

# TAMIL CULTURE IN CEYLON

A General Introduction

M.D. Raghavan

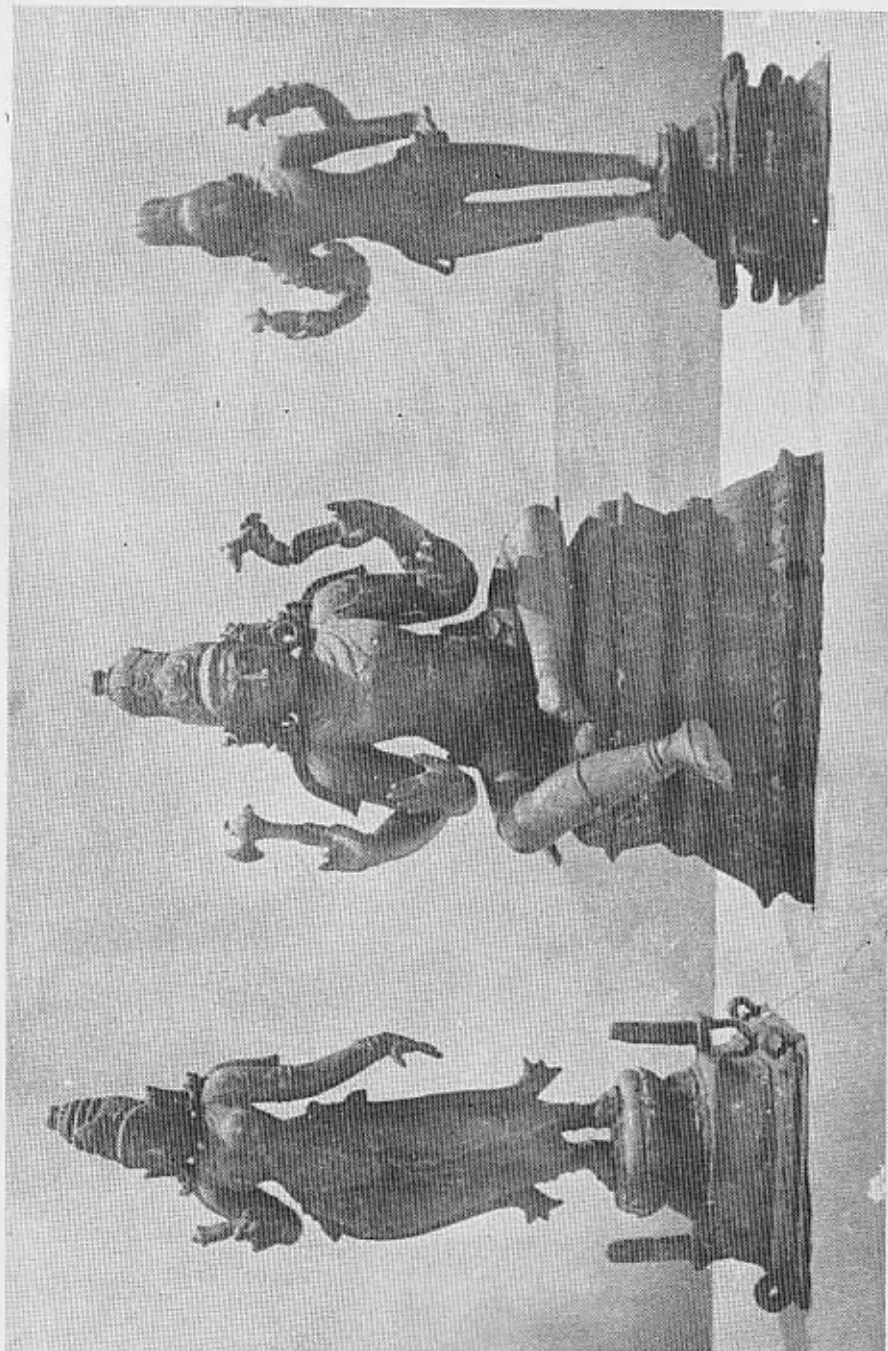
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*Siva as Chandrasekhara, Siva as Somaskanda and Parvati*

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by  
**M. D. RAGHAVAN**

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3. **Handsome Beggars : The Rodiyas of Ceylon, 1957.**  
K. V. G. De Silva and Sons, Colombo.
4. **The Karava of Ceylon : History, Society and Culture, 1961.**
5. **Ceylon : A Pictorial Survey of the Peoples and Arts, 1962.**
6. **India in Ceylon History, Society and Culture.**  
Indian Council for Cultural Relations, New Delhi, Second Edition 1969
7. **Sinhala Netum : The Dances of the Sinhalese.**  
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## P R E F A C E

The period of my tenure of service in the Department of National Museums was all too short to carry out a racial and cultural survey of the Tamils of Ceylon on a scale commensurate to the vast field. In the early years, all attention was concentrated on the great need of the moment, the verification of the collections and the re-opening of the four National Museums of Colombo, Kandy, Ratnapura and Jaffna, after the dislocation of normal work consequent on the Second World War. Of the four Museums the Jaffna Museum was then in the stage of infancy. The work of organizing the Museum and placing it on a satisfactory basis, necessitated frequent tours to Jaffna and my stay there for days at a time. This incidentally gave me my first opportunity to acquaint myself with the social and cultural field of Jaffna.

The Ethnological Survey of Ceylon, resumed on my assumption of duties in Ceylon, steadily accumulated a wide range of data, social and cultural. In fulness of time this materialised in a series of monographs published in the successive issues of the *Spolia Zeylanica*, the organ of the Department. Popular interest, a dynamic factor all through my Ceylon career, found expression in numerous articles contributed to the daily Press, highlighted in due course in a series of twenty-four articles contributed to the *Times of Ceylon* on the Arts and Customs of the peoples of Ceylon. These articles with fresh additional

material were later embodied in a comprehensive volume. "Ceylon a Pictorial Survey of Peoples and Arts," (M. D. Gunasena and Sons, 1962). This book incorporates a number of cross-sectional studies of a number of Tamil societies in the different provinces.

In the present book, I have attempted a survey study of the Northern Province, supplemented by a few incidental aspects in the other provinces of Ceylon.

M. D. RAGHAVAN.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, my acknowledgments are due to Mr. K. C. Thangarajah, for the production of this book in its present form. First designed as a book solely on Jaffna, its extended range inclusive of cross-sectional studies on the Tamils of all Ceylon, I owe to the wisdom of Mr. Thangarajah, who during his visit to Madras in January, 1968, as a delegate to the Second International Tamil Conference-Seminar, suggested the extension of the project to cover a general survey of all Ceylon Tamils, supplementary to an extensive study of the Northern Peninsula of Jaffna.

Mr. S. Ratnanather, devoted as he is to anthropological studies in general and to the cause of Tamil Culture in particular, extended his whole-hearted support to the work. For all these facilities and for the printing of this work at the Ceylon Printers Limited, I am deeply grateful. I am glad to make my acknowledgments to him.

In the course of my writing the book, I had occasion to consult Mr. S. Ambikaipakan, Principal, Vaitheeswara Vidyalayam, Jaffna, on certain aspects of the studies. I acknowledge his help.

Mudaliyar Kula Sabanathan, often called on me at the International Cultural Centre, Wellawatta, Colombo, where much of this book was written, and I had helpful discussions with him.



The survey of the essential aspects of the spread of Roman Catholicism in Ceylon, included in the scheme of the book, I owe to Rev. Fr. H. S. David, Principal, St. Patrick's College, Jaffna. My thanks to him for this valuable contribution.

Both Mr. Kandiah, the Curator, and Mr. M. P. Selvaratnam, the Assistant Curator, Jaffna National Museum, have been helpful to me. I thank them for this co-operation.

In this context, let me not omit to express my gratitude to my late lamented friend, Kalai Pulavar K. Navaratnam, to whom I am indebted for much valuable assistance.

In my study of the Mukkuvar of Jaffna, I received considerable help from Mr. T. V. G. Sastri, who for a number of years was on the staff of the Hindu College, Karainagar, and I acknowledge his assistance.

I have drawn upon the studies of Mr. M. Ramalingam on the Folk Songs of Jaffna, and of Dr. S. Vithiananthan, Chairman, Tamil Drama Panel, Arts Council of Ceylon, on his studies of the Folk Songs of Batticaloa, "Mattakalappu Nattuppadalkal," 1962. My grateful acknowledgments to these two valued sources.

My acknowledgments to the Commissioner of Archaeology, for the departmental photographs of the three bronzes of Siva as Chandrasekhara, Siva as Somaskanda, and Parvati, discovered at Trincomalee in 1950, and to the Director, National Museums Ceylon for the photograph of the bronze Goddess Tara.

For the drawing of the text figure of the Cattle Brand marks of the Nalaver, I am thankful to Mr. Prabhat Wijesekera of the Colombo National Museums.

A few of the features have already appeared in the Ceylon and the Indian Press. In the *Times of Ceylon Annual*, 1964 was published, a survey study entitled, "Jaffna in History and Legend." Two articles were contributed to the *Sunday Standard, Madras*, in its issues of the 1st & 8th May, 1966: "Early Tamils of Jaffna" and "Aryachakarvarthies of Jaffna." In the same Weekly, appeared a series of articles on "Ancient Hindu Temples of Ceylon."

Mr. C. S. Navaratnam has been pleased to check and correct the proofs. I am grateful to him for this service and for his very helpful suggestions.

I am deeply beholden to the late Dr. K. C. Shanmuga Ratnam for all the facilities he extended to me and for the warm reception accorded to me during my studies in Jaffna in 1965. I greatly mourn his unfortunate and untimely loss.

I dedicate this book to his sacred memory.

