from its original inhabitants.

Arnold J. Toynbee, the famous British historian, once said that he felt the twentieth century West might have to pay with compound interest for the wrongs it did to China in the nineteenth century (that it has not happened is a different matter). He also said that only a Chinese could comprehend the shock caused to China by the West by its aggressive acts. At one stage in the nineteenth century the western powers appeared to be about to partition China among themselves. But apart from economic exploitation, through opium trade and other means, Britain and other western nations were unable to subjugate China in its entirety.

However, one of the last British imperialist possessions was Hong Kong and the adjacent territories. Their reversion to China marks the near completion of the reunification of China. For its completion Taiwan and the Macao island too have to come back to China. Macao is due to be handed back to China in 1999 by Portugal.

The probabilities are that Taiwan too will revert to China. When it will happen cannot be predicted at present.

What then, is the significance of Hong Kong's reversion to China? It is that it marks the virtual end of one of the largest empires that ever existed and is another important step in the reunification of China. Beyond that, Hong Kong's reversion has no particular importance.

The dissolution of the British empire in this manner is a significant event. During the European expansion which started around the beginning of the 16th century of the Christian era, the whole world, except for two or three countries, was divided by European nations among themselves. The largest among the empires that resulted was the British empire. A leading Sri Lankan nationalist intellectual said, in a school book written by him when Sri Lanka was still a colony of the British empire, that there had been no other empire so large and powerful and that we should be proud to be a part of it. In fact, even many intellectuals did not expect that the British empire would end so soon.

What is the significance of the American spacecraft Pathfinder which landed on Mars?

Fifty years ago no country in the world was capable of making a rocket with the velocity required to escape from the gravity of the earth (i.e. until the time when the Soviet Union sent Sputnik I in 1957 to orbit round the earth). The Pathfinder shows how far the world, the United States in particular, has gone subsequently.

The Pathfinder, in addition, reminds us of a tragic fact. It is that the European expansion of the last few centuries is very, very difficult to reverse in some countries and impossible in some others.

The United States of America is a land which the descendants of the pre-Columbian people cannot hope to get back. The reason is that the European descendants have established themselves so firmly and the original people have become a very small minority mainly due to genocide.

In fact every one of the 26 countries in the Americas is still a colony, not in the conventional sense, but from the viewpoint of the original people of those countries.

Some readers might be surprised by this statement. But it is true.

The only difference is that those countries now do not belong to the European nations who had 'owned' them earlier.

At the time of European expansion there was no great difference between the people of other continents and those of the Americas. As a very large land mass, the Americas had peoples of various levels of development. There were people who practised farming, wore good clothes, had the art of writing, constructed large buildings, and highways, had a knowledge of mathematics and other sciences, created advanced religious, as well as those who depended on hunting for their living. However, even school books do not say much about them.

No descendant of the pre-Columbian people is a head of state or government in any of the countries of the Americas today. It is not because they do not exist. One percent of the population of the United States, a slightly higher percentage in Canada, about 30 percent in Mexico, more than 40 percent in some countries like Bolivia, Colombia and Venezuela, and more than 50 percent in Peru, Ecuador and Guatemala, are descendants of people who had been there before Columbus.

In 21 of the 26 countries of the Americas the political leadership and dominance are held by people of European origin. In two countries, viz. Haiti and Jamaica, the political leadership is held by descendants of those brought as slaves from Africa by the Europeans. In two, viz. Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana, the present rulers are descendants of immigrants from India. The President of Peru is a member of a Japanese family from Japan.

However, it will be very much more difficult for a descendant of the pre-Columbian peoples to come to political leadership in any country in the Americas.

A term that illustrates very well the disregard of even those who live outside the Americas for the descendants of pre-Columbian people is 'Latin America'. Its use is so widespread that even Marxists (who should know better than others) use it. But it is an extremely aggressive term. What it implies is that the countries to the South of

and including Mexico belong to Latin people. Latin people are those of Italy, France, Spain, Portugal and Romania. On that basis, if the Quebec province of Canada become an independent country under the leadership of its French speaking people, that too will have to be treated as a Latin American country because French is a Latin language!

When the term 'Latin America' is used, only the descendants of Spanish and Portuguese invaders are taken into account while ignoring the descendants of the people who had been in the Americas for thousands of years before Columbus.

Theodore Herzl, a pioneer thinker of Zionism, called Palestine 'a land without a people for a people without a land'. Obviously he did not consider the Arabs who were already there in Palestine as 'people'. Although the use of the term 'Latin America' by European and European descendants can be understood, its use by others, especially by Asians, is difficult to understand.

There are many people of African origin and some people of European origin too who are among the oppressed in the Americas. There is also the fact that the government existing in Cuba from 1959 has tried to do justice to all sections of the people there. In spite of all that, the great injustice done to the descendants of the people who had been in the Americas before the European invasion must not be forgotten. The greatest crime in human history was perpetrated against them.

It is not only in the Americas that there are people who had been subjected to European expansion and who find it difficult to think of retrieving themselves from it. Australia and New Zealand are two other such countries. About 200 years ago they were inhabited entirely by Asians. But today they are under complete domination of European descendants.

Although the year 2000 of the Christian era cannot be a turning point in the history of the world, we can make a wish for the next century regarding, at least, the Americas. It is that: Let there be governments led by Amerindian people in at least a few of the countries there. Democratic elements of the people of European origin in the Americas might be able to play a vital role in achieving this.

While being mesmerized by the scientific achievement represented by the pictures sent by Pathfinder (there is nothing wrong in that), let us not forget the tragedy of the Amerindian people who have lost two whole continents.

Shakespeare's Language of Sexuality

Regi Siriwardena

This is an expanded version of a lecture delivered to the English Association of Sri Lanka on Shakespeare Day, 1997.

The most challenging statement about Shakespeare's language of sexuality was made by a cockroach. His name was archy, and he figured in Don Marquis's *archy and mehitabel*, which, several decades after it was published, I still consider the finest book of American light verse ever written. But since I am probably the last survivor of the generation of Sri Lankan readers who grew up with archy, I had better explain about him. This is the story Don Marquis tells. In his apartment, he used to find poems written on his typewriter by an unknown person. So he kept watch, and found that a cockroach visited the apartment every night and laboriously typed out the poems by jumping up and down on the keys. The cockroach turned out to be the reincarnated soul of a poet. Since he couldn't operate the shift key while jumping up and down on the letter keys, there were no capital letters in his poems; and whenever archy wanted a question mark or a mark of exclamation, he had to spell them out. Here then is archy's poem, 'archy confesses', about Shakespeare and sexual language:

coarse
jocosity
catches the crowd
shakespeare
and i
are often
low browed

the fish wife
curse
and the laugh
of the horse
shakespeare
and i
are frequently
coarse

aesthetic
excuses
in bill's behalf
are adduced
to refine
big bill's
coarse laugh

but bill
he would chuckle
to hear such guff
he pulled
rough stuff
and he liked
rough stuff

hoping you
are the same
archy¹

Was archy right about Shakespeare and sexual language? The modern enlightened liberal attitude assumes that when artistic necessity justifies sex-talk of the kind that's considered improper in polite society, then it's permissible; otherwise it's obscene. That, for instance, is the principle underlying such landmark documents in the sexual liberation of literature as Judge Woolsey's judgment on *Ulysses* in the United States, or the British court's decision in the

Lady Chatterley trial in the 'sixties. But what archy is saying is that these 'aesthetic excuses' are so much guff when it comes to Shakespeare: he was a popular entertainer who pulled rough stuff because he liked rough stuff. Was archy right? That's the first question I want to try to answer. For this purpose, I shall use two passages from two plays of Shakespeare as test-cases.

The first passage is from the lesson scene in Act 4 Scene 1 of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Sir Hugh Evans, the Welsh parson, examines the small boy William on his Latin grammar in the presence of his mother and Mistress Quickly. Part of the humour of the scene comes from the parson's Welsh accent and verbal mannerisms. Making fun of the linguistic habits of minority speakers is a familiar source of popular comedy: the English stage has for a long time been laughing at Scottish, Irish or Welsh speakers, just as Tamils and Muslims speaking Sinhala are often laughed at in Sinhala theatre and cinema. But the main source of comedy in this scene is in the bawdy jokes made possible by a combination of Sir Hugh's Welsh accent and the illiterate Mistress Quickly's misunderstandings of what is being said. After some preliminary questions, the parson puts William through the declension of the Latin pronoun *hic*, *haec*, *hoc*. 'What is the fociative case, William?' he asks. William is stumped by this question, and stammers, 'O — vocative, O —' which serves as another unintended sexual pun (unintended, that is, by the character) since *O* was in Elizabethan slang one of the ways of referring to the female genitals. Sir Hugh says, 'Remember, William. fociative is *caret*,' which is the Latin for 'it's missing' — that is, there is no vocative. But in the context of 'fociative' the word *caret* calls up in the minds of the audience the carrot as an image of the penis. Mistress Quickly, in her verbal confusion, underlines that by saying, 'And that's a good root.'

Now what are we to say about this scene in testing archy's claim? The scene has no bearing at all on the rest of the plot. In fact, in the Quarto text of the play, it's omitted entirely, and that's because that text was probably an abridged one made for a provincial performance. We can't find any 'aesthetic excuse' for the scene on the basis of plot or theme or character. It's just a piece of extraneous

¹ Don Marquis, *archy and mehitabel* (London, 1934: Faber and Faber), pp. 100-101.

funny business, and the comedy, apart from the ethnic humour, comes from the bawdy puns. So here, in archy's terms, is Shakespeare pulling 'rough stuff' either because he likes it or because he knows the audience will like it.

Before I pass on from this scene I want to recall something that throws light on Sri Lankan norms of linguistic propriety. In 1940 Lyn Ludowyk produced *The Merry Wives of Windsor* with the University Dramsoc. He played the Welsh parson himself, and he brought the house down with the line about the 'focative case'. But later in the scene Sir Hugh asks William for the genitive cases of the pronoun. William answers, 'Genitive — *horum, harum, horum*', and Mistress Quickly bursts out: 'Vengeance of Jenny's case! Fie on her! Never name her, child, if she be a whore.' But in the Dramsoc production, the actress didn't speak the word *whore*, she replaced it with a wave of the hand. So I want to offer this footnote to Sri Lankan social history — that on the Colombo stage in 1940 a male actor, and the university Professor of English at that, could play on the word *fuck*, but a well-brought up upper-middle class young lady couldn't be required to say *whore*.