M. D. RAGHAVAN.

# TAMIL CULTURE IN CEYLON

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## ABBREVIATIONS

1. A.R.A.C.S. — Annual Report of the Archaeological Commissioner, Ceylon
2. A.S.C. — Archaeological Survey of Ceylon.
3. C.A.L.R. — Ceylon Antiquary and Literary Register.
4. C.H.J. — Ceylon Historical Journal.
5. C.J.S. — Ceylon Journal of Science.
6. Cul. — *Culavamsa*.
7. Dip — *Dipavamsa*.
8. E.J. — *Epigraphia Indica*.
9. E.Z. — *Epigraphia Zeylanica*.
10. J.I.H. — Journal of Indian History.
11. J.M.B.R.A.S. — Journal, Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.
12. J.N.M.C. — Journal, National Museums of Ceylon, Colombo.
13. J.R.A.S. (C.B.) — Journal, Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch.
14. Maha. — *Mahavamsa*.
15. Raja. — *Rajavaliya*.
16. S.I.I. — South Indian Inscriptions.
17. S.Z. — *Spolia Zeylanica*, National Museum, Colombo.
18. U.H.C. — University History of Ceylon.



# PART I

## Introductory: The Field of Study: Racial and Cultural

ALL through the Island Story, Ceylon has been a big draw to the peoples of the World. Different nations have called the Island by different names at different times. To the ancient Greeks, the Island was *Taprobane*, immortalised by Milton in the line "From blue *Chersonese* to the *Utmost Isle Taprobane*." Obviously the name is a variant of *Thambapanni*, a name which occurs in the inscription on the rock of *Girnar* in Guzerat, an edict of Asoka, deciphered by Prinsep enjoining medical relief to both man and beast ; (JASB. Vol. VI, pp. 790 - 94). The name has its own association with South India. Flowing from the hills to the sea is the river Tambraparni in Tinnevely. '*Mahavamsa*' traces the name to *Vijaya*, whose followers "exhausted by sea sickness sat down at the spot where they had landed out of the Vessels, supporting themselves on the palms of their hands pressed to the ground ; whence the name *Tamba-Panni*, and from the same cause also this renowned land became celebrated under that name" (*Mah.* VI, p. 58).

Adjacent to South India and its peoples, the Tamil inspired names are an impressive list. Such are the names *Ilam*.

Ila (n)-nadu, Ilankai, Ilanara, *Tiru Ila-nadu* and others. Ilam is the Dravidian form of *Pali*, *Sinhala*, which in turn is closely related to the early Sinhalese *Elu* or *Helu*.

*Ilankai* recalls to mind the classical name *Lanka*, bestowed on it by India's epic poet, *Valmiki*. While other names have more or less yielded to time, the name *Lanka* shines with a splendour that has grown with the ages and today with the advent of national status, the name is more sacred than ever.

In the *Pali Attakatha*, Ceylon is throughout referred to as *Simhala Dwipa* or *Tambapanni*. In the frequency of its usage in later days, the name *Simhala Dwipa* prevails, very likely what remained of *Lanka* in the ages that followed the submergence of parts of it in the waters of the sea; what was left of the more extensive dominions of Ravana's *Lanka*.

The more familiar term in Tamil is *Ilam* occurring in Tamil literature, as in the spoken word. As a land which has had a good deal of Tamil cultural influence in the Middle ages, the term found its way to Kerala. An illustration of this is the saying in Malayalam, which Gundert quotes, "Whoever sees Ilam, will not see his home again," which perhaps is largely true. (Malayalam-English Dictionary, p. 462).

To the early European nations it has not been altogether, a case of distance lending enchantment to the view. The enchantment led to close commercial contacts, in particular to the Arabs who founded settlements on the coasts, the nuclei which developed in the process of time into strong Muslim settlements.

### Race and Culture

Man is of one mould, anthropologically termed, the *Homo Sapiens*, "Man the Wise," a term which distinguishes man as he is, from his ancestral structural forms in the earlier stages of evolution, covering a million years, during which time man was evolving, until he finalised into the common physical mould, the *Homo Sapiens*.

Though of one mould, people differ from one another in their mode of life, their way of living. The two sides of the science of Anthropology are racial and cultural, or Physical Anthropology and Cultural Anthropology. So far as Physical

Anthropology is concerned, the peoples of the world have been so much in the melting pot for ages that to classify peoples according to a standardised set of physical characters, has been proving too baffling a task; and the futility of the endeavour is being steadily recognised today. Cultural Anthropology studies human societies with reference to their living conditions, each in its particular pattern of life. So far as Ceylon is concerned, the cultural outlook predominates. We may rightly visualise the word 'culture' as an anthropological tabloid. In this little word you sum up the entire life history of a people in all its aspects, whether as a member of a family or as a limb of the wider sphere of the society in which he lives and moves and has his being. The customs and habits that regulate life in such matters as the production and preparation of food, dress, conditions of housing, matrimonial relations, behaviour and courtesy, symbolisms, traditions, ballads, myths and legends, folk songs and folklore, systems of medicine, magic and charms, religious doctrines, rituals and practices, festivals and ceremonies, system of education, music and dance, agricultural life, arts and crafts, all these and many more too numerous to detail, are all implied by the word "culture." In a detailed account therefore of the peoples, we have to study what may be called the cultural content under each of these several factors. It is obvious that the field of culture is too vast to be traversed by any one man working all his life.

The historian in Ceylon as well as the sociologist has to face the fact that we have no studies of the Tamils of Ceylon, giving us an inter-related account corresponding to the *Mahavamsa* of the Sinhalese. Early Tamil writers of Tamilnadu as of Ceylon were poets who have left us a heritage of poetical compositions some of which rank among the highest productions of Tamil literature. The era of the Arya Chakravarties of Jaffna — from about the 8th to the 17th Century, was an era of all round cultural progress and in the writings of the age, we have a number of poems expressive of the several sides of Jaffna society and culture. Of folk literature we have two sets of collections, the *Kayilaya Malai* the earlier and the *Yalpana Vaipava Malai* by Mylvagana Pulavar.



The British Colonial days were marked by an exuberant interest in their new Crown colony and we have a number of outstanding writers, mostly members of the Civil Service. Among these, Tennent perhaps tops for the insight he gives of the topography and geology and the life of Jaffna of his days. More comprehensive in its wide range of interests, political, social and cultural are the long series of books by Paul Pieris, our great authority on the Portuguese and Dutch eras. These apart, the one outstanding work on the ancient history of Jaffna, is Rasanayagam's *Ancient Jaffna*, 1926. Rasanayagam's work has been an eye-opener to succeeding generations and more of Jaffna scholars have entered the field and given us in the past two decades an array of books of value on the history, religion, art and industries of Jaffna.

Of studies by visiting anthropologists, we have two recent publications in the series, Cambridge Papers in Social Anthropology — E. R. Leach : *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon, and North-West Pakistan* and Michael Banks : *Caste in Jaffna*, 1960.

The social and cultural field is ever widening. Fresh avenues open themselves before the mind's eye as we proceed. The studies presented in the following pages are of an exploratory character, a first step towards deeper sociological studies.

On grounds of ancestral racial and cultural heritage, the Veddas, the Sinhalese and the Tamils are the three "Primary Races of Ceylon."<sup>1</sup> The Veddas are the aborigines of the Island. Practically, all authorities are agreed, that the Tamils have been in occupation of the Island "for over 2,000 years."<sup>2</sup>

Racially considered, the Veddas are the easiest to deal with. Though the general anthropological term "The Veddoid," denotes them best, they are themselves, a composite group, mainly of the Australoid, with some strains of the Mediterranean race in varying proportions, distinctly seen in the home lands of the Vedda; and in the coastal regions of the Eastern Province.

1 Stoudt : The Physical Anthropology of Ceylon, Colombo, 1961, p. 4

2 Tennent : Ceylon, Volume II, p. 359 ;

Paul Pieris : J. R. A. S. (C.B.), Vol. XXV and XXVII and Stoudt : Colombo, pp. 4, 167.

Speaking of the Sinhalese, the latest data by Stoudt in his comprehensive studies on the racial composition of Ceylon, sums up the Sinhalese in these terms : "There is general agreement that the first large scale immigration into Ceylon in historic times came in fact as well as in legend during the 6th Century B.C. and that these Aryan-speaking immigrants from the North of India were in some part ancestral to the present day Sinhalese. However, there is also little doubt that the present day Sinhalese are a composite people which include, in addition to the predominant Aryan-speaking North Indian, admixtures from Dravidians of the South of India and especially in the Kandyan Highlands, from the Veddoid aboriginals of India as well."

The above conclusion of Stoudt, generally bears out the comprehensive studies of Hooton leading him to the observation that the Tamils and the Sinhalese are each a morphological type, of the composite Indo-Dravidian Race, "a blend of a number of racial strains on a basic Mediterranean race"<sup>1</sup>. In the present context, I need not enter into the subtleties of the several racial strains that have gone into the make-up of the peoples of Ceylon. Nevertheless, there are variations in physical characters, noticeable literally on the face of it, in the skin colour, as in other traits, of both the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Except in the Pallar and in the group unjustifiably labelled the Parayar, both dark brown, almost black, varying shades of brown prevail among the other groups, mostly light brown in the Koviari and the Nalavar, and a shade lighter, in the Goldsmith.

From fair to light brown, are the Vellalar, with a cast of features approximating the classic Mediterranean type.

Of those engaged in fishing, the skin colour is darkened by continuous exposure to the sun.

The racial characters are generally similar in the Tamil as in the Sinhalese, which has disposed anthropologists,<sup>2</sup> to remark that "the Tamils and the Sinhalese are racially alike, but sharply distinguished in language and customs of life."

1 Hooton : Up from the Ape, pp. 612 - 616.

2 Leach, E. R. : Caste in South India, Ceylon and N.W. Pakistan, Cambridge, 1959.

## Ancestry of the Ceylon Tamil

**T**HE history of the world is writ large in the story of the movements of people from land to land, from the pre-historic to the historic days. Thus evolved the variegated social landscape differing in structure and composition.

The commanding position of Ceylon at the Southernmost point of the mainland of Asia, on the world's highways between the East and the West, has drawn to its shores divergent peoples, from early ages. Lured by the pearls, gems and spices, came foreign merchants — the Greeks, the Romans and the Arabs. Besides trade, the footprint on Adam's Peak (Sri Pada) regarded by the Muslims as the sacred footprint of Adam, was an additional impetus to the Muslim world. Prompted by interests other than trade, came the Malays from the Island of Java in the 13th century and in time spread over to different parts of Ceylon, mainly the Northern, Western and Southern Provinces.

While these in brief outline the main streams of relations of Ceylon with lands overseas, nearer home, the environmental geography of Ceylon in relation to South India, its next door neighbour, steadily exerted profound and enduring influences on Ceylon, historically, socially and culturally.

Tracing back the original homes of the Tamils, recent researches have in the main strengthened the hypothesis of the origin of the Dravidians from lands bordering the Mediterranean Sea, and the islands of the Aegean archipelago. Dominant racial strains and cultural traits of the Tamils found prevailing in varying proportions over North India and adjacent lands, lend substantial weight to this wider outlook of the original home of the Tamils, leading us to the proposition that however much the Tamils are concentrated in South India, where their language and culture are best preserved, they nevertheless were not indigenous to South India. As the Dravidian problem is separately considered in the sequel, in some considerable detail, more need not be said of it here.

### International Outlook of the Tamil

The dispersal of the Tamils over the ages from their homelands to the mainland of Asia, spreading over in strength to lands of South East Asia and beyond, and to the islands of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, bear testimony to the international outlook of the Tamils from very early days—a universality of outlook, an outlook which found ample expression at the Second International Conference - Seminar of Tamil Studies held in Madras in January, 1968, attended by delegates and observers from forty-two countries. Ceylon sent a strong representation of delegates and observers.

### Tamilnadu and Ceylon

The intimate cultural integration of Ceylon with the Tamilnadu of South India is well sustained by several sources. Of literary evidence we have the epic poem *Manimekalai* among "the greatest of the classical epic poems of Theravada Buddhism," and the *Cilappadikaram*, the Epic of the Anklet, singing the chronicle of Kannaki. The cult of goddess Kannaki is a vital link between South India and Ceylon. Following the inauguration by Cheran Sengottuvan, of the temple to Goddess Kannaki, an inauguration at which Ceylon was represented by King Gajabahu (171 - 193 A.D.),<sup>1</sup> as *Cilappadikaram* tells us, the cult of the Goddess spread all over Ceylon, the Kannaki Amman of the Tamils, Goddess Pattini of the Sinhalese, the most vigorous perhaps of the folk cults of the Sinhalese.

<sup>1</sup> See XXXVIII, "Mahavamsa"

In the category of archaeological data, we have the observations of Paul Pieris, the eminent Sinhalese civilian and historian, following his excavation of part of the site of Kantharodai, the earliest capital of the kings of Jaffna.<sup>1</sup> "It will be seen that the village of Kantharodai has no reason to be ashamed of its contribution to our knowledge regarding the ancient history of our island. It stands to reason that a country which is only 80 miles from India and which would have been seen by Indian fishermen every morning as they sailed out to catch their fish, would have been occupied as soon as the continent was peopled by men who understood how to sail. I suggest that the North of Ceylon was a flourishing settlement before Vijaya was born. I consider it as proved that at any rate such was its condition before the commencement of the Christian Era." Memories of the past flash across one's mind, as I felt, when I first visited the site a few years ago.

In a similar vein, are his remarks<sup>2</sup> on the ancestral Hindu Temples of Ceylon: "Long before the arrival of Vijaya, there were in Lanka five recognised *isvarams* of Siva which claimed and received adoration of all India. These were Tiruketeeswaram near Mahatittha; Munneswaram dominating Salawatta and the Pearl fishery; Tondeswaram near Mantota; Tirukoneswaram near the great bay of Kottiyar and Nakuleswaram near Kankesanturai. Their situation close to these ports cannot be the result of accident or caprice and was probably determined by the concourse of a wealthy mercantile population whose religious wants called for attention."

The situation of these large and ancestral shrines in widely separated parts of Ceylon, is an obvious index to the range of distribution of the Tamils over Ceylon from very early ages, testifying to a strong Tamil population at the cardinal points and sea port towns of Ceylon. This would also indicate that the Tamils entered Ceylon at whatever port was most convenient of access, not necessarily from the major sea ports of the Jaffna Peninsula.

1 & 2 Pieris, Paul E.: Nagadipa and Buddhist Remains in Jaffna, J.R.A.S. (C.B.), Vol. XXVIII, No. 12, p. 68 and Vol. XXV, No. 70, pp. 17-18.

The Veddas, the Sinhalese and the Tamils are the three "Primary Races" of Ceylon. The Veddas are the aboriginals of the Island. As already stated, practically all authorities are agreed that the Tamils have been in occupation of the Island "for over 2,000 years."<sup>1</sup>

Says Tennent, "Jaffna has been peopled by Tamils for at least 2,000 years, the original settlement being of a date coeval with the earliest Malabar<sup>2</sup> invasion of the Island, and their chiefs continued to assume the rank and title of independent princes down to the seventeenth century. The *Rajavaliya* recounts the occasions on which they carried on wars with the Sinhalese kings of the Island; and their authority and influence in the fourteenth century are attested by the protection which the Raja whose dominions extended as far as Chilaw, afforded to Ibn Batuta, when with his companions, he was permitted to visit the sacred foot-print on the summit of Adam's Peak."

The more significant role that Jaffna filled in the annals of the Tamils in Ceylon, is to be sought in the fact that as the nearest to the Tamilnadu of South India, Jaffna was the earliest to come under strong social, cultural and political influences from South India, and was occupied by the Tamils earlier than the rest of Ceylon, going back to the legendary days. (*Manimekalai*; *the Cilappadikaram*). Under a variety of forces, Jaffna developed as an independent sovereign power from early ages with its own line of kings. Jaffna grew from strength to strength and in later ages, became a strong political factor in the history of Ceylon, to middle seventeenth century when Jaffna passed into the hands of the Portuguese. The Tamil kingdom of Jaffna indeed witnessed its growth and development side by side with the Sinhalese Kingdom at Anuradhapura. Politically and

1 Tennent: Ceylon Vol. II p. 539; Codrington: A Short History of Ceylon, p. 32; Paul Pieris: J. R. A. S. (C.B.), Vols. XXV and XXVIII; and Stoult: the Physical Anthropology of Ceylon, Colombo National Museum, 1961, pp. 4 and 167.

2 'Malabar' in the sense of 'Tamil,' a usage begun by the Portuguese and continued by the Sinhalese and British historians ever since.



culturally, the Vijayan era set the stamp to the progressive growth of the Ceylon Tamil, the main lines of which are narrated in the next chapter.

The Ceylon Tamils are intensely concentrated in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, regions which have come to be known as the homelands of Ceylon Tamil, and they are a strong minority in the rest of the provinces of Ceylon — a major element in the population of the Western, Central and North-Western Provinces, particularly in the region between Puttalam and Kalpitiya.

## APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 2

### The Manimekalai

“ONE of the finest jewels of Tamil poetry”, the epic poem *Manimekalai* by Poet Sathanar, 2nd century A.D., is unique for the deep spirituality and mysticism it unfolds against the historical and geographical background of South India and of adjacent Jaffna.

The death of her father, Kovalan, under tragic circumstances, weighs upon the mind of young Manimekala and she resolves on a life of renunciation. At every turn she is obstructed. Running through her life story are a set of counteracting forces — on the one hand is her passion to enter holy orders of a Buddhist bhikkuni and on the other, the infatuation of Udaya Kumaran, the Chola prince, to win her favours.

The first scene is laid in the garden of the capital city, Puhar, with Manimekala and her companion, Sutamati, gathering flowers. With all the daring of his princely rank, Udaya Kumaran gives vent to his deep love. Faced by a situation from which there is no escape, spiritual aid comes to her in the person of the Goddess Manimekalai, her guardian deity. The Goddess charms her to sleep, and while in a state of trance,

spirits her away to the Island of Manipallavam,<sup>1</sup> down South. Leaving her there, the Goddess gets back to Puhar, the Chola capital. Appearing before Prince Udaya Kumaran, she tells him of the unrighteousness of his conduct, unbecoming of a prince. The Goddess now appears to Sutamati in a dream and tells her of her flight to the Island of Manipallavam with Manimekala, and how the Goddess has set her on the road to spirituality.

Bewildered at her loneliness in strange surroundings Manimekala roams about the place until she comes upon the site hallowed by the visit of the Buddha. This was the site where according to legends, the Buddha landed and settled a growing strife between two warring Naga Princes for a gem-set throne left to them by an ancestress. The episode of the Buddha's visit to the Island of Nagadipa, where he preached a sermon of reconciliation between the two Naga princes, is sung in Buddhist legends of Ceylon, chronicled in Sinhalese *Mahavamsa*. Circumambulating the holy seat, and prostrating herself before it, memories of her past life miraculously dawn on her. One of her righteous deeds in her past life, is here recounted. Lakshmi, as she was in her previous birth, comes upon a Buddhist *Charana* by name Sadhu Sakkaram flying

1 Of the character and functions of this Goddess, Paranavitana enlightens us: "This Goddess appears in a number of Sinhalese and Pali works. Her chief job appears to be the guardianship of the sea." Quoting '*Rajavaliya*' we are told, "Viharamahadevi, the mother of Duttugemunu, who was offered by her father as a sacrifice to the sea Goddess, was brought ashore by this very Goddess at Magama in Ruhuna where she found her future husband." (Paranavitana: Ceylon Literary Register, 1931).