Now let's look at the other passage from Shakespeare I want to use as a test for archy's claim. This is from *Hamlet*, Act 3 Scene 2, the scene where Hamlet stages the play within the play in order to determine Claudius's guilt. In this part of the scene Hamlet goes up to Ophelia, who is seated among the assembled court audience, and settling himself at her feet, says: 'Lady, shall I lie in your lap?' In the Elizabethan language of sex, this could mean only: 'Shall I sleep with you?' Ophelia, no doubt embarrassed and blushing, says, 'No, my lord,' whereupon Hamlet pretends to correct himself: 'I mean, my head upon your lap?' Ophelia replies, 'Ay, my lord.' Hamlet then asks her, 'Do you think I meant country matters?' *Country matters* would mean 'something coarse, vulgar, obscene', but it contains a hidden pun, in the first syllable of *country*, which the actor might stress in speaking; '*country matters*'. Ophelia, probably outraged again, says: 'I think nothing, my lord,' to which Hamlet responds: 'That's a fair thought — to lie between maids' legs.' Ophelia, perhaps uncertain what he means, asks: 'What is, my lord?'

and Hamlet says, 'Nothing'. This seems to be a dismissive answer, as if saying, 'Never mind,' but it actually carries on the sexual allusions of the previous lines. To understand this we have to know the sexual meanings of *thing* and *nothing* in Elizabethan speech. There were actually two sets of usages, both of which can be found in Shakespeare. In one usage *thing* is used undifferentiatedly of both the male and the female sexual organ. In the other usage, *thing*, as representing the penis,² is contrasted with *nothing*, which Elizabethans pronounced as 'no thing'.³ In this second usage *nothing* represents the female genitals; this implies a markedly patriarchal conception of femaleness, as defined by the absence of a penis. It is this latter usage that explains the line from *Hamlet*. What Hamlet is saying is, 'If you think nothing, that is the proper thing between a woman's legs.' Incidentally, knowing the sexual meaning of *nothing* gives us an understanding of one point of the title of another Shakespeare play, *Much Ado about Nothing*. Part of that play turns on the suspicion that Hero has lost her virginity before marriage, and this false accusation against her almost leads to tragedy. But through the pun in the title Shakespeare is mocking his own plot: his first audience

² Knowing this usage illuminates many passages in Shakespeare: for instance, the first stanza of Feste's last song in *Twelfth Night*:

When that I was and a little tiny boy,
With hey-ho, the wind and the rain;
A foolish thing was but a toy.

For the rain it raineth every day.

The 'foolish thing' as a 'toy' belongs to childhood masturbation, as contrasted with the adult sexuality of stanza 3: 'But when I came, alas, to wive.'

³ Hence it is that Shakespeare is able to rhyme 'doting' with 'nothing' in Sonnet 20. The sonnet is of particular interest in relation to what is said later in this essay about the sexual ambivalence of the poet's feelings for the young man to whom it is addressed:

And for a woman wert thou first created,
Till Nature as she wrought thee fell a-doting,
And by addition me of thee defeated,
By adding one thing to my purpose nothing.
But since she pricked thee out for women's pleasure,
Mine be thy love, and thy love's use their treasure.

would have understood him as covertly saying: 'All this fuss about a vagina.'

But to return to the *Hamlet* scene. Hamlet had been in love with Ophelia, but by this scene his bitterness against his mother's adultery has blackened the whole of womankind in his eyes. He vents his misogyny and his revulsion against women, and against sexuality itself, by a sadistic verbal assault on Ophelia, tormenting her with coarse sex-talk. The scene is painful, but I think we have to say that unlike the passage from *The Merry Wives* we looked at earlier, it isn't just indulgence in bawdy language for its own sake. The dialogue has undoubtedly a dramatic point and purpose, within the scene and within the play as a whole, in articulating Hamlet's disgust with sexuality, with womanhood, with life itself, that is part of his malaise. But it can be suggested that the sexual puns have a further significance in relation to the play's theme. The world of *Hamlet* is one of deceptive appearances. Behind the pomp and splendour of the Danish court is the ugly reality of murder and adultery. So, to Hamlet there is falsity in language itself: seemingly innocent words conceal obscene meanings.

So, as far as the passage from *Hamlet* is concerned, I don't think archy's description applies. It's conceivable that there were spectators who were titillated by it, but it isn't funny: if we admit an element of humour in it, we have to say that the humour is bitter, horrific or black. But elsewhere in the plays one may find sexual language that is different in tone from the *Hamlet* passage but equally organic to the drama - as with the bawdy humour of Mercutio and the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, the obscenities of Iago in *Othello*, or the sexual allusions of the Fool in *King Lear*. Or that wonderful description by the Hostess in *Henry V* of Falstaff's death, which brings together sexual frankness, folk piety and folk practicality, tenderness and pathos: I need to read the whole passage:

'A made a finer end, and went away an it had been any christom child; 'a parted e'en just between twelve and one, e'en at the turning o'th'tide; for after I saw him fumble with the sheets, and play with flowers, and smile upon his fingers' ends, I knew there was but one way; for his nose was as sharp as a pen, and

'a babbled of green fields. 'How now, Sir John?' quoth I, 'be o'good cheer!' So 'a cried out, 'God, God, God!' three or four times. Now I, to comfort him, bid him 'a should not think of God - I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet. So 'a bade me lay more clothes on his feet; I put my hand into the bed, and felt them, and they were as cold as any stone; then I felt to his knees, and so up'ard and up'ard, and all was as cold as any stone.

The Hostess putting her hand on Falstaff's genitals and feeling them 'as cold as any stone' has to be the final mark of death: if that vital centre of Falstaff is cold, he must be dead indeed. But this intimacy with his body also comes naturally to her, so that what might elsewhere have been bawdy humour is transformed into a maternal tenderness and loving sadness that are very moving.

In making a contrast between the passage from *The Merry Wives* on the one hand and those from *Hamlet* and *Henry V* on the other, I run the risk of leaving you with a wrong impression. You may suppose that in the lesser plays there are sexual jokes thrown in for their own sake, but not in the greater ones. But that wouldn't be true. Let me offer a passage from one of the tragedies that's purely exploitation of bawdy language with no 'aesthetic excuses', as archy calls them. In *Othello* the Clown is talking to the musicians who have come to serenade Othello and Desdemona after their nuptial night:

CLOWN Are these, I pray you, wind instruments?

FIRST MUSICIAN Ay marry are they, sir.

CLOWN O, thereby hangs a tale.

FIRST MUSICIAN Whereby hangs a tale, sir?

CLOWN Marry, sir, by many a wind instrument that I know.

This is a joke created by a rather laboured and not very funny play on words, and it doesn't add anything essential to the scene. *Tale:tail* in Elizabethan slang was an expression for the penis, and it hangs by, or close to, a wind-instrument, that is, the anus. So Shakespeare, as a popular writer for the theatre, could, even in one of the great tragedies, strain to make a dramatically extraneous sexual joke for the delectation of the audience.

By comparing the abundance of sexual language in Shakespeare's plays with its paucity in the theatre of the eighteenth, or nineteenth, or the first half of the twentieth century, some people may be led to suppose that Shakespeare had total freedom in this respect. But that wouldn't be true, although censorship in his time didn't concern itself with sexual morality as much as with politics and religion (and religion, as regarded by the state, was a dimension of politics). Outside the censorship of individual plays to keep out political and religious subversion, the only state regulation of the language of the theatre that we know of was an Act of Parliament in 1606. Under this Act profanity in the theatre — that is, the taking of God's name in oaths — was prohibited. We know that this regulation affected those plays of Shakespeare that were produced or revived after that date. But consider the fact that neither the word *fuck* nor the word *cunt* appear, in those naked forms, in the passages we have looked at, nor do they in any other play of Shakespeare or in any Elizabethan play I know. They appear in disguise, as it were, in the form of a pun. But the pun implies that there is a taboo on speaking the words openly — perhaps not so much as a rule of censorship but as a consensus on what could be said and couldn't be said on the public stage. The function of the pun is to enable the taboo to be circumvented, so that the forbidden word can be said without fully speaking it out. But the resultant effect of defeating the taboo in this way varies with the situation. In the passage from *The Merry Wives*, if we are amused by it, we can admire the writer's ingenuity in manipulating the language so as to make a sexual allusion by covert means. But since there is no further dramatic point to the passage, we don't find that the puns have illuminated character or situation. The effect of the *Hamlet* passage is much more complex. When we listen to it, what we are immediately aware of is Hamlet's sardonic wit; we see the lines as Hamlet's releasing of his bitterness by disguising it through the puns; it's only secondarily that we think of Shakespeare securing this effect through his control of language.

But it's not only with tabooed words that these possibilities arise, but also with seemingly chaste ones, underneath which a pun may conceal a hidden sexual meaning. There's a good example at the very end of *The Merchant of Venice* — the last two lines, in fact.

In the last scene of the play the two women, Portia and Nerissa, have teased their husbands, first, by accusing them of giving away their betrothal rings to women; later, by producing the rings and claiming that they had them from the lawyer and his clerk with whom they themselves went to bed. After the truth has finally been sorted out, Gratiano speaks the last couplet of the play:

Well, while I live I'll fear no other thing
So sore as keeping safe Nerissa's ring.

On the surface these lines seem to say that he'll take good care not to lose her betrothal ring; but *ring*, like *circle* and *O*, was used in Elizabethan slang to mean a woman's sexual organ. After all the teasing about Portia's and Nerissa's fictional infidelity, Gratiano is hinting that he will see that his wife doesn't really cheat him sexually, so that he rings down the play with a burst of guffaws from the audience. Especially, I suppose from the men, because it's a male joke about the sexual unreliability of wives.

I haven't counted, but it's likely that the majority of Shakespeare's puns have to do with sexual language, and without doubt most of his comic puns do. In the witty exchanges between a pair of characters that are so common in the comedies, we often have a string of puns turning on sexual allusions, or one that is climaxed by a bawdy joke. These passages have mostly lost their saltiness today, partly because punning as a form of humour is no longer in fashion, but also because the sexual puns have become linguistically obscure, and most people need to consult glossaries or annotated editions in order to unravel them. It's well known that the great Dr. Johnson disliked Shakespeare's fondness for puns, and described a quibble - that is, a pun - as 'the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world and was content to lose it'. It's normally supposed that Johnson's hostility to puns was due to his neo-classic opposition to ambiguity of language. To me it seems likely that the stern moralist in him was also offended by the sexual content of many of the puns; or that correctness of language for him went hand in hand with correctness of morals.

The Elizabethan theatres were situated on the periphery of London, so as to be out of the reach of the city authorities who,

dominated by Puritan views, were hostile to the theatre. The theatre therefore belonged to the less regulated fringe of city life, and it shared this territory with the brothel quarter. Not only did the brothels jostle with the theatres for building space, but the prostitutes and pimps contacted customers at the entrances and exits to the theatres and even within the auditorium itself. In 1597 the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London presented a petition asking that the theatres be pulled down because they corrupted youth with 'unchaste matters and ungodly practices', they were places of resort for vagrants, whoremongers and criminals, they distracted working people from their occupations and from the practice of religion, and they spread disease. In other words, the theatre was said to be a source of social, moral and physical infection. Nothing happened then because the theatre had the protection of the monarchy and powerful aristocrats, but in 1642, with the outbreak of the Civil War, the Puritans had their revenge. The theatres were closed, and remained so till the restoration of the monarchy eighteen years later.

The sexual language of the Elizabethan theatre was in keeping with the relative freedom of the territory in which it flourished. But it was also a heavily male-dominated theatre. There were women among the spectators, but the theatrical profession — whether of writers or actors — was exclusively male since women's parts were played by boys. One of the grounds for Puritan attacks on the theatre was this practice of males dressing and acting as women, which, as a Puritan theologian complained, 'may kindle sparks of lust in unclean affections'. This fear of homosexuality was perhaps grounded on more than theory. Where boy actors were apprenticed to grown-up men in the company, and often lived with them in the same lodgings, sexual relations between them were always a possibility.

There are very few and fleeting references in Shakespeare's plays to sexual relations between males, and he never confronted the subject openly in any of the plots or main relationships of his plays. It was, of course, a relationship forbidden by both church and state; but Marlowe, who was reputed to be both gay and unbeliever, did in *Edward II* make a tragedy out of the situation of a king who loses his throne and his life because of his love for his favourite Gaveston.

There is no direct representation on stage of the physical relationship between the king and his lover, but we can be in no doubt about what these were. At the climax of the tragedy we see enacted on the stage the murder of Edward by a redhot poker being thrust up his anus in a horrible caricature of the act of sodomy. Shakespeare never confronted these unlawful relationships with that degree of openness. What we do have in his plays are, on the one hand, the flickering sexual ambivalence of some of the roles played by the boy actors, and on the other the unexplained intensity of the attachments of the two Antonios, in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Twelfth Night*, to people of their own sex.

Shakespeare was particularly fond of the situation in which the boy actor playing the heroine dresses up as a young man. When, within the fictive world of *As You Like It*, the character Rosalind, disguised as the boy Ganymede, offers to pretend to be Rosalind so that Orlando can try out his love for her, what Elizabethans would have seen on the stage was a boy-actor resuming his real boy-self to play a love scene with another, probably young, male actor. The maze of sexual identities here was deeply subversive of fixed gender distinctions (one can understand the Puritan fears).

It has been said that in the Sonnets the feelings expressed by the poet for the young man to whom the first sequence is addressed are more than friendship and less than homosexual desire. The same might be said of Antonio's feelings for Bassanio in *The Merchant of Venice*, with his willingness to risk his life for his friend by signing the fatal bond, his equal willingness to die for him if only he can see him at his death, his unexplained melancholy and his description of himself which confesses an unspecified guilt:

I am a tainted wether of the flock,
Meetest for death. The weakest kind of fruit
Drops earliest to the ground and so let me.

In Richard de Zoysa's imaginative production of the play a decade ago, he highlighted Antonio's position as the odd man out, leaving him alone and silent on the stage at the end, when the three happy couples have gone in.

The other Antonio, in *Twelfth Night*, has even less to say of himself than his namesake in *The Merchant of Venice*, but he too risks personal danger to follow Sebastian into the city:

But come what may, I do adore thee so
That danger shall seem sport, and I will go!

He is cut to the heart later when, as a consequence of the mistaken identity between the two twins, he thinks Sebastian has ungratefully disowned him. But these are the only enigmatic shadows in Shakespeare's plays of those unlawful passions forbidden by both state and church.

The polite eighteenth century, the age of Johnson, thought of Shakespeare's sexual language as one mark of the barbarous age in which he lived. But by the nineteenth century there was an even stronger reaction to it from readers, critics and theatre directors alike. In Shakespeare's plays women could talk, or joke, about sex almost as freely and unashamedly as the male characters. And not only lower-class women like Juliet's Nurse and the Hostess but also women of gentility such as Beatrice or Helena. There is no assumption in the plays that a woman's freedom of sexual talk goes with looseness of behaviour. When Hero in *Much Ado about Nothing* is accused of sexual relations with a man other than the one she is betrothed to, all her friends treat it as a foul slander, but the same Hero, with her maid Margaret and with Beatrice, could indulge in uninhibited sex-jokes only two scenes previously. Shakespeare even represents the fourteen-year old Juliet as waiting impatiently and eagerly for the coming of night to consummate her marriage. It's the most physically passionate speech in the play: Romeo's love poetry is ethereal and bodiless in comparison. But nineteenth-century, especially Victorian, norms about female modesty were very different.

In 1807 there appeared a book titled *The Family Shakespeare*, in which twenty plays were reprinted in versions purified of all improper language. The book had no great success immediately, but its popularity boomed in the Victorian period. Within seventy years it went through thirty editions. The first edition had been anonymous, but later editions named the purging hand as that of Thomas Bowdler,

a doctor of medicine. Bowdler was thus to contribute a word to the English language, *bowdlerise*. Actually, it was discovered a few decades ago that the task had been initiated and for the most part carried out by his sister Henrietta Bowdler. She didn't put her name on the title-page because to have done so would have been to admit that she had read those same offending passages that she had purged. And the Victorian audience to which *The Family Shakespeare* appealed was especially one of women and young girls. They could now enjoy the beauties and wisdom of Shakespeare without tainting their minds. In one of Dickens's novels there is the character of Mr. Podsnap, for whom 'the question about everything was, would it bring a blush to the cheek of the young person'. The young person was, of course, feminine in gender, and was personified by Mr. Podsnap's daughter. Though Dickens laughed at Victorian prudery there, he wasn't free of Podsnappery in writing his own novels. Shakespeare too had, therefore, to be expurgated to keep out everything that might bring a blush to the cheek of the young person. In Henrietta Bowdler's hands Shakespeare had gone through two stages of sanitisation. First, she had selected twenty of what she called 'the most unexceptionable of Shakespeare's plays'; then she aimed 'to remove every thing that could give just offence to the religious and virtuous mind', and the end result was a book that could be 'placed in the hands of young persons of both sexes'. However, not everybody was satisfied even with Bowdler. Lewis Carroll, a life-long celibate, whose only female friends were little girls, whom he sometimes photographed in the nude, at one time thought of producing an edition of Shakespeare that would out-bowdlerise Bowdler. Nor did the spirit of Bowdler die with the Victorian age. The institutionalisation of English literature as an examination subject in the latter part of the nineteenth century required the production of school editions of Shakespeare which were carefully purged on the principles of Bowdler, and these continued in force throughout the first half of the present century. I remember that the edition of *Julius Caesar* in which I studied the play at fourteen didn't even allow Portia to say that if Brutus didn't trust her, 'Portia is Brutus' harlot, not his wife'. The word *harlot* was replaced by *plaything*. This continuation of the

Bowdler tradition was breached here only in 1943, when for the first time admission to the University of Ceylon was restricted by a competitive examination, the forerunner of the present A-level. Lyn Ludowyk, in what seemed to be a conscious act of daring, prescribed as the set Shakespeare text *Measure for Measure*, a play about a Vienna seething with prostitution and venereal disease. There were no expurgated school editions of *Measure for Measure*, because it had never been considered a fit play for schoolchildren, so students just had to read it in the *Complete Works*. Ludowyk got a plaintive letter from a nun who had to teach the play in class, and who asked why, when there were so many beautiful things in Shakespeare, he should have prescribed something ugly and unpleasant.

But even in more exalted scholarly milieux inhibitions about the recognition of Shakespeare's interest in sexuality persisted until comparatively recently. Caroline Spurgeon's *Shakespeare's Imagery* (1930), which pioneered the practice of interpreting Shakespeare's plays through their image structures and was enormously influential for at least three decades, was based on a comprehensive card-indexing and classification of the playwright's images — those drawn from food, clothing, animals, disease, and so on. But when Spurgeon categorised an image, she did so on the basis not of its tenor (what was represented) but of its vehicle (the object or activity through which it was represented). Thus, when Cleopatra says of herself, 'I was/ A morsel for a monarch', or when Antony says of her: 'I found you as a morsel cold upon/ Dead Caesar's trencher', both images would have been categorised as images of food: sex didn't have to come into the picture at all. Indeed, as Gary Taylor has observed, 'sex' didn't even appear in Spurgeon's analytical index.⁴ Not that sexual activity or the sex organs never appeared as the vehicle in Shakespeare's images. Thus, when Mercutio protests against Benvolio interrupting him and the latter pleads, 'Thou wouldst else have made the tale large', Mercutio retorts: 'O, thou art deceived; I would have made it short: for I was come to the whole depth of my tale; and meant, indeed, to occupy the argument no longer.' We can be pretty

⁴ Gary Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare* (London, 1991: Vintage), p. 261.

sure that Miss Spurgeon didn't detect a sexual metaphor or a bawdy joke in this, though *tale* carries the double meaning to which reference has already been made, (*w*)*hole* is another sexual pun, and *occupy* has the hidden meaning of 'to copulate'. But supposing we were to reverse Spurgeon's method and analyse and categorise the variety of metaphorical vehicles through which Shakespeare represented the sexual act or sex organs as tenor. We would get a very different result from Spurgeon's, as is shown by the several pages in which Eric Partridge in his book *Shakespeare's Bawdy* listed the extraordinary diversity and fertility of the images through which Shakespeare represented the sexual.⁵ But Miss Spurgeon, who sought to elicit from Shakespeare's imagery not only thematic elements in the plays but also an impression of his mind and personality, concluded that 'he was healthy in body as in mind', and, of the five terms she found to sum up the sense of his character conveyed by his imagery, one was 'wholesomeness'. In the mouth of a genteel English woman scholar in 1930, these attributes unmistakably connoted 'sexual modesty'. One is tempted to say that Shakespeare, if he could have read her, might have found in 'wholesomeness' an incitement to a bawdy pun.