That Manipallavam is an Island, is obvious from the reference in the *Manimekalai* to "the sea girt land of Manipallavam," the Island where "stood the seat of the Buddha" — the seat for which "there appeared in contest two Naga kings from the Southern Regions each claiming the seat for himself." This specific allusion to the gem-set seat and the Buddha appearing and making peace between the warring princes, make it abundantly clear that the Island meant is Nagadipa, or the Jaffna Peninsula itself, for at this time the name seems to have been extended to refer to the whole Peninsula as the *Mahavamsa* has it. Another pointer is the name Pallavam, Tamil for the sprout of a tree, the projecting top of the Peninsula thrusting itself into the sea, having all the look of the sprout of a tree. There is also the view that this idea may be at the back of the names of the later Pallavas bearing the suffix "ankura" meaning in Sanskrit, a sprout, in their surnames. (Rasanayagam, C.: Ancient Jaffna, p. 81).

across the air. As he landed, Lakshmi and her husband, Rahula, prostrated before the sage, and Lakshmi offered the sage food. The merit that she thus acquired gained for her the reward of acquiring nirvana, in her next birth, destined to live the life of a Bhikkuni. Rahula, her husband, was reborn as Prince Udaya Kumara. This accounts for his amorous advances to her. To release her from this attachment and to help her to fulfil the Karma, was the mission of Goddess Manimekalai who spirited her away to the Island of Manipallavam. In her past birth she was one of the three daughters of King Ravivarman and his Queen Amudapati, of Yasodharanagari. The other two daughters were Tarai and Virai, married to King Durjaya. On a certain day returning from a visit to the hills by the side of the Ganges, the royal party came upon Aravana Adigal, the great Buddhist saint. The latter persuaded the king and his daughters, to worship the footprints of the Buddha in *Padapankaja Malai* of the Giridharakuta hills. The story of the footprints finds mention in these words: "The Buddha stood on the top of the hill and taught his Dharma to all living beings, and as he preached in love, his footprints became imprinted on the hill, which thus got the name *Padapankaja Malai* (the Hill of the Lotus feet)." The king and his queens were advised to go and worship the sacred footprints. As a result of the merit thus acquired, the two daughters Virai and Tarai, were reborn as Sutamati and Madhavi.

To resume our story. Initiated in Buddha Dharma, the goddess prevails on Manimekala to complete her spiritual education by learning the teachings of other religious persuasions. Towards this end, she instructs her in a mantra the chanting of which would enable her to fly through the air, disguised as a hermit. With these pronouncements, the goddess again leaves her.

Walking about the place, Manimekala meets the goddess *Tivatilaki* who recounts her own experiences. "On the high peak of Samanta Kuta, in the adjoining Island of Ratnadipa, there are the footprints of the Buddha. After offering worship to the footprints, I came to this Island long ago. Since then, I have remained here keeping guard over this seat under the orders of Indra. My name is Tiva-tilaki, the Light of the

Island. Those who follow the Dharma of the Buddha strictly and offering worship to this Buddha seat will gain knowledge of their previous birth."

"In front of this seat there is a little pond full of cool water overgrown with lotuses. From that pond will appear a never failing alms bowl, by name Amrita Surabhi (Endless Nectar). The bowl once belonged to Āputra and appears every year on the full moon day in the month of Rishabha, in the fourteenth asterism, the day on which the Buddha himself was born. That day and hour are near. That bowl will presently come into your hand. Food put into it by a pure one will be inexhaustible. You will learn all about it from Aravana Adigal, who lives in your own city." Circumambulating the pond, the bowl emerges from the water and reaches her hands. Delighted at this, Manimekala chants praises of the Buddha. The last line of the chant alludes to the Buddha's services to the Nagas: "Hail holy feet of Him who rid the Nagas of their woes."

How the bowl found its way to Nagadipa is another story<sup>1</sup> Manimekala now flies back to Kaveripattinam. Meeting her mother and Sutamati, she recounts her experiences. All three go to the Sage Aravana Adigal. The sage narrates to her the

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1 Salli, the faithless wife of a Brahmin Appachikan, deserted her husband. She gave birth to a child whom she left by the wayside. Attracted by the cries of the child, it was looked after by a cow. In time, the child was adopted by a kind Brahmin. The child thus got the name Auputhiran—the cow's son. The boy, as he grew up, denounced animal sacrifices. Matters came to a head one night when he rescued a cow consecrated for sacrifice the next morning. He was discarded by his adopted parents. Auputhiran fled to Madurai and took refuge in a pilgrims' rest home. Touched by his charitable disposition to feed the poor, Saraswati bestowed on him the miraculous rice bowl, with which he fed man and beast. In time, Indra moved by his charities, appeared before Auputhiran and volunteered to grant him whatever boon he desired. "What greater boon can you give me than the pleasure of feeding the hungry" he replied. This curt reply displeased Indra. The land soon grew so fertile with seasonal rains, that the people had no more need for Auputhiran's rice bowl. Seeing his mission in this land at an end, he decided to leave the country and took ship. The ship weighed anchor at the uninhabited island of Mantpalavam and sailed away without him. Thus stranded on the island, Auputhiran starved himself to death. Before he died, he deposited the bowl in a pond nearby with the prayer that it should appear once a year and come into the hands of the virtuous. His prayer was fulfilled in time on a particular Vesak day when Manimekala got possession of it.

story of the miraculous bowl. As the story ends, Manimekala dons the robes of a Bhikkuni and with the begging bowl in her hand, makes her way through the streets of the city. The news reaches Prince Udaya Kumaran of Manimekala's presence in her own Madurai and her attentions to the poor and forlorn. The prince goes to find her. Seeing her as a Bhikkuni, he asks her why she has taken to this austere life. She makes appropriate reply. Unable to resist the prince's advances, she disguises herself as Kayasandigai, so as to escape his attentions. Meanwhile, Kanjanan, the husband of the real Kayasandigai, mistakes Manimekala in her disguise, as his wife. Manimekala does not respond to Kanjanan's words. This infuriates Kanjanan, who suspects Udaya Kumaran to be his wife's lover, and kills him.

Manimekala now continues in her wanderings and finally reaches Conjeeveram. Here she waits upon Aravana Adigal, who instructs her in Buddha Dharma. Manimekala from now settles herself to the dedicated life of a Buddhist Bhikkuni.

## The Tamils and the Vijayan Era

**I**N the reconstruction of the history of the Ceylon Tamil the early stages pose a problem of their own. This largely follows on the scarcity of absolute historical data, either of chronicles or of evidence from archaeology on a scale commensurate to the magnitude of the problem.

There is some comfort in the thought that we have more or less specific knowledge of the centres vital to the early history of the Tamils. Sporadic explorations such as we have had over the past few decades at a few of the sites in the Northern Province hold out promise of a harvest of valuable materials on well planned systematic excavations of archaeological sites.

Within the limitations imposed by the lack of historical chronicles and the inadequacy of archaeological investigations, students of history are left to assess historical data from Tamil literary sources and from traditions and legends in an endeavour to bridge gaps in knowledge of the chronicle of the Ceylon Tamil. In this respect Sinhalese history strikes a parallel to early Tamil, much of the Vijayan epoch being built up from a complex of legends; so much so historians are disposed to begin the authentic history of Ceylon from the reign of Devanampiya

Tissa, (247 - 207 B.C.), the contemporary of Asoka, on the ground that it is only after the spread of Buddhism that an authentic account of the history of Ceylon emerges.

Notices and accounts by foreign travellers and mariners have made their own contribution to our knowledge of early Tamils. Not all these accounts have been fully investigated yet. Among literary sources, the more significant is the Tamil poetical literature of the Sangam age.

A definite stage in the pursuit of traditional lore of the Jaffna Peninsula is the publication in 1736 of "*Yälpana Vaipava Mälai*" by Mylvagana Pulavar, which embodies earlier collections, the "*Kailaya Malai*", "*Vaiya Padal*", "*Pararajasekharan Ula*" and "*Raja Murai*." The recent edition of "*Yälpana Vaipava Mälai*" by Mudaliyar Kula Sabanathan has made a notable contribution to the regeneration of this work.

Leaving aside for the moment these sources, legends and traditions, literature and travellers' accounts, let us turn to facts of history; of relations which inevitably followed on the close proximity of North Ceylon to the populous Tamilnadu of South India, leading in their wake to a variety of forces, social and political, which contributed to the growth of an independent Tamil sovereignty of Jaffna.

Of prime importance to the destinies of Jaffna have been her seaports the only gateway for ages between Ceylon and lands overseas, an index to which are the antiquities revealed by the sporadic excavations so far carried out at Kantharodai and Mantai, Indian Punch-marked coins, Roman coins, objects of indigenous art and industry and Hindu and Buddhist sculptures. These and other objects of material culture disclosed in the small scale explorations elsewhere too, bear out the inter-related life, the people lived.

Here I may draw attention to the cosmopolitanism in social relations, not only in Jaffna but also in other commercial centres on the mainland, such as Puhar, the Chola capital. What is found in the Jaffna peninsula, in the ancient capital cities and the maritime port of Mantai, is this cosmopolitan life of early Tamil commercial centres in India as in Ceylon.

So far as South Indian influences on Jaffna are concerned, the fact is too obvious to stress that Jaffna with its close proximity to the thickly populated Tamil districts of South India would have been occupied by the maritime Tamils earlier than by other racial elements. Illustrative of these relations, is the ancient site of Kantharodai, already referred to, first explored by Paul Pieris.<sup>1</sup>

In place-names, Sinhalese place-names in Tamil areas and Tamil place-names in Sinhalese areas, we may rightly see a reflection of the inter-related social life the people lived, rather than any priority of occupation by either.

We may now briefly outline the more significant of the historical relations between South India and the North Ceylon in the early ages. In the chronicle of the relations, the eponymous Vijaya set the pace with his matrimonial mission to the Pandyan king at Madura, to find a mate befitting his royal rank, in place of the Yakka princess, Kuveni. The mission to the Pandyan king and the king's response are mentioned in the "*Mahavamsa*" (VII, 48-58):— "The ministers, whose minds were eagerly bent upon the consecrating of their lord and who, although the means were difficult, had overcome all anxious fears about the matter, sent people entrusted with many precious gifts, jewels, pearls and so forth, to the city of Madura in South India to woo the daughter of the Pandu king for their lord, devoted as they were to their ruler, and they also sent to woo the daughters of others for the ministers and retainers. When the messengers were quickly come by ship to the city of Madura, they laid the gifts and letters before the king. The king took counsel with his ministers, and since he was minded to send his daughter to Lanka, he having first received also daughters of others for the ministers of Vijaya, nigh upon a hundred maidens, proclaimed with beat of drums: 'Those men here who are willing to let a daughter depart for Lanka shall provide their daughters with a double store of clothing and place them at the doors of their homes. By this sign shall we know that we may take them to ourselves.'

<sup>1</sup> Pieris, Paul E.: *Nagadipa and Buddhist Remains in Jaffna*: J.R.A.S. (C.B.), Vol. XXVIII, p. 65.