It was only as late as 1947 that Eric Partridge, the distinguished lexicographer, made the first attempt ever at a comprehensive study of Shakespeare's language of sexuality, though it can be seen now to have been in some respects incomplete. This was in the book titled *Shakespeare's Bawdy* that I have already cited. Even so, the first edition was limited to a thousand copies and high-priced, so that it must have sold more to collectors of erotica than to Shakespeare scholars. Later popular editions, perhaps for fear of censorship, contained in the glossary such period curiosities as *c**t* and *fu*k*. Not surprising, since the great *Oxford English Dictionary*, when first published in thirteen volumes in 1928, didn't list these and comparable words. There is a story of a group of Australian undergraduates who at that time wrote a letter to the Oxford University Press in some such words as these: 'We have bought the *Oxford English Dictionary*

⁵ Eric Partridge, *Shakespeare's Bawdy* (London, 1955: Routledge and Kegan Paul), pp. 40-49.

after reading your advertisement, which said that it was the most comprehensive dictionary of the English language ever produced. We have looked in it, and have failed to find the word *fuck*. Will you please refund our money?’

But there was one place where bowdlerisation of Shakespeare survived much longer: that was in the former Soviet Union, down to the end of its days. This was in keeping with official sexual morality in the Soviet Union, which was quite Victorian. The Soviets’ treatment of the texts of the classic Russian writers was something that Miss Bowdler might have been proud of. Even in scholarly editions, the bawdy poems of Pushkin and Lermontov were cut to ribbons, and the personal letters of the great nineteenth-century writers, when reprinted, were peppered with little figleaves denoting material that was ‘unsuitable for publication’. So it’s hardly strange that Shakespeare got similar treatment. There’s a translation into Russian of six of Shakespeare’s tragedies by Boris Pasternak that may be the greatest version of him in another language — such a translation as only a poet of genius could have produced. But in rendering Shakespeare’s sexual language poor Pasternak had to conform to the Soviet norms: otherwise his translation wouldn’t have got past the Soviet censor. Of many examples that could be offered, one will have to suffice here. In *Othello* there is a scene where the hero, agonised by the uncertainty of not knowing whether Desdemona is or isn’t unfaithful, demands from Iago proof. Iago answers:

Would you, the supervisor, grossly gape on,
Behold her topped?

The coarseness and nastiness of that ‘topped’ is dramatically vital: Iago finds a sadistic delight in torturing Othello with the fantasy it conjures up. But Pasternak has to translate feebly, ineffectually:

Do you want to look on in secret
While he and she embrace?⁶

Translated from Boris Pasternak, *Vilyam Shekspir: Tragedii* (Moscow, 1968: Hudozhestvennaya Literatura), p. 306.

And now to return for the last time to archy’s claim. I have already indicated that he was right part of the time, and wrong at others. But he was essentially correct in emphasising that Shakespeare was a man of the popular theatre, susceptible to its pressures and demands — a fact that is too often ignored by those who venerate him as the supreme dramatic and poetic genius. He was, of course, a great dramatist, but he was also a popular entertainer, and only those who think these two roles are mutually exclusive will find them contradictory. I don’t. Actually, Shakespeare would have been a less full-blooded dramatist if he hadn’t been writing out of and for that popular theatre. If I ask myself why I prefer Shakespeare to Aeschylus, Racine or Pinter, the answer is that there’s one kind of theatrical and literary vitality to be found in a popular theatre that’s absent in a ritualistic, courtly or intellectual one; and if so, one must take it with the total dramatic substance in which it comes embedded. The sometimes tasteless sexual jokes, like the sometimes ham-handed melodrama, the sometimes creaking plots, and the sometimes bombastic rhetoric, were bound up with the conditions which also made possible what in Shakespeare we admire and delight in. So let us not on this anniversary make a fetish of that William Shakespeare to whom mountains of learned treatises and critical disquisitions have been erected, and whom the dramatist himself would have found unrecognisable. How fantastic Shakespeare would have thought it that his plays should be studied as school and university texts when he wasn’t even interested in publishing them, because for him their existence was in the theatre! Let us then celebrate instead the man who was the most successful playwright of his time because in his heights, his flats and his depths he was always with his audience — archy’s ‘big bill’, often lowbrowed and frequently coarse.

Gender, Poverty and *Thesawalamai* Law

Somasekaram Vasuki and Muttukrishna Sarvananthan

This essay consists of two sections. The first section is a brief survey of recent literature on the nexus between gender and poverty in Asia (particularly South Asia) - the evidence, causes, and policies. The second section is a brief study of the nexus between a customary inheritance law, as embodied in *Thesawalamai* law, and poverty of women, among the northern Tamil community of Sri Lanka.

Gender of Poverty

The nexus between gender and poverty has been established in recent times. Now it is widely perceived that women confront poverty more often than men. The proportion of women among the poor is considerably greater than the proportion of women in the overall population, in most countries, and in some instances even increasing.

During the 1980s, women were 50% more prone to poverty than men in the United States, irrespective of ethnicity or age. More alarmingly, the poverty gap between the genders in the US has increased from 10% in 1950 to 50% in 1980 (McLanahan et al, 1989). Almost the entire increase in this gender gap of poverty was due to relative decline rather than absolute decline in the position of women, vis-a-vis men. A similar pattern of gender division of poverty has been observed in many other developed countries as well (for empirical evidence, see Casper et al, 1993). In China, too, economic reforms have increased poverty among women, in absolute and relative terms

(Summerfield and Aslanbeigui, 1994). This may partly explain the rising incidences of female infanticide in China, particularly in the rural areas.

Evidence of Gender Division of Poverty

Are women poorer than men? The empirical evidence among Asian developing countries is mixed. We shall look into the evidence using the following yardsticks - consumption, literacy, mortality, health care, morbidity and education.

Consumption - Gender differentiation in consumption among Asian developing countries is not very clear. The disparity in consumption against women could be observed in most South Asian countries. The empirical studies which validate this hypothesis are Agarwal (1986), Banerjee (1983), Behrman (1988 a&b), Sen(1988), Sen and Sengupta (1983), Taylor and Faruque (1983), all for India, and Chen, Huq, and De Souza (1981) for Bangladesh. The empirical studies which refute this hypothesis are Basu (1989&1993), Behrman and Deolalikar (1990), Dasgupta (1987), and Harris (1990), all for India. At least one study in South Asia points to evidence against men (Pitt et al, 1990, for Bangladesh).

Hence, the evidence of gender discrimination in consumption, in South Asia, is not unequivocal. This is partly because of different methodologies adopted to measure consumption.

In East and South East Asian countries, gender differentiation in consumption is virtually absent. The empirical studies arriving at this conclusion are Haddad and Kanbur (1990), for Philippines, and Deaton (1989), for Thailand.

Literacy - As regards literacy rates among genders, we find disparity against females in many Asian countries. This seems to be more pronounced in South Asian countries (barring Sri Lanka) than in East and South - East Asian countries (ESCAP, 1993).

Mortality - Gender differentiation in infant mortality rates (among under 5 year olds) is also significantly high against girls throughout Asia, especially in South Asian countries (Sen, 1990, for India ; ESCAP, 1993).

Health Care - In health care provision too, there is a gender bias against females in South Asia (Kynch and Sen, 1983, for India ; Alderman and Gertler, 1988, for Pakistan), but no such evidence exists in East and South - East Asian countries. In fact, in Indonesia, a marginal gender disparity exists in favour of girls (Deolalikar, 1991).

Morbidity - Morbidity rates again confirm gender disparity against women in South Asia (for example, Chen, Huq, and De Souza, 1981, for Bangladesh), but no such disparity is found in East and South - East Asian countries (for example, Deolalikar, 1991, for Indonesia).

Education - In terms of years of schooling too, girls are more disadvantaged than boys throughout the Asian countries. This is evident to a greater extent in South Asia (barring Sri Lanka) than in East and South - East Asian countries (ESCAP, 1993).

All the foregoing six indicators are measures of wellbeing and it positively shows widespread gender discrimination, especially in South Asia. Generally, the lack (of consumption, literacy, health care, and education) or prevalence (of morbidity, and high infant mortality rate) of the above are used as measures of poverty and inequality. Thus, sufficient empirical evidence exists to show that women are more deprived than men - that is, there are more poor women than poor men, especially in South Asia. The difference in empirical evidence is partly due to the use of different methodologies to arrive at the respective conclusions.

Though, in terms of literacy rates and educational attainments there does not seem to be much difference between the genders in Sri Lanka as a whole, in the eastern and northern provinces, considerable gender disparity in these two criteria are observed, as a direct result of the ongoing civil conflict (IAWID, 1994). Besides, in terms of infant mortality rates, morbidity rates, and health care provisions, gender differentiation in these two provinces is much greater than in Sri Lanka as a whole (ibid).

Causes of Gender Division of Poverty

Many of the causes of gender differentiation of poverty are due to disparity in intra-household distribution of resources. This could be due to economic factors and/or socio-cultural factors. The economic rationale advanced in favour of gender discrimination within the household is that boys provide greater returns to investment on them than on girls (Quibria, 1993), though there is hardly any empirical evidence to support this hypothesis. Gender differentiation within households is also due to socio-cultural factors such as societal values and norms.

Women's access to food, education, health and nutrition within their households is circumscribed compared to men. This leaves them in a disadvantaged position in seeking wage employment outside home. Even when they are successful in obtaining wage employment, they may face wage discrimination. This, may not be entirely due to gender discrimination, rather it is partly due to lack of education, skills, etc. This wage differential in the labour market, in turn, would prompt lesser investment on girls within the household, due to differential returns to investment among genders (this argument is articulated in Quibria, 1993&1995). Thus, it is a vicious circle of gender discrimination against women within households.

Ownership and command over property (and/or assets), especially land, is very much restricted to women due to various customary inheritance laws in many Asian countries (Agarwal, 1994 a&b ; Quibria, 1995). In most agrarian societies in Asia, ownership and command over land could determine poor and non-poor situations. Thus, women's lack of ownership and command over productive assets in general, and land in particular, has made them poorer than men.