"When he had thus obtained many maidens and had given compensation to their families, he sent his daughter, bedecked with all her ornaments, and all that was needful for the journey, and all the maidens whom he had fitted out, according to their rank, elephants withal and horses and wagons worthy of a king and craftsmen and a thousand families of the eighteen guilds, entrusted with a letter to the conqueror Vijaya. All this multitude of men disembarked at Mahatittha, for that very reason is that landing place known as Mahatittha."

Assembling the data from these and other sources, Fr. Gnanaprakasara, in "*The Beginnings of Tamil Rule in Ceylon*,"<sup>1</sup> sums up the social impact: "The Pandyan sent out his own maiden daughter with 699 maidens chosen from among his nobility. These 700 ladies landed with their retinue safely at Cottiar. The princess was attended by a personal staff of 18 officers of state, 75 menial servants (being horsekeepers, elephant keepers and charioteers) besides numerous slaves. It may reasonably be assumed that each of these 18 officers was accompanied by his wife and children, his men-servants and maid-servants, male slaves and female slaves. In like manner each of the 699 noble maidens was accompanied by attendants, servants and slaves. And there were also numbers of families of each of the five sorts of tradesmen who came to Ceylon on this occasion."

The Vijayan era was one of cordiality between South India and Ceylon. All through his long reign of 38 years, Vijaya sent to the Pandyan king an annual present of "a shell pearl worth twice a hundred thousand" ("pieces of money"). (*Maha. VII: 72-74*).



## From the Post-Vijayan to the Kandyan Era

TRADE as a fundamental factor in the early relations of South India and Ceylon finds frequent mention in the *Mahavamsa*. The retinue that accompanied the sacred Bo-sapling from India included "families of traders." The ruins of Vessagiri in Anuradhapura testifies to the time when merchants entered the Sangha. Here dwelt five hundred Vessas (Vaisyas) "when they received the *Pabbaja* from the Great Thera" (*Maha. XX: 15 - 16*)

The name occurs of the Brahmin Kundali, "in whose possession was merchandise from overseas" (*Maha. XXIII: 23-41*). The exports included horses. The Governor of Giri in the Village of Kudumbiyagana, had "a Sindhu horse that would let no man mount him" (*Maha. XXIII, 71*). That trade spear-headed political adventurism, is evident from the career of Sena and Guttika, sons of a freighter who brought horses and changed over from trade to political conquest. Coming at the head of an army, they overpowered King Suratissa (187 - 177 B.C.) and ruled at Anuradhapura (177 - 155 B.C.). This seems to have been the first of the Tamils to assert themselves over their

neighbour Ceylon, at a time when the Sinhalese monarchy felt itself secure following the righteous rule of Devanampiya Tissa (247 - 207 B.C.).

"Love thy neighbour as thyself," as a code of political ethics, has seldom found much of an application in the story of nations, however much it may be cherished as an ideal.

The trail of political conquest, set by Sena and Guttika, was pursued by Elara "from the Chola country, a Damila of noble descent," who seized the kingdom from Asela (155 - 145 B.C.) and ruled for forty-four years (145 - 101 B.C.) "with even justice toward friend and foe on occasions of disputes at law." (*Maha. XXI: 13 - 15*).

Elara was ultimately vanquished in open encounter by Prince Duttagamini. In the *Mahavamsa* statement (Ch. XXV: 115), that "when he had thus overpowered thirty-two Damila kings, Duttagamini ruled over Lanka in single sovereignty," we visualise both the strength of the Tamil resistance, and the heroic achievements of Prince Duttagamini.

Trade and politics continued to interact sporadically. "Tissa, a Brahmin, led a rebellion in the reign of Valagamba" and "his following waxed great." This is supposed to have given a handle to the Pandyan to enter the stage of Ceylon. The *Mahavamsa* narrates that five members of the Pandyan dynasty — Pulahatta, Bahiya, Panayamara, Piliyamaraka and Dhatika, ruled in political partnership for a total period of fifteen years from 44 to 29 B.C.

The history of Ceylon from the reign of Devanampiya Tissa (247 - 207 B.C.) to Mahasena (325 - 352 A.D.) is spoken of as the Asokan period of Ceylon history, a term based on the circumstance that Devanampiya Tissa and Emperor Asoka were contemporaries and the reign of Tissa inaugurated a spiritual and cultural renaissance, of the greatest consequence to Ceylon with the Asokan influences predominating, and the spread of Buddhism in Ceylon.

In the years intervening, before the era began of the Pallavas, appeared a Sinhalese Sovereign whose reputation has shone ever since, in the person of King Gajabahu (171 - 193 A.D.).



Remarkable alike for his military deeds, as for his spirituality, he will ever be remembered for his inaugurating in Ceylon the cult of Goddess Pattini, on his return from South India. Of his presence at the consecration of the first Pattini shrine in South India by King Chera Sengottuvan, we have evidence in the Tamil epic of the age, the *Cilappatikaram* of the 2nd century A.D. The Sinhalese poem *Gajabakathava* (the Chronicle of Gajabahu) sings these incidents in flowery language. Pattini cult is today among the most widely prevailing of the folk cults of the Sinhalese.

Before we come to the Pallava-Ceylon relations, we may pause awhile over the rather cryptic statement of the *Mahavamsa*, of the sequel to the victory of Prince Duttagamini over King Elara, already referred to, the statement that "when he had overpowered thirty-two Damila Kings, he ruled over Lanka in single sovereignty." Who are these 32 Damila Kings? There is no chronicle to clarify this bald statement. Nevertheless we cannot brush this aside as pure fancy. The term "Kings," need not be interpreted in the literal sense of the word. It may well have been used in the general sense of chiefs or nobles. The only reference we have, is to the existence of an independent royal dynasty in South East Ceylon in the second century B.C., supported by Paranavitana's researches on the inscriptions of Bovatagala, at a distance of about 30 miles from Kataragama. Commenting on this offshoot of the Kshatriyas, Paranavitana observes, "The origin of the Kshatriyas of Kataragama is obscure. The only mention of them in chronicles is in Chapter XIX, verse 54, of the *Mahavamsa*. There is no statement to show that the Kshatriyas of Kataragama, were connected with the royal dynasty then ruling at Anuradhapura. It appears possible that the Kshatriyas of Kataragama were connected with a stream of immigrants to the Island quite distinct from the main stream whose legends and traditions are the theme of the chronicles of Anuradhapura."<sup>1</sup>

There is also a specific mention of "Kings" of Kataragama in the *Dhātuvamsa* in the words, "Gothabhaya, the ruler of Ruhuna (South Ceylon) killed the ten brother kings of Katar-

gama, and for expiation of the crime, he built 50 viharas on either side of the Mahavaliganga." That the epigraphs of Bovatagala studied by Paranavitana, carry the engraved symbol of a fish, the symbol of the Pandya dynasty, is of interest, and we have the authoritative mention of the *Mahavamsa* of Elara, as a member of the Chola dynasty. These several pointers in their totality make it plausible that the thirty-two "kings," whom Duttagamini had to vanquish after he overcame Elara, were the residue of the Tamil Kshatriya nobles who lingered on in South Ceylon. All this leads us to the strong presumption that there were pockets of Kshatriyas of South India in isolated and secluded regions of South Ceylon.

Now that we have cleared the ground relating to the "kings" that Duttagamini had to contend with, after he vanquished Elara, we may briefly relate the Ceylon-Pallava relations.

Spells of peace and war alternated in the chronicle of Indo-Ceylon relations of the early ages. Peaceful and cordial relations subsisted from 2nd century B.C. to 8th century A.D., the era of South Indian history covered by the Satavahanas and the Pallavas. Manavamma the Sinhalese King and Narasinhavarman the Pallava King (630 - 668) were friends and allies, and each with the help of the other, triumphed over his rival to the throne of Ceylon and of the Pallavas respectively, as dramatically narrated in the *Mahavamsa* (Ch. XLVII: 15).

Of historical and cultural interest in this connection is the Tiriya rock inscription in the vicinity of Trincomalee—an inscription which bears out the cordial relations between the Sinhalese and the Pallava Kings. The observations of Paranavitana spotlight the cultural value of this inscription:—

"The script of this record is one of its main features of interest. It resembles Pallava-Grantha of about the seventh century, and in this script has been written the few inscriptions of this period found in Ceylon." Paranavitana assigns the Tiriya rock inscription to the closing decades of the seventh or the first half of the eighth century (E.Z., Vol. IV, 1934 - 41. pp. 152 - 158).

1 Ceylon Journal of Science, Section A, pp. 37, 38, 99, 100, 175, 176.

The close connection of Ceylon with the Andhra Kingdom after the break up of the Maurayan empire, profoundly influenced the Sinhalese school of painting, best seen in the frescoes of the rock-pockets of Sigiriya. Pallava connections of Ceylon are manifest in the temple architecture of the age.

The temple of Issurumuniya, at Anuradhapura, incorporating both structural and rock-cut techniques, and the rock-cut temple of Dambulla with its long facade built on the slopes of a high cliff, strongly recall the rock-cut Pallava temples of the Seven Pagodas of Mahabalipuram, in the vicinity of the city of Madras. Of the Pallava style too, are the sculpture of "Man and Horse" at Issurumuniya and the magnificently sculptured realistic elephants on either side of a cleft in rocky surface by the pond at Issurumuniya. The elephant sculptures are remarkably like the elephants of Mahabalipuram. The parallel to the Pallava art extends even to the cleft in the rock, symbolic of the longitudinal cleavage of the extensive rock surface at Mahabalipuram, the cleft simulating the flow of the Ganga (the river Ganges). In typical Dravidian architecture is the Nalanda Gedige in the district of Kandy in the style of the monoliths of Mahabalipuram.

Of structural shrines of the Pallava period in Ceylon, we have the Koneswar temple at Trincomalee and the temple of Tiruketeeswaram in the North West. These are featured further on in some detail in our general section on religion.