Access to institutional credit is another factor which distinguishes poor and non-poor situations. Here again, women are more disadvantaged than men for a variety of reasons. Lack of collateral due to the absence of ownership of assets, and lack of literacy/educational attainments to follow the procedures and

fill application forms have acted against women in obtaining institutional credit to undertake productive activities. However, in some instances, like the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, this anomaly has been successfully redressed to a considerable extent (see Heyzer, 1994, p280-297, for more successful case studies in Asian countries). Further, cultural constraints have also curtailed women's access to institutional credit. For example, women visiting financial institutions to obtain credit, which are overwhelmingly staffed with males, may be a cultural taboo in many traditional societies.

Hence, the foregoing economic, social, and cultural factors have caused greater poverty among women, vis-a-vis men, in many Asian countries, particularly in South Asia.

Policies to Alleviate Gender Division of Poverty

Due to gender differentiation in the incidence of poverty, anti-poverty policies should be gender-oriented. This is proposed on the grounds of 'equity' and 'efficiency' by Quibria (1993).

Since there is substantive evidence of gender disparity among the poor against women, anti-poverty policies should be targeted towards women to redress this anomaly. Even gender-neutral policies do not benefit women significantly, due to additional impediments faced by them - socio-economic, cultural, and informational (Quibria, 1993). Therefore, gender-oriented anti-poverty policies in favour of women should be devised on moral and social principle of 'equity'.

As we have discussed earlier, gender disparity exists in such social indicators as health, education, nutrition, etc. It is argued that the social rate of return of social investments on women is greater than on men. For example, upgrading the nutritional standards of women will not only improve the mother's health, but also the child's health. Further, improved health facilities and educational attainments of women would not only improve their own living standards, but would also make positive contributions to the reduction of the birth rate, and improved health and hygiene of the household, in general. Hence, social

investment on women has a multiplier effect. These overall improvements of the household would, in turn, decrease public investment in the social sector, over time (Quibria, 1993&1995 ; Agarwal, 1994a). Therefore, it is argued that social investment targeted towards women should be undertaken on the principle of 'efficiency' as well.

The important point to note is that, gender-oriented anti-poverty policies make not only social sense but economic sense as well. Several empirical studies have revealed that gender differentiation in poverty is due to economic as well as socio-cultural factors, and largely confined to discrimination in the intra-household distribution of resources. While public (Government) action may be able to rectify gender discrimination based on economic factors, it could do little to rectify socio-cultural factors, especially within the household (Quibria, 1995, p382). Hence, public action should be complemented by community action to overcome socio-cultural factors contributing to gender division of poverty.

Conventionally, it has been argued that access to wage employment for women is the single most important action towards gender equity. Many developing countries in Asia have made great strides in providing wage employment to women, but gender inequity stubbornly persists. This is largely due to the fact that, though women now have greater access to wage employment, they are low - paid due to wage discrimination, they are concentrated in menial, clerical, and lower grade jobs, and health and safety conditions at work where women predominate are substandard. These issues are discussed by Cho (1994) for Korea, which is a country experiencing high economic growth rates coupled with reasonable (overall) equitable distribution of income. For example, in Korea, the average working hours of females are longer than those of males, and the average wage of females is half that of males (ibid, p102).

Due to the limited success of the 'gender equity through wage employment' policy, it is now being argued that ownership and command over productive assets (especially land) by women

is a pre-requisite to achieve gender equity, and to alleviate gender division of poverty.

In a ground - breaking study on the organic link between gender disparities in society and ownership and command over land in South Asia, Agarwal (1994a) argues that gender disparity (in favour of men) in property ownership is the single most crucial determinant of gender inequity in society - in economic, social, and cultural spheres (p1458). This conclusion is arrived at from an extensive field research in various parts of India (Agarwal, 1994b).

Therefore, the need for independent ownership of and command over land by women is being argued on the principles of (a) welfare, (b) efficiency, and (c) equity and empowerment (Agarwal, 1994a).

Welfare argument - It is argued that independent ownership of and command over land by women would go a long way in redressing gender imbalance in resource distribution within households, and hence would increase the overall welfare. Empirical evidence has been found to show that women in poor rural households mostly spend resources under their command on basic needs of the family, whereas men mostly spend on personal consumption such as tobacco, alcohol, etc. It has also been found that children's nutritional standard is positively correlated to mother's earnings rather than the father's (ibid, p1461). In the rural Philippines, Senauer, et al (1988) found that the income of a mother has a positive effect on the relative allocation of calories for herself and her children. Therefore, the argument in favour of independent land rights for women is advanced on welfare grounds.

Efficiency argument - It could be argued that independent land ownership rights to women will result in (i) smaller size holdings of land, which will be inefficient, and (ii) increased fragmentation of land, which will have an adverse effect on productivity. However, existing evidence does not suggest that smaller land holdings will necessarily result in lower output (Japan being an

example), and land fragmentation can take place under both male and female inheritance (Agarwal, 1994a, p1463). Therefore, independent land rights to women are called for on the grounds of efficiency.

Equity and Empowerment argument - By providing independent land rights to women, they can be empowered to be on equal footing, and challenge male dominance and chauvinism within households as well as in the wider society (ibid, p1464). This is a moral and social argument, rather than an economic one.

Unfortunately, in many Asian countries including Sri Lanka, gender-segregated data on poverty and inequality are hardly available. Therefore, a thorough survey of poverty and inequality to capture the gender dimension, in every country, is a pre-requisite for successful formulation and implementation of anti-poverty strategies.

Gender focused anti-poverty strategies will have the greatest impact on poverty alleviation than all other target group-oriented strategies because of the fact that women typically compose around fifty per cent of the population, in all countries. Further, for the very same reason, the single most important strategy to reduce income inequality within a country would be the rectification of gender imbalance in the distribution of income and wealth within the households, as well as in the wider society.

Thesawalamai Law and Poverty of Women

The purpose of this section is to reinforce the hypothesis propounded by Bina Agarwal (1994 a&b) that customary inheritance laws of South Asia are inimical to gender equity, in economic, social and cultural spheres. A critical analysis of the *Thesawalamai* customary law of Sri Lanka is undertaken, as a case study, to test the above hypothesis. This section is largely drawn from IAWID, (1994, p29-32).

Thesawalamai (national norm) law governs the Tamils of the northern province in Sri Lanka. The statutes under this law

are, (i) *Thesawalamai* law, (ii) Matrimonial Rights and Inheritance (Jaffna) Ordinance of 1947, and (iii) Law of Pre-emption of 1947. These statutes govern the inheritance of property and matrimonial rights of the Tamils of northern province.

Thesawalamai in its original form is a blend of *Marumakathayam* (a matriarchal law of Kerala) and patriarchal Hindu laws of South India. This original form evolved into a 'customary law' of the northern (Jaffna) Tamils, over the years, reflecting the customs of their *Malabar* constituents.

Tamils of the northern province are bound by *Thesawalamai* law wherever they reside within Sri Lanka. The rest of the Tamils are governed by the general law of Sri Lanka (which is Roman-Dutch law).

Thesawalamai law entitles women to 'own' property, but does not entrust 'command' over the same. Women are entitled to *Mudhusam* (patrimonial inheritance) and *Urimai* (non-patrimonial inheritance) of properties. Women are also entitled to retain their *cheethanam* (dowry), both cash and property. Besides, women are also entitled to at least half of *Thediatheddam* (assets and wealth acquired after the marriage by either or both), and any other assets and wealth possessed prior to the marriage or as a divorcee/widow.

Though women are entitled to ownership of property, a woman is not permitted to manage, invest (in a business), mortgage, lease or sell immovable property without the written consent of her husband. Women have no 'locus standi' in a court of law, and are hence treated as a minor in a litigation. As a result, no one will enter into a contract with a woman as an individual without the inclusion of her husband. Therefore, *Thesawalamai* law bestows nominal ownership on women with no real command over such assets and wealth.

Thus, whether in the case of the separate properties of women or common properties, men exercise effective command and control over them. However, after the amendment to the law in 1947, a husband cannot sell without the written consent of his wife if a property had been acquired in her name. In

some instances, the law courts have held that women can lease their property without the consent of their husbands.

Under *Thesawalamai* law, daughters are entitled to equal inheritance of parental properties, in theory. However, in practice, sons are the ones who inherit parental properties. Thus, daughters who have received *cheethanam*, and who have brothers, do not inherit parental properties in most instances. This is a discriminatory practice.

Thediatheddam is a unique feature of *Thesawalamai* law. *Thediatheddam* includes acquisitions of property, by either or both, after marriage, and profits accruing from independent ownership of properties by either of them. These are communal ownership shared by husband and wife. That is, the wife owns half of acquired property even when the property is solely acquired by her husband. Further, on the death of her husband, intestate, the wife is entitled to half of her husband's share in addition to her own half (that is, three fourth of the total). Hence, *Thediatheddam* provides some kind of economic security to women who are housewives, who have very little opportunity to acquire property on their own (but not necessarily to other women). Nevertheless, this is a nominal security rather than real (when the husband is alive), because the law does not permit her to independently manage, invest, mortgage, lease, or dispose of the property which she partly owns.

Thesawalamai law has imposed additional constraints on women, who are bound by it, in the present conflict situation. Civil conflict has rendered many households female-headed. This is because many men have fled the country seeking refuge abroad, and some more have 'disappeared' locally. These have resulted in a surge in female-headed households among the Tamils. In the absence of their husbands (abroad), women are unable to dispose of or make productive use of their properties. Besides, in the case of the 'disappeared' men, women are unable to dispose of or make productive use of their properties, because obtaining death certificates for their 'disappeared' husbands is an herculean task. In these circumstances, normally

women can request the law courts to sanction the transactions involving their properties. However, due to the non-functioning of law courts in the conflict areas, this recourse to justice has been elusive.

Under the general law of Sri Lanka, which binds the rest of the Tamils, women are entitled to independent ownership and command over properties under the 'Married Women's Property Ordinance'. In marriage, women are regarded as individuals in regard to ownership and command over assets and wealth. A woman can manage, invest, mortgage, lease or sell assets and wealth under their ownership without the consent of her husband. Thus, women have 'locus standi' in a court of law, and are considered as 'femme-sole'.

However, under the general law, the economic security conferred by *Thediatheddham* is unavailable to women. Hence, women who are home-bound may be at a disadvantage under the general law. Nevertheless, with ever growing salaried and wage-employed women, and female-headed households in society, *Thesawalamai* is a regressive law which has to be overhauled.