The Pallavas were great navigators and Ceylon obviously marked a stage in their expansion over South East Asia. The Pallavas gave place in South India to the Cholas and the Pandyas, and Ceylon entered into a different phase of relations with these expansionist powers. Six Pandyan chiefs occupied the throne of the Sinhalese kings, in the course of the year 433 A.D. Dhatu Sena (460-478 A.D.) repelled the invaders, but agitations for the throne followed his death. Muggalana the rightful heir escaped to India and returned with reinforcements after a long period of eighteen years and fought and won back the kingdom from the usurper Kassapa, who had ruled as King from the castle he built over the precipitous rock

of Sigiriya. Dynastic disturbances flared up again in the succeeding year. Kings Silameghavanna (617 A.D.), Agbo III (626 A.D.), Dhatopa Tissa I (626-641 A.D.), Dhatopa Tissa II (650-658) and Manavamma (676-711), each in turn crossed over to South India for military reinforcements of Tamil mercenaries.

We have reached a stage in the history of Ceylon, when she had to contend with the rising powers of South India, the Pandians and the Cholas, events dealt with in some detail in a subsequent chapter.

With the ascendancy of the dynasties of Kotte, and two rival kinsmen at Rayigam and Sitawaka, a fresh chapter opened in South Indian relations. Covering the period from 1373 to 1509, the one king of this era who ruled over entire Ceylon including the Tamil kingdom of the North, was King Parakrama Bahu VI (1415-1467). Politically the reign of this monarch is significant for Ceylon's contacts with the new South Indian power, the Vijayanagar empire. Culturally considered, Hindu influence was dominant in the counsels of the Court, as in the fields of art, literature, music and the dance.

As the Kotte kingdom faded out by slow stages, in its wake rose the kingdom of Kandy, whose rise and progress synchronised with the European period of Ceylon history, of the Portuguese, Dutch and the British eras.

The reciprocal relations of South India in the closing stages of the Kandyan kingdom, are briefly related in the succeeding chapter.

The quick survey we have here made of Ceylon history covers the vast range of relations, political, social and cultural, of Ceylon with India in general and specifically with South India, from the close of the Vijayan to the opening of the Kandyan era, from 4th century B.C. to early 16th century A.D., the period of the history of Ceylon generally termed "the Indian period of Ceylon history." Socially, almost all the several social groups in the population of present day Ceylon entered the Island at some time or other, in the long span of the Island's story. Of the social categories of South India, the main groups

are the Tamils, the Keralas and the Andhras, in varying degrees, predominantly the Tamils, the racial and social factor most adjacent to Ceylon.

In spite of wars of aggression that marked the Chola and the Pandyan periods of South Indian history, goodwill prevailed. Of particular asset were the matrimonial relations between Sinhalese and South India royalty. The example set by Vijaya, of matrimonial kinship, grew with the years, into something of a convention. Thus we see king Parakramabahu II (1238-1271), felicitating himself on his part in promoting matrimonial links : " I have brought hither the king's daughters from Jambudipa with gifts and thereby made the nobles of a foreign land your kinsmen." Much the same link up is recorded of King Raja Sinha II (1636-1687) : " He brought the king's daughters hither from the town of Madura." (*Culavamsa*, Ch. 87, 25).

## 5

### A Tamil Dynasty of Kandyan Kings

WE have now briefly reviewed the course of Ceylon history from the post-Vijayan to the era of the Kotte dynasty, the closing stages of which synchronised with the rise of the Kandyan monarchy, a dynasty of Kings who guided the destinies of Ceylon from 1591 to 1815, entrenched in the mountain fastnesses of Kandy. The Kandyan era in its later phase, witnessed the rise of a line of Kings bearing the title of the Malabar dynasty, 'Malabar' in the strictly Ceylonese sense of Tamil, a usage begun by the Portuguese and continued by the Dutch, the British and the Sinhalese historians. By the Malabar dynasty, is meant the Nayakkar dynasty of Madurai, tracing descent from the Pandyan and later the Vijayanagar Kingdom. The Nayakkars of Madurai were governors of provinces under the Vijayanagar emperors. With the fall of the Vijayanagar empire, the Nayakkars of Madurai, like those of Tanjore, assumed independence.

#### A Matrimonial Heritage

Malabar dynasty of Kandyan Kings may rightly be viewed, as a sequel to the matrimonial alliances of Sinhalese Kings with the South Indian royal families.

Stoudt (p. 42) sums up the story of inter-racial marriages between Sinhalese royalty and princesses of royal dynasties of South India, in these words: "It is known that Sinhalese Kings, starting from Vijaya in 543 B.C., often married Tamil Hindu princesses from the South Indian Kingdoms of Pandya, in the Madura and Tinnevely districts, Chola, along the Coromandel coast and Chera, on the South West coast. As late as the 17th century, Knox reports that the "right and lawful Queen" of the Kandyan Sinhalese King Rajasimha II "was a Malabar brought from the Coast."<sup>1</sup>

King Narendra Sinha's wife was a princess of Madura, daughter of Pitti Nayakkar. The King subsequently married her two sisters as well. His three wives bore him no heir. So at his death, Narendra Sinha nominated the brother of the Queens to succeed him, and he duly succeeded Narendra Sinha as King, under the throne name of Sri Wijaya Raja Sinha. Thus began the Malabar dynasty of Kandyan Kings. There were four kings of this dynasty, Sri Wijaya Raja Sinha (1739-1747), Kirti Sri Raja Sinha (1747-1780), Sri Rajadhi Raja Sinha (1780-1798) and Sri Wickrama Raja Sinha (1795-1815). With the accession of the latter, a fresh chapter opened in the history of Ceylon, progressively leading under a combination of circumstances, to the termination of the Kandyan royal dynasty and with it, the end of the Sinhalese monarchy, replaced by the British.

The only Tamil royal dynasty, apart from the Aryachakravarties of Jaffna, the Nayakkar dynasty of Kandy from 1739 to 1815, has had its own impact on the socio-cultural landscape of the Kandyan region. The political arena opened the door to Tamil social and cultural influences. The social and cultural impact has not been lost on the historians and administrators of the Colonial times. Thus Ivers: "The original Keppitipolas were full blooded Tamils who came to the Island with some Malabar King presumably subsequent to 1739, when the Malabar dynasty was instituted and settled in Navagammuwa, near Rambukkana" (R. W. Ivers, Official Diary, Kegalla, 26-9-1884). "In time they were considered aristocratic Sinhalese, having acquired the indigenous language, religion and customs."

<sup>1</sup> Knox, R: An Historical Relation of the Island of Ceylon in the East Indies, p. 54.

Evidently the retinue that accompanied the several kings and queens and other members of the royal family, were of all classes, nobles as well as commoners duly absorbed in the vast statecraft of the Kingdom and in the hierarchy of the Court and palace personnel.

## Ceylon in Relation to the Pandya and Chola Kingdoms

**J**AFFNA contacts with South Indian royal dynasties, the Pallava, the Chola and Pandya, and later the Vijayanagar were either incidental to the political relations of these dynasties with the Sinhalese monarchy or direct with Jaffna. By virtue of her geographical situation at the apex of Ceylon, Jaffna served in these intercourses, as the political springboard between South India and Ceylon, and Jaffna sea ports were the gateway to and from Ceylon. In the early days, relations between South India and Ceylon were purely social and matrimonial, relations which had far-reaching consequences in the later ages. Rivals for supremacy in South India turned for support to the Sinhalese kings who were thus drawn into the almost continuous struggles that were a feature of the martial life of the Middle Ages. These activities had their own repercussions on the political history of Ceylon.

To confine our attention to Jaffna. Specific mention of Jaffna occurs in the two Manimangalam<sup>1</sup> inscriptions, the first

<sup>1</sup> Rasanayagam, C.: *Ancient Jaffna*, 1926, p. 278, *et seq.*

by the Chola king Rajadhiraja I (1018 - 1054), in 1046 A.D. and the second by Rajendra Chola in 1059 A.D. The earlier inscription speaks of "three allied kings of the south, who arrayed themselves against the king." The third of these kings bears the name Manabharana, whom the king vanquished and killed in the battlefield. In the second inscription, that of 1059, Manabharana is specifically featured as a king of Ceylon. As there was no Sinhalese king of this age of the name Manabharana, it is felt that the reference may be to a king of Jaffna. This is scarcely correct, as there was no king of Jaffna either by this name.

Apart from the inscriptions and their triumphant tone, we have no account of any political conflicts visualised in these records. The name Kanna Kuchiyar occurring in the inscription, meaning the people of the land from which the troops came, leads historians like Rasanayagam<sup>1</sup> to presume that it refers to the land of Jaffna, the land of the Kanna Kuchiyar, or men who wore their tuft of hair slung on a side of the head (Kanna or Karna).

The reference in the inscription to Manabharana, as king of Jaffna, seems susceptible of another interpretation — that he may well have been a prince of Jaffna royal line. This view finds support from a series of matrimonial alliances. The Sinhalese king Vijayabahu I (1070 - 1114), gave his sister Mitta in marriage to a Pandyan prince. His three sons by this alliance are Manabharana, Kittu Siri Megha and Sri Vallabha, names which seem to ring a close parallel to the names in the inscriptions. Vijayabahu's queen, Tilokasundari was herself a princess of the Kalinga royal line (of Singai Nagar of Jaffna). Manabharana, the son of the Pandyan king by Mitta, the sister of Vijayabahu married his cousin, Ratnavali, the daughter of Vijayabahu. In the light of these affiliations, we may perhaps give some credence to the language of the inscription and presume that a prince of Jaffna and not a king may have been meant by the name Manabharana. This nevertheless is unsupported by any account of any conflict between the Chola kings and Jaffna.

<sup>1</sup> Rasanayagam, C.: *Ancient Jaffna*, 1926, pp. 281 - 283.



In the literature of the age, we have in the Tamil poem, *Chola Mandala Satakam* by Kambar, the renowned court poet of Rajaraja II (1164 - 1173), reference to a generous gift of a thousand shipload of paddy by Sadayappa Mudali, a patron of the poet, to relieve a great famine of the time. The king is referred to as Pararaja Singham, alluded to as King of Kandy. How this anachronism crept in, we are unable to say. Perhaps it is an interpolation of later days. The fame that Kandy attained to in the later ages, may have been responsible for this patent error. Pararaja Singham may well have signified a king of Jaffna, who often took the throne name of Pararaja Sekharan, which may have been transformed to Pararaja Singham by the poet.

Of Chola relations, we have also the mention of an invasion of Jaffna by Rajendra Chola III, who is pictured as "a very Rama in Northern Lanka, renowned as the abode of Virarakshasas." (M.E.R. of 1912, Sect. 32: page 69 and Inscription No. 64 of 1892 and No. 42 of 1911).

Of Pandyan connections we have a series, almost all linked with dynastic rivalries. Sundara Pandya (1216 - 1244) A.D. sets the pace in Jaffna-Pandya relations, by soliciting the help of Jaffna king against his rival Vira Pandya. The Jaffna king readily responds and with his aid, Sundara Pandya regains the throne. This is borne out by the inscription of the 20th Year of Maravarman Sundara Pandya. Distinctive as the title Pararaja Sekharan has been, of the Jaffna kings, it is obviously justifiable to conclude as Rasanayagam does, that the king referred to in the inscription is an Arya Chakravarti of Jaffna. It is likely that it is this event that is referred to in the *Yalpana Vaipava Malai*, of a Pandyan king seeking the aid of Singa Aryan, with whose reinforcements, the Pandyan regained the throne. An element of confusion is cast by the circumstance that the Pandyan king is featured as Chandra Sekharan and not as Sundara Pandya. *Vaipava Malai*, being a collection of oral chronicles, lapses of the sort do occur. This nevertheless does not seem to affect the basic core of the aid afforded by the Jaffna king to the Pandyan. Sundara Pandyan's rule being from 1214 to 1244 A.D., the Arya Chakravarti who went to his aid, would presumably have been Vijaya Kulankai Chakravarti,

otherwise known as Singai Aryan (1215 - 1240). We have also the allusion in the Tamil composition, *Segaraja Sekara Malai*, of help to Sundara Pandyan by a Jaffna king against a Hoysala.<sup>1</sup>

That it was not all a one-way traffic, is shown by a record which speaks of Jatavarman Vira Pandya coming to the aid of Jaffna in 1253 A.D. against the invasion of the Javakas from far off Java, led by Chandrabanu.<sup>2</sup> That this event was something more than a passing-show is evident from reminiscences in Jaffna that recall Javaka contacts of North Ceylon. One of these is that part of Jaffna known today as Chavakacheri. A cultural trait active today is the Musical Kite of Jaffna, the home of which is the Indonesian Islands. In Ceylon the Musical Kite does not prevail anywhere outside Jaffna.

To resume our narrative of Jaffna relations with South India. The finale of these relations is something of which we have a number of differing versions. The personalities concerned are the triangular powers, the Sinhalese monarchy, Arya Chakravarti and the Pandyan. We may begin with the *Culavamsa*<sup>3</sup> account: "Once when here in Lanka, a famine arose, there landed, sent with an army by the five brothers, the kings who held sway in the Pandu realm, a Damila general known by the name of Arya Chakravarti, who though he was no Arya, was yet a great dignitary of great power. He laid waste the kingdom in every direction and entered the proud stronghold, the town of Subhagiri (Yapahu). The sacred Tooth Relic and all the costly treasures there, he seized and returned with them to the Pandu kingdom. There he made over the Tooth Relic to king Kula Sekhara, who was as the sun for the lotus blossom of the stem of the great kings of the Pandus." "As the ruler, Parakramabahu III (1303 - 1310) saw no other means but friendly negotiations, he set forth in the company of several able warriors, betook himself to the Pandu kingdom and sought out the ruler of the Pandus. By daily conversations he inclined him

1 & 2 Pillai, K. K.: *South India and Ceylon*, University of Madras, 1963, p. 127.

3 *Culavamsa* II, Ch. 90, V. 43 - 47.



favourably, received from the hands of the king the Tooth Relic, returned to the Island of Lanka and placed the Relic in the superb Pulathinagara in the former Relic Temple." (*Cul. V. 48-47*).

The allusion to five brothers<sup>1</sup> who ruled over the Pandyan kingdom jointly finds mention by Marco Polo<sup>2</sup> who, in an account of his travels in South India towards the close of the 13th century, speaks of "five royal brothers and five crowned kings of the province of Malabar." We are also informed of "contemporary Chinese sources" which tell us of "the five brothers who were Sultans." No corroboration of this is found from other sources, nor does any chronicle tell us of any cause of action between either the "five brothers," or Kulasekhara Pandyan, against Ceylon, resulting in "the sacred Relic and all costly treasures" of Yapahu being carried away as spoils of the fight.

The Jaffna version gives us an altogether different view. According to these accounts, in the *Yalpana Vaipava Malai*, a conflict arose between Bhuvanakabahu I (1278-12/4), the Sinhalese king and the Arya Chakravarti of Jaffna over the rights of Pearl fishery in the Gulf of Mannar. The battle staged (1278 A.D.) was severe and Arya Chakravarti triumphed over his adversary. As a consequence, it is claimed, that "one flag, the flag of Yalpanam, waved over the whole of Lanka." The sacred Relic and other treasures fell into the hands of the victor. According to the *Vaipava Malai*, "this state of affairs continued for twelve years, and the Jaffna king restored the kingdom to Parakramabahu through the mediation of Kulasekhara, King of Pandya (1268-1309), who personally guaranteed the annual payment of tribute by the Sinhalese king."

Paul Pieris, takes a balanced view with the statement that "Arya Chakravarti was attempting to spread his domain over Sinhalese territories," while he agrees that "following the

death of Pandita Parakramabahu (1235-1270), repeated invasions from India took place and the Tooth Relic was captured by the Pandyan, who restored it on the personal intercession of the king who proceeded to India for the purpose."

A dispassionate judgment would entitle us to favour the *Yalpana Vaipava Malai* account as the more probable of the two versions, an invasion by the Arya Chakravarti of Jaffna without engrafting an extraneous element in the person of a minister of the Pandyan King, Kulasekhara, a rather laboured proposition without anything to support it in the nature of any other evidence from Indian or Ceylon sources. The description of the political scene of the time as the *Rajavaliya*<sup>1</sup> presents it, of the position of the Arya Chakravarti *vis-a-vis* the other powers, is also in favour of a probability of a direct invasion by the Arya Chakravarti as more reasonable than the story as the *Mahavamsa* gives it:—

"The Minister Alakeswara lived in the city of Raiyagama and the nephew of Parakramabahu remained in the city of Gampola while the King Arya Chakravarti dwelt in the seaport of Yalpanapatuna. Arya Chakravarti whose army and wealth were superior to those of the other kings, caused tribute to be brought to him from the hill and low districts and from the nine ports."

The *Culavamsa's* eulogy, on the other hand, of the Pandyan King Kulasekhara in the words<sup>2</sup>, "the king who was as the sun of the lotus blossom of the stem of the great kings of the Pandus," is easy to understand. Whatever may be the different versions of the conflict, of one thing all are agreed, that it was solely through the intercession of the Pandyan King that the Tooth Relic and the treasures were restored to the Sinhalese. To Sinhalese kings, the Tooth Relic stands for the very stability of the kingdom, and to all it has a foremost place in the religious life of the land. The high praise lavished on the Pandyan king by the *Culavamsa*, may more reasonably be viewed as an acknowledgment of the inestimable services of

<sup>1</sup> Rasanayagam, C.: *Ancient Jaffna*, 1926, pp. 344 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> Paul, S. C.: "The Overlordship of Ceylon in the 18th, 14th and 15th Centuries," *J.R.A.S. (C.B.)*, XXVIII, p. 74, 1921.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Pieris: *The Portuguese Era*, Vol. II, p. 267.

<sup>1</sup> *Rajavaliya*. B. Gunasekara, Colombo, 1899, pp 66 - 67.

<sup>2</sup> *Culavamsa* II, Ch. 90: 43 - 47.

Kulasekhara in getting the Tooth Relic and costly treasures restored. Nor should we forget that despite differences of the latter days, the connection between the Sinhalese kings and the Pandyan dynasty has been one of the closest from the day that Vijaya and his followers espoused Pandyan wives, a relationship that developed in later ages in further matrimonial alliances. The grandfather of Parakramabahu I was a Pandyan prince (*Cul.* 59, 41 - 44). It is as a reflection of all these traditions and mementoes of alliances, added to the signal services of Kulasekhara Pandyan in interceding between the Arya Chakravarti and King Bhuvanakabahu that the praise to the Pandyan king by *Culavamsa* may best be interpreted.

With the rise and expansion of the Vijayanagar empire, the Pandyan power progressively waned. That the Pandyan nevertheless continued to be a significant factor for some time in South Indian politics, we may presume from an expedition that Arikesari Parakrama Pandya (1422 - 1461) led against the Chera and Sinhala.<sup>1</sup> Among the battles he claims to have won, are mentioned those staged at Singai and Anura, very possibly signifying Singai Nagar, capital of Jaffna, and Anuradhapura, the Sinhalese capital. This invasion may be the invasion of 1451, which Philalethes<sup>2</sup> mentions in his history of Ceylon.

1 Travancore Archaeological Series, Vol. I. Inscriptions of the Later Pandyas, No. 2.

2 Pillai, K. K. : South India and Ceylon ; University of Madras, 1964, p. 111.

## Ceylon and the Vijayanagar Empire

VIJAYANAGAR coming into power, in the wake of the Chola and the Pandyan kingdoms, a new epoch opens in the history of South India. The influence that Vijayanagar exercised over the adjacent countries, is a measure of its strength and power. That the neighbouring kingdoms courted its favour, is a reasonable conclusion from the reference by Ferishta that "the Rajas of Malabar, Ceylon and other countries kept ambassadors at the court of the king of Vijayanagar and sent annually rich presents." This need not necessarily mean that Vijayanagar brought these countries under its dominance by might of arms.