Though *Thediatheddham* is a source of economic security to home-bound women, it is detrimental to the social and cultural emancipation of women including housewives. By virtue of not being recognised as an 'independent self' under *Thesawalamai*, women are relegated to the position of second class citizens in society. This has profound effect on the self-confidence, and self-esteem of womanhood in society. Thus, though *Thediatheddham* may be of economic benefit to home-bound women, it is not so socially and culturally.

Conclusion

In sum, the foregoing analysis provides further credence to the hypothesis posited by Bina Agarwal that gender disparity in ownership and command over property is the single most crucial determinant of gender inequity, and gender division of poverty in particular, in South Asia. Customary inheritance laws

of South Asia are the primary cause of gender disparity in ownership and command over property.

Therefore, an overhaul of the customary inheritance laws of South Asia has to be undertaken to eradicate gender inequity, and gender division of poverty in particular. As regards our case study, an overhaul of the *Thesawalamai* law is a pre-requisite to combat gender inequity, and gender division of poverty in particular, among the northern Tamil community. The urgency of this change is underscored by the predicament of women arising from the ongoing civil conflict. Besides, *Cheethanam* should be outlawed forthwith (in practice as well).

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Quarterly Quarks Seehawk

When D.S. Senanayake strode to the flagstaff to raise the Lion Flag (no agreed national flag had yet been designed) signalling Ceylon's independence on 4 February 1948, the auspicious time for this act was, of course, determined by the astrologers. But it's clear that they bungled the job: how, otherwise, explain the diasasters that have dogged Sri Lanka's course during the fifty post-independence years? So, as my contribution to the fiftieth anniversary celebrations, I have asked my most trusted astrologer to re-calculate the auspicious time, and tell me what alternative histories were missed by the blunder. He has actually come up not with one but with two different times, and therefore with two histories that were unfulfilled.

So let's rewind the tape of history back to 1948, and erase everything in between. Ready? Okay, auspicious time: 9.34 a.m. Let's see what follows.

The road not taken (1)

D.S. Senanayake was a fond father, and would have dearly loved to see his son Dudley succeed him as head of government. But being a man of mature wisdom, he told himself that the interests of party and class must take precedence over family. The man properly in line for the succession was S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, who was also the ablest man in the Cabinet. Dudley must wait; he was younger, and would have his turn.

As a man of the old school, Senanayake didn't see eye to eye with Bandaranaike on all things. By outlook, conservative, and by associations, pro-British, he didn't really sympathise with Bandaranaike's brand of populist nationalism, but he told himself that, anyway, he would be dead and gone by the time the latter took over; let the future look after itself.

Thus, when D.S. fell off his horse on Galle Face Green in

1952, Bandaranaike succeeded as Premier smoothly and without conflict, and led the party to a resounding victory in the general elections later that year. Bandaranaike had brought fresh blood into the government from his own Sinhala Maha Sabha, while the older, more élitist leadership of the UNP was still represented within it. Thus, he found himself heading a multi-class and multi-ethnic coalition. This represented the ideal balance of forces for the role he had long seen himself playing: neither obstructing change nor violently enforcing it, but, like a midwife, assisting in its peaceful and painless birth.

What Bandaranaike did, in the first place, was to speed up the transition from English to Sinhala and Tamil as official languages, in accordance with the State Council's resolution of 1943. There were some Sinhala nationalists who pushed for Sinhala as the only official language, but the Prime Minister steadfastly resisted these pressures, insisting that equality of status for the two national languages was a necessary condition of national unity. But he also emphasised that English was the window on the world that Ceylon couldn't do without. While swabhasha was the medium of instruction in the primary and secondary schools, university education continued to be conducted in English, and the quality of English was steadily pushed up in provincial schools to enable rural students to have access to higher education.

With the popularity of these policies, together with a non-aligned foreign policy, regional councils for local self-government, land reform and fostering of local manufactures, Bandaranaike easily won a second term as Prime Minister. When he died in 1965, to be succeeded by Dudley Senanayake, *The Times* (London) said that he had built 'the most stable democracy in South Asia'.

The road not taken (2)

My astrologer's second option for an auspicious time was 3.42 p.m. It turns out that if the Lion Flag had been raised at that moment on 4 February 1948, everything in the historical record would have stayed the same till 1977. So, in this alternative, we rewind the tape of history only back to the morrow of the general elections of that year; everything before that remains part of the depressing actuality that

we have known. Okay: let's go.

J.R. Jayewardene's unprecedented five-sixths majority at the 1977 elections didn't go to his head. He knew that many people had voted not so much **for** his party as **against** the previous government. He also knew that there was a major problem to be resolved: that of simmering Tamil frustration and discontent. Even the lawyers and good bourgeoisie of the TULF had opted for a separate state at the Vaddukoddai sessions of the party, and though they may have intended this declaration only as pressure for bargaining, Jayewardene's security advisers told him that Jaffna youth took it seriously and were prepared to take up arms for it.

Jayewardene's election manifesto had promised settlement of Tamil grievances, and he meant what he said. His heart was set on dismantling the regimented economy set up by the previous government, and in his more extravagant moments, he dreamed of making Sri Lanka another Singapore. But he was realistic enough to know that there could be no economic development worth talking about without ethnic peace.

Accordingly, one of the first post-election steps taken by the new government was to call the All-Party Conference on the ethnic problem promised in the election manifesto. These talks were the prelude to sweeping changes in the Constitution of 1978: Sinhala and Tamil being given equality of status as official languages, and extensive regional devolution of power. There were, of course, dissentient voices, both in the opposition and within the governing party. Cyril Mathew even staged a hunger strike in protest, but J.R. remarked, nonchalantly, 'I made him, and I can unmake him.' The 1978 Constitution set up an executive presidency, and J.R. was able to carry through policy changes, free of the day-to-day fluctuations of parliamentary currents. With Tamil opinion conciliated, the incipient militant movements of Jaffna youth withered for lack of popular support. Meanwhile, the economy boomed with de-regulation and free competition. J.R. easily won his second term in 1982, and when he retired from active politics in 1988, *The Times* (London) said that he had built 'the most stable democracy' in South Asia.

The legend of Ayeshamma

Ameena Hussein-Uvais

Ayeshamma was only 23 years old when she died. She was a tall slim grey-eyed woman who bore herself strong and straight when she walked around the village. She was not considered a beauty in her village. In fact they thought she was rather ugly. "All skin and bones," the other village women said, "and those ugly see-through eyes, ugh, they make me feel strange and give me goose-bumps to look at them." It was some twist of fate that plonked Ayeshamma in a small village located at the foot of the Knuckles range. Had she been born in any country in the West, she would have had men falling at her feet. She would have been discovered shopping at a suburban mall by a young model scout and then snatched up by the Ford or Elite modelling agency who would have rhapsodized about her perfect *cafe au lait* complexion, her long neck, her perfectly proportioned body, her endless legs, her thick black hair with streaks of copper, and those eyes. She would have commandeered ten thousand dollars a day - US that is - and married a rock star and launched her own keep fit video series and done other supermodel things.

But instead Ayeshamma was born to a village where beauty was plump and short with black hair and black eyes. She had lived all her life in her village only venturing to the edge of the forest to gather firewood and trudging off to the water pipe at the roadside to fill her earthenware pot. And when the village men came back with stories of seeing a huge lake that was filled with salt water and was as blue as the kingfisher's tail, she would sit at the last row with no-one beside her and strain her ears to hear about the great city and rich loose women who wore clothes that did not cover their knees and covered their eyes with black glass. She would then sigh and go and sit on the doorstep of her sister's house and look out at the silhouette of the mountains and sigh many more times before she would creep

into the kitchen and unroll her mattress and lie down on it and try to sleep. But on these nights sleep would not come easily and she would toss and turn and her eyes would roll upwards towards the tiny window and she would see the slivered crescent of a new moon and make a wish "Please New Moon, Please New Moon let me....." She did not pray to a God because by then she had stopped believing in one. Instead she turned to animism, and attributed a higher power to those that could not hurt her. Animals, inanimate objects and those of the celestial world.

Ayeshamma was not always considered unlucky. In fact the year she was born, it was the most bountiful harvest the village had ever seen. The rains came on time. The wild boar stayed away from the crops. And in general the village lived a peaceful and harmonious life that year. She was a happy child and was often seen dancing around her mother on the way to the water pipe or she would be found perched on her father's shoulders asking him to tell her stories of the stars and the Prophet of Islam. Of his five children he loved her best and would often shield her from her mother's chidings. "Let her be," he would gently say pushing his wife away, who would then shake her head in anger and advise him against spoiling his daughter. "Enough, woman!", he would sharply retort. "She will grow up soon enough. Let her be for now." And so while Ayeshamma's sisters toiled in the kitchen and worked in the fields during harvest time she spent her time chasing butterflies and teasing the family goat.

One day three weeks shy of her thirteenth birthday Ayeshamma went with her sister to the edge of the field to perform her morning ablutions. Her screams pierced through the delicate mist of dawn and brought the villagers rushing to the scene. They found Ayeshamma lying dramatically on the ground, with her sister trying hard to hush her up. They saw trickles of blood down her leg and heard her moan that she was dying. Bleeding to death, that is. Her angry mother ordered her sister to quickly take her into the house. Half-carried, half-dragged by her mother and sister and accompanied by all the other women in the village Ayeshamma was taken into the house. Once inside she was made to tie a string around her waist and then a piece of cloth was attached to the front and back of the string so that it covered her private parts and would prevent the menstrual

blood from running down her legs. A frightened and almost hysterical Ayeshamma was told that this bleeding was going to happen to her every month from now on. And that when this happened she would have to place this cloth between her legs. She whimpered with a shame she could not comprehend and asked her mother "Why?". To which her mother replied "You're a girl, aren't you?"

For seven days she was not allowed to venture out of her corner where her sleeping mat had been placed. The village women poured in and out of the house and she was fed the most delicious food that could be thought of. Years later Ayeshamma would think back at all the food she was given and realize that in all her life that would be the only time she was fed without resentment. For those seven days Ayeshamma ate eggs and milk and fish and meat. She ate and slept and did no work and when the women came to visit they brought her gifts and looked at her with new eyes and she revelled in their attention. On the seventh day she was taken to the village well and the woman who had delivered all of them from their mother bathed her, all the while uttering strange and powerful prayers. She was dressed in new and glittery clothes and made to sit down on the only chair the house possessed. And throughout the day the village women and children crowded into the house and chattered in loud voices while staring at her and drank sweet coloured milk from chipped glasses borrowed from the rundown Muslim boutique five miles down the road. The men hung around the house outside and spoke in guttural whispers, embarrassed and out of place at this woman's event. They crouched in clusters of three and four and patiently rolled their evil-smelling beedis. They filled their sparse conversation with frequent drags on their slim beedis which they inhaled with undiluted pleasure. The celebrations from the house filtered out to them and occasionally one of them would turn his head lazily to the house and crack a crude joke about women. Their jokes were always about women. What women did. How they thought, or rather the lack of it. How they walked. How they talked. What they were good for and how they should be treated.