The period of Vijayanagar empire, from the middle of the 14th to the end of the 17th century, covers so far as Ceylon is concerned, the reign of the kings of Rayigam and Kotte, whose dynasties together lasted from the late fourteenth to early sixteenth century. The two outstanding monarchs of this age are, Vira Alakeswara, at Rayigam and Parakramabahu VI (1415 - 1467), at Kotte, the king who brought all Ceylon under one umbrella. That Vijayanagar empire cast its spell over Ceylon of the days, is obvious. Nevertheless it was an influence different in character from the policies of the aggressive Chola and the Pandya.

Steering clear of speculations of earlier contacts, Vijayanagar relations with Ceylon commenced with the campaigns of Virupaksha against the neighbouring kingdoms, including Ceylon. Our main evidence of this, are the Ariyur Plates<sup>1</sup> of Virupaksha I, 1390 A.D., according to which the Vijayanagar king, planted a pillar of victory in Sinhala. This event is presumed to have taken place between A.D. 1386 and 1390, judging from the circumstance that the Soraikkavur Plates of 1386<sup>2</sup>, are silent on his Ceylon campaigns. The conquest of Sinhala finds mention too in the poetical composition, *Narayanavilasam* by Virupaksha.

Harihara II, in his Nallur inscription of 1399, speaks of himself as master of Purva, Pachima and Dakshina Samudradhisvara. This lends support to his encounters over Ceylon.

An invasion by Maha Desa Raja against the Sinhalese king at Gampola, chronicled in the *Rajavaliya*,<sup>3</sup> is also presumed to be a Vijayanagar invasion of Ceylon. Nevertheless this cannot be considered very authoritative, unsupported by evidence from other sources.

The observations of Fernao Nuniz,<sup>4</sup> the Portuguese chronicler that "Ajaras took Goa and Chaul and Dabull and Caillao and all the country of the Charamandal," sounds authentic. Ajaras may very likely refer to Virupaksha Raja, and Caillao is obviously Ceylon.

From these several references we may conclude that the Vijayanagar kings following Virupaksha, left Ceylon alone until Devaraja II (1422 - 1446), came into power and turned his gaze on his neighbours including Ceylon. This obviously was a strategic move to assert his powers over his neighbours, as may be inferred from the title Dakshina Samudradhipati<sup>5</sup> he assumed following the military manoeuvres by his General Lakanna Dandanayaka. The objectives specifically included Yalpanam (Jaffna) and Ilam the rest of Ceylon. This we learn from a

1 Indian Antiquary, Vol. XXXVIII, p. 12.

2 *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. VIII, pp. 300 - 301.

3 *Rajavaliya*, p. 263.

4 Sewell: A Forgotten Empire, p. 302.

5 South Indian Inscriptions, Vol. VIII, No. 428.

Vijayanagar inscription<sup>1</sup> of Saka (1362 - 1440 A.D.). The Jaffna king of the time may be Gunaveera Singai Aryan (1410 - 1440 A.D.), and the Sinhalese king, Parakramabahu VI (1415 - 1467). No details have come to light nevertheless, of any encounter between the forces of the Vijayanagar king and either Jaffna or Kotte. It might well have been a triumphant march, a show of might, without coming to a head in the form of a resort to arms.

Almost seven years after his first expedition, Lakanna appears to have staged a second expedition, as we gather from an account left by Abdur Razzak, the Persian ambassador to the court of Deva Raya II. This was probably impelled by the need to re-establish the waning allegiance of these neighbours, after a lapse of seven years. The General seems to have retracted his steps, without achieving anything, owing to untoward developments at the court of Vijayanagar, in the course of which a desperate effort was made on the life of the king himself. The reference to Lakanna having been "on the frontiers of Ceylon,"<sup>2</sup> does not justify the conclusion that this expedition was directed specifically against Jaffna alone. More reasonably it may be presumed that as he reached North Ceylon, he had to turn back owing to troubles at home alluded to above.

In regard to Vijayanagar-Ceylon relations in general, Salatore places the first expedition to Ceylon in 1415 A.D. and refutes the view that there was a Vijayanagar conquest of Ceylon after Virupaksha (*Indian Antiquary*, Volume LXI, 1932, pp. 223 *et seq.*).

As an example of the striking capacity of Parakramabahu VI, of Kotte, we have the reference to an expedition set out by the latter, against a chieftain of Tanjore, Malavaraja in retaliation to the arbitrary seizure of a Ceylon cargo of cinnamon by the chieftain and his men. According to *Rajavaliya*, the chieftain was slain and much booty carried away, and an annual tribute was paid by the four villages near the port of Adirampet.<sup>3</sup>

1 Annual Report of Epigraphy, Southern Circle, Madras Government, 144 of 1916.

2 and 3 Pillai, K. K., University of Madras: South India and Ceylon, p. 109.

## PART II

## The Jaffna Peninsula: Geography and Topography

**T**HE climate of a land is among the determining factors of the character of its people. Climatically considered, the two major Zones of Ceylon are the Dry and the Wet Zones with Intermediate Zones between the two. The climatic zones in conjunction with the geological surface features, give us the four Natural Divisions of the Island. In the Central is the hill country over 1,000 feet in elevation. The rest of the Island are the great Plains — *South-Western Plain*, bounded by the sea on the West, the Deduru Oya on the North, the hills to the East, and the Walawe Ganga to the South-East; the *South-Eastern Plain*, between the hill country and the sea, the northern and southern boundaries being roughly the Mahaveli Ganga, and the Walawe Ganga, respectively and the *Northern Plain*, the largest of three, bounded by the sea on the North-East and West, enclosed between the river basins of the two rivers — the Deduru Oya and the Mahaveli Ganga.

The Dry Zone of today, almost three-fourths of the Island, was the most populous part in the story of early Ceylon, the

region which supported the largest population, from the very beginnings of the Sinhalese dynasty — from about 500 B.C. to 1240 A.D., when Polonnaruwa was abandoned as the Capital of the Sinhalese monarchy. Today, the *Dry Zone* is the land mass bounded by the Deduru Oya on the North-West, the Walawe Ganga on the South-East, with the region of the Central hill country, forming the boundary on the landside. We call it the *Dry Zone* because of its comparatively dry condition today. The climate of a region is not a constant phenomenon — though for all practical purposes, we judge the past by what it is today. But this is pure speculation. Climatic changes are a matter for deep study and research. Whether in the distant past, this dry region of today, enjoyed a more favourable climate, is a matter for investigation. Studies in recent years carried out on the climatic conditions of the Coromandel Coast of South India — a comparatively dry area today compared with the more wet and rainy West or Malabar Coast — led to interesting results which show that in pre-historic days, the Coromandel Coast enjoyed a more favourable climate with a warm wet weather, more than it does enjoy today. The presumption is reasonable, that we have no knowledge today whether the Dry Zone of Ceylon, has always been in its present dry condition, or whether it enjoyed more favourable conditions of life. Even as it today is, the Dry Zone of Ceylon is not quite so dry, as the term would signify. The annual rainfall ranges from 50 to 75 inches. September to December are the wet months, when it can be quite well wet, though the region has witnessed its seasons of drought too. There are indications that the area, particularly the North-West, supported a vigorous settlement of Stone Age peoples in the pre-historic past. The later colonists in the dawn of history, favoured the spot, as a sort of the heritage of the past. For, man in every land has shown a natural disposition to occupy sites which have been once favoured by early humanity. Such sites which have been under continuous occupation, give evidence of successive cultures, to the spade of the archaeologist. Though climatically dry, the region is favourable in other aspects. The land is level and flat. Water is the only thing needed to support a flourishing humanity. The early colonisers were drawn to this part of Ceylon, more than to any other by the comparative ease of turning it to good account.

It is interesting that the Dry Zone has today, a drier area, or rather two drier areas which have been called the *Arid Zone* with a rainfall today between 25 and 50 inches. One is the coastal strip on the North West extending from Puttalam to the neighbourhood of the Jaffna Peninsula. In the South of Ceylon, you get another arid zone, a much smaller area, from Tangalla to Pottuvil. The aridity that prevails now, did not prevent the earliest colonisers from entering the Island from the side of this arid zone on the North West; and they soon settled on the land supporting themselves by paddy cultivation, possibly by storage of such water supply as they could collect from rainfall. Whether at the time that we speak of, the rainfall was so scanty, as it today is, we can only surmise. In any case we have evidence of a vigorous agricultural life in these earlier days, in the tank sites such as the Giants Tank of the North West and the smaller tanks in the South East.

The arid zone was soon abandoned as the centre of Sinhalese kingdom by King Pandukabaya who made Anuradhapura his Capital, about 500 B.C. In this dry central area, Sinhalese life and thought grew and flourished throughout the long Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa periods. More favourable to cultivation of grain crops, here flourished a peasantry rooted to the soil, based on agricultural economy. Isolated from contacts with any other civilisation, the villages reflected the best of indigenous culture. Tumults and the fight for political supremacy, scarcely affected the contentment of the peasant's life. The large irrigation systems carried out by the Sinhalese Kings rendered more fruitful, a soil capable of much fertilisation. With the occupation of the Dry Zone from about 500 B.C. as the home of the Sinhalese peasantry, the social life of Ceylon entered on the Second Phase of Sinhalese history and culture; and even today continues to be less influenced by urbanising or modernizing tendencies.

Geographical factors apart, political factors were no doubt a great force in regulating the human habitations and village settlements of the Island. Political influences led in time to the final abandonment of Polonnaruwa from 1240 A.D. The seat of Government was transferred to Dambadeniya and Kings and peoples took the way down South. This step had its repercussions on the life of the Dry Zone as a whole. Villagers left their



villages and wandered South. Forests soon advanced, and covered the Dry Zone, and in the midst of the ruins of the cities, jackals kept their nightly vigil. From this time begins the development of the *Wet Zone*, the Third Phase in the social history of the Island.

The Wet Zone is the region roughly covered by the area between the Deduru Oya on the North, the sea on the West, the Walawe Ganga on the South, and the hill country on the East. The Wet Zone scarcely attracted the notice of the early settlers of the Island. It was a land left to the primeval conditions of Nature. Climatically, the Wet Zone markedly differs from other parts of the Island. With the heavy rainfall almost throughout the year, the place was covered with swamps and marshes and was comparatively the least populated part of the Island down to about 1000 A.D. Almost the first attention