On the eighth day Ayeshamma's sleeping mat was returned to its normal place and she was instructed by her mother that from now

on she would help her elder sisters and stay at home and not wander outside like before. What had happened to her was a woman thing and she was now a woman and would have to behave like a woman. Ayeshamma knew very little about these woman things that her mother seemed to be recently obsessed with. All she knew was that her elder sisters seemed to have no fun and that her mother looked tired and miserable doing all these woman things. Soon Ayeshamma learnt that her life was dominated by these woman things.

One year later Ayeshamma and her elder sister Nooramma were given in marriage to the headman's two sons. In twelve months Ayeshamma had gone through a personality change. She was quieter and spent much of her time looking down at the ground when she went out. If you could manage to get a glimpse of those eyes you would have seen that she had lost the sparkle and her lips rarely stretched a smile across her face.

Ayeshamma and her sister were woken up with the dawn on their wedding day. Surrounded by the village girls, Ayeshamma and Nooramma were prepared for their wedding. Their faces were made up with an assortment of hotch potch cosmetics by Rizana, the only female who had been to the big city working as a factory girl, and whom the village men would make crude remarks about. After many hours of being tugged and squeezed and pulled into and out of various garments, the two sisters were declared ready to be taken to the marriage hall. Ayeshamma's father, seeing the potential gain of marrying his two daughters to the village headman's sons, had gone into debt to have the grandest and gaudiest wedding the village had ever seen. The only village hall had been decorated with an assortment of coloured lights. Tinsel and crepe paper twirled around every column. At the far end of the hall stood two chairs underneath a bower of plastic flowers upon which Ayeshamma and her sister sat. Loud Tamil film songs blared from the mosque speakers and filtered into every nook and cranny in the village. There was no escaping Ayeshamma's wedding. It was the grandest the village had ever seen in twenty years.

Ayeshamma saw her husband for the first time on her wedding day, looking under flickering downcast eyes and she trembled slightly

while he walked towards her. She had never seen a more good-looking man in her life. He was tall and strongly built and he had straight black hair that fell down on his forehead and hid his eyes. If she had been able to see them she might have trembled from fear but that would come in a few hours. But right now, dressed in her bridal dress and holding a bunch of cheap cloth flowers, she trembled with excitement. That night Ayeshammam, fourteen years old, was raped by her husband, twenty-five years old. Not once. Not twice but six times. He held his palm over her mouth and used his weight to pin her down, and then finding that she did not resist but lay motionless beneath him just staring up at him with her eyes, he put his palm over her face and blocked out her eyes. The next day Ayeshamma hobbled to her mother and before she could say anything her mother put her finger across her daughters split and bloodied lips and shook her head from side to side indicating that she didn't want to hear what Ayeshamma had to say.

For the year that followed Ayeshamma learnt to be content with her life. She learnt to live in a curtained - off section in her parents' house with her siblings living on the other side. When you are as poor as Ayeshamma privacy and shame are luxuries. She learnt not to be embarrassed about her husband's sexual demands which could be heard in every part of the house. And she learnt what it was to be a woman.

After Ayeshamma had been married for three years she heard the whispers. At first they were just that. Whispers. She knew they were talking about her for whenever she got close to them they would stop awkwardly and leave as quickly as possible. And then the whispers got louder and louder and she could no longer deny them. "Barren bitch," they taunted at the water pipe, "do you know that your husband seeks comfort elsewhere?" And she would turn and look at them with her grey eyes and say nothing. She had no friends and even her sister would clasp her two children protectively and stare at her uneasily when she walked past. Ayeshamma did not blame her. Everyone knew that a woman without children was bad luck and Ayeshamma's stomach despite three years of marriage clung to her hip bones and stretched flat as a grinding stone. At first Ayeshamma's

eyes would well up with tears and she would beg and plead with Allah to give her a child. She would fast and keep all sorts of vows but to no avail. She even went to the holy man that would visit the village every year and claimed to have a cure for everything and a direct line to Almighty Allah, for the correct price of course. Her mother in consultation with the other village women agreed upon a date and time to meet with the holy man. And so Ayeshamma and another village woman, Fathima, who also had no children went to the holy man accompanied by their respective mothers. Ayeshamma was to be seen first by the holy man. The holy man's assistant instructed Ayeshamma's mother to stay outside as the holy man needed great concentration and would be distracted by unnecessary persons in the room. Ayeshamma's mother frowned at this flaunting of convention but reluctantly agreed, so desperate were they. The assistant, an old woman with no teeth and betel-stained lips, showed Ayeshamma into a dark room, cleared her throat and darted out letting the curtain fall behind her. The only sign that anyone else was in the room was the heavy breathing that Ayeshamma heard in the corner. Ayeshamma too began to breathe faster and her pupils dilated in an effort to see the holy man. She heard a shuffling that got closer and closer and then she felt her hand being clasped roughly. The holy man whispered hoarsely, "What do you want woman?" And Ayeshamma replied "To have a child". She then felt herself being seized by the holy man with a lot of wheezing and coughing and fumbling accompanying the rather strange and questionable encounter. After a few minutes the holy man handed Ayeshamma a piece of damp cotton wool and instructed her to place it in that place where babies come from. Ayeshamma complied, upon which the holy man then shuffled off into the even darker corner he had emerged from and through his silence Ayeshamma realized that the encounter was over. She stumbled out and winced at the bright light that hurt her eyes and told her mother no details of the meeting with the holy man. As she left, she saw Fathima being shown into the holy man's room. Nine months later Fathima was delivered of a healthy baby girl who had none of her father's features, but the family was too overjoyed to notice anything suspicious and made elaborate promises

to reward the holy man the next time he came to the village. Ayeshamma however, had no such luck. Month after month the menstrual blood would flow and her heart would sink deeper and deeper into the pit of her stomach in despair. Month after month her husband would approach her with fury and violence. Wrapping her long hair around his fist he would jerk her head around while he pounded at her long lithe body, spitting out ferocious words while she lay in apathetic submission.

When Ayeshamma turned 20 she gave up. She refused to believe in God and would stubbornly boycott the religious celebrations conducted in the village. She did not fast during the holy month of Ramazan and would sometimes brazenly chew betel for all to see. She would frequently go to the forest long before dawn and return long after sunset. Her husband had gone from the house two months ago and taken up residence with Mariamma, a quiet and somewhat dowdy plump youngish woman to whom the village men were mystifiably attracted to. Even though Mariamma had never married, she had a number of children from various men in the village and some from the next as well. This blatant flouting of morality somehow didn't seem to perturb the villagers. Mariamma filled a much needed void, or so the explanation went, and the men who sought her out, including the village headmen and the religious teacher, acknowledged her existence as a necessary evil. The women of the village tolerated Mariamma with icy coldness but none would dare to openly insult her. They knew only too well the retaliation that would be effected by Mariamma through their husbands. Mariamma herself gave the whole village a wide berth. She encouraged no friendships with the women, she was independant and she answered to no-one. When Ayeshamma's husband took residence at Mariamma's house no eyebrows were raised. Many of the village men at some point in their marital lives had left their wives and children behind and moved in with Mariamma. After some months of experiencing Mariamma's loose and fluid lifestyle the men would long for their own wives and squabbling children. They began to crave the order and certainty of what they had previously perceived as being boring and dull. And they would move back in with their

wives, who would not mention the whole incident for the rest of their married lives but who would walk straighter and prouder around the village, and their voices would be raised just a semitone louder than it had been before. And thus the village was made aware of a change.

When Ayeshamma's husband moved out of the house, at first the village women reacted with typical voracity. Gathering around an inert and disheveled Ayeshamma they chewed their betel, made comforting noises and murmured on the fickleness of men. But as weeks turned into months and the errant husband failed to materialize as expected, their flickering eyes turned on Ayeshamma and took on a suspicious cast. Their visits ceased and their tongues curled around hateful words with an enthusiasm that was terrifying.

The forest visits were the last straw for Ayeshamma's parents. In despair over their daughter's behaviour and her godlessness they threw her out and Ayeshamma was forced to take refuge with her sister, who had moved into her own house and treated her most shabbily and little better than an unfortunate servant. Ayeshamma accepted her sister's cold treatment under the condition that she be allowed to go into the forest once all the work was done. She treasured the few times she had been able to escape into the forest in the nights. They had been full moon nights and the whole forest seemed to throb with a special intensity, bathed under a pearlwhite glow. She didn't do much on these forest trips. She would wander around, touching a tree here, a shrub there, picking a flower occasionally, and then when she got tired she would sit under the vast banyan tree cradled by the giant roots that churned out from under the soil. And she would lie there until dawn watching the sky through heavy-lidded eyes. This was Ayeshamma's life for three years. One day Nooramma woke up and realized that her sister hadn't returned from her forest jaunt. Waking up her disgruntled husband they set off towards the forest in a foul mood to bring Ayeshamma home. They approached the banyan tree and found no-one there. Nooramma shouted out to Ayeshamma while her husband began foraging around the area. After half an hour of fruitless searching Nooramma called her husband to the middle of the banyan tree and asked him to look carefully at the roots and see if

he saw anything strange. He peered down and gave a start. He mumbled something and ran a few steps back. Nooramma cautiously stepped her way towards the banyan tree and she too ran away with her husband towards the village.

Ayeshamma was never heard of or seen again. But if any woman from the village wanted a child, she would go into the forest and approach the banyan tree. She would stand in the middle and look down towards the roots that were wrapped together and seemed to resemble a woman sleeping. She would voice a prayer. Any kind of prayer. And in time a child would be born. That, they say, is the legend of Ayeshamma.

Samskara

Pradeep Ratnam

I awake to the din that accompanies the fateful dawn of a shrarda — a Hindu ritual which involves paying customary obeisance to the dead. In the pantheon of castes and sub-castes that constitute Indian social hierarchy, the rules are ominously clear. The higher you go the tougher things get. God becomes more demanding because HE authorized your privileged social status, HE arbitrated on your Karma and HE decided on where you screwed up and where you didn't. The bottomline is I made it to His good books. Thus applying Hoffman's theory on Right-Duty correlation or more simply, the near universal principles of contractual obligation I owe Him for starters my posterior, and.....

I am shaken out of my sacrilegious ponderings, with the raucous greetings of the female brigade, the annual congregation of good Samaritans who divide amongst themselves the operational supervision of the occasion's tedious infrastructure development. There is Ambalu mami with her betel-stained smile and the hexagonal diamond nose rings which accentuate her mammoth inflating nostrils. She comes in a package deal, with her inseparable adolescent offspring Gayathri, her daughter, apprentice and shadow. Mami 'cooked for the Gods' and was an indispensable requisite for festivity and sorrow alike. Then there is Anasu, the female accountant with the protruding teeth, she was diminutive, but in control, whose invaluable services extend to budgeting the show, setting an itinerary, haggling with the priest, and monitoring every penny spent, and thus moderating what could otherwise degenerate into an expensive affair. Then there was Ranganayaki the matronly embodiment of cleanliness, who swept and washed and set the place in order to welcome our celestial, astral and more conceivably human guests. She combined her

vocational skills with a native sense of aesthetics, manifested as much in her choice of upholstery as in the startling seating arrangements for the participants. (The red cushions to offset the peeling blue walls I suspect are her contribution to reinventing the decor.)

This was just the nucleus of the party. When the gibberish begins to assume cacphonic proportions in a million different sharps and flats, it's time I realise to get out of bed. The son of the Sharma family emerges from his nocturnal abode and assesses the congregation with a benign scrutiny. The core group has swollen in ranks — I see a host of women, frenzied, animated and gesticulating in the courtyard in what seemed like infinite permutations of size, shape and vigour — the large, the smelly, the 'nylon sari' type, the mustached variety, the querulous, the menopausal and the absolutely offensive.

My arrival is met with a sudden hush that paralyzed the flurry of activity. They are frozen in time; over a dozen pair eyes gazing rivettedly at the unannounced entrant to the show. This was *the man*, the son, the male heir to the Sharma lineage. The descendant who counted. With the sacred anatomy which nurtured in its concealed depths the seed to the future generations. Now caught in the ritualistic rigmarole of extorting the blessings of the past.

Amma was embarrassed. "Raja, you remember..."

Social graces. An introduction. A deliberate effort to coerce two worlds into an assumed common terrain, forced into mutual acknowledgment through words.

As I stagger tortuously through the crowded annexe into the sylvan confines of the shower, I feel a thousand inquisitive glances follow, shearing through the carefully constructed walls of privacy, through the covering layers to the very depths of my soul. I fastened the door shut and stared at myself in the mirror. Vedaraman Sharma, 24. Brown, but with the Aryan complex claiming Caucasian ancestry. Straggly unshaven, unkempt. Bags under my eyes (Insomnia, a reckless nightlife, workaholism???), swarthy skin and facial grime caused by my overactive South Asian oil glands, with the tropical humidity as an added contributory.

When I surfaced from my solitude a half-hour later, I found my robes — the bordered 'veshti' and the silk 'angavastra' laid out

in ceremonial regalia awaiting to be draped around the contours of an unfamiliar body-'. The ritual was to begin.

A Hindu ritual is a messy affair. There is the sacrificial fire which is the epicenter of ritualistic activity. A confluence of incense, oil and food. Rice, coconuts sweetmeats and flower all converging to become one indistinguishable pot pourri. Currency notes tucked rather conspicuously between the offerings. Then there are the men who engineer the show, the priests venerated as the sacred instrumentalities who make good the nexus between humanity and divinity. In the instant case there was the belligerent skipper Ramanatha Shastri accompanied by a coterie of accomplices, mostly awkward adolescents who would chant the scriptures in a distinctly orchestrated chorus. The chief was chubby, bald and potbellied, the ultimate stereotype to lord over the community's spiritual desires. The offensive bare - all torso. Was he sexual? Had he ever... ..

Brahmanoho Shyamukhaaseeth...The Brahmin constitutes Your Head (O imaginary Physical Construct of the Supreme).

America America America. What we see as the land of plenty. The captivating facade of wealth and opportunity and hedonism. Glittering malls and white skin. Where laissez faire captures more than just economic ideology, it permeated the legions of the social and spiritual to conquer the very essence of the soul. Tell me what is it about you, O timeless seductress, that inflamed the passions of colonialist Europeans and medieval adventurers? Why have you now years later extended your inviting tentacles to invade our dreams, fire our imagination, redefine our conceptions of success and propriety? Nobody can sense the insidious neo-colonialism masquerading under the catch phrase of globalization. Let's keep it that way.

I was a middle-class Indian, with notions on caste and class. With dreams of upward mobility, wealth and exhibitionism. Who left with these half-baked images of skyscrapers and pizza to savour the unknown delights of materialism, left to escape the drudgery of mediocre surroundings and an impoverished soul.

Bahoora Janya Kritha...From your Shoulders O Indescribable came the Kshatrias, the warrior caste, the aristocracy.

So I had arrived in America. By begging, borrowing and mustering up funds through discrete sources and means. Pawning mom's gallery and selling the car. I arrived at the back waters, the suburbs. Lived in the filth and stench one doesn't get to see in the chic images constructed on Star TV, tailored to mesmerize the South Asian audience. I attended polytechnic through the day and worked in night clubs and bars in the night. Stared with stars in my eyes at 'them', absorbing every atom of their ethos, every move, smell and gesture. Aping indiscriminately their accents tastes and dress. Learning and imbibing religiously the nuances of their prejudices and lifestyle. Every thing which my subconscious classified as superior was adopted — to stay.

The hymns and the Vedic chants. The repetitive tune, the dreary monotony. Why was I consenting to this? To salvage the soul of my dead father? Sentimental considerations and nominal deference to mother?

The asphyxiating fumes of burning oil sprang forth in vicious puffs from the sacrificial fire spreading itself through the room, engulfing all present living, inanimate, astral. This was my culture, a part of me which I ardently believed I had discarded into the annals of the past. No more Brahmin aghrahams for me. No more musty homes with blue walls and the pervasive presence of coconut oil and camphor overflowing from the (unduly large) premises of the Pooja room, the spiritual sanctum and in many ways the reinforced nucleus of communal and social identity.

Ooroothathasyadvaishyaha...The trader the third in the hierarchy ordained by Your Intellect and (translated by Manu) emerges from Your Thighs...

By the time I made it to New York I had reached a definitive stage in the process of transition. I was Bohemian, though more out of a desperation to overcome my own identity rather gradual socialization and the internalization of values through empathy and

a reflective process. It had been a slow and painful ascent, with a determination to overcome the snubs hostility and systemic biases and integrate with my surroundings. I will be American, I will be as white as internalization and domicile can get you — I will think, speak and live American. One day I will become its citizen.

When Law School happened I was a veteran of sorts. I liked to believe I was a brown American, with an internally processed value system, inconstant dynamic at times incoherent, constantly combating (and I hate to admit this) with a residual nativity I had been tempered with, which not all the toilet paper in the world could erase. That was a part of me, my eighteen years of cloistered upbringing, with all the curry, cardamom and essence which goes into its making.

Law School was everything I could ask for to cement the metamorphosis. Not so much the mundane lectures on Civil Procedure, as the alternate stimulus for 'evolution'. The film club opened me up to the world of Fellini and Louis Malle. The Literary and Dead Poets society which discussed Pablo Neruda and Jean-Paul Sartre with an empathy which could impassion the most unaesthetic of us. The acrimonious discussions on ideology and Marxism. Music, minorities and alternate sexuality. The radicals and the Feminists. Critical Legal Studies and a host of emerging disciplines. The way pot, parties, women, sex, opera and jurisprudence just blended into one another effortlessly defying all notions on conventionality and compartmentalization.

Padyagum Shudro Ajayatha....The Shudra, the lowest of the low (the nasty, brutish and short) spring from your feet..

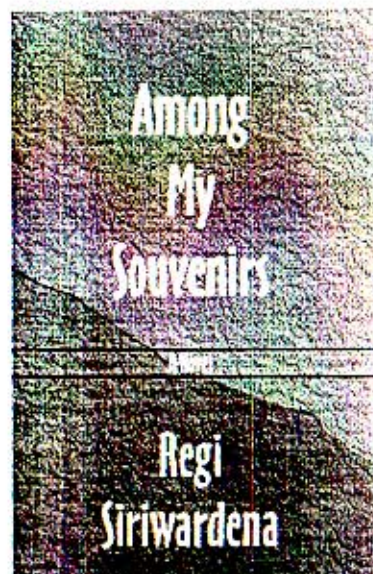
The incantations drew to a close. I was there and I was absent. I held the little cups of rice, the sacred 'pindas' in the ceremonial posture the situation demanded, and discarded them mechanically. Through my passivity there was seething resentment, silent fury beneath the ostensible calm, targeted at 'our' beliefs, burning contempt for our own small lives and petty value systems. Millions of little knots endorsed through centuries of unquestioned adherence.

I have fulfilled the obligations of a son. Tomorrow I return to New York, to the commercial euphoria of my Wall Street law firm,

to Wendy my girlfriend of Anglo Chinese descent, to the world of single minded professionalism and the unabashed pleasure pursuit, which follow each other in alternate cycles with clockwork precision. As I say my last goodbyes my ears catch strains of 'Thooongade Papa Thooongade' a little ditty which echoed through my childhood, a common ode to sleeping children in my native language. I pause for a moment, and move on.

POSTSCRIPT

'Samskara' has no precise equivalent in the English language, but manifests itself in the beliefs and prejudices of our society, our day-to-day practices and interactions, our thoughts, actions and very sense of familial and communal solidarity. The little residual bit of me which will, I realize, never change.



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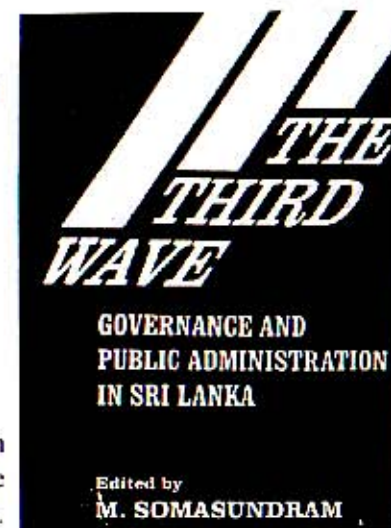
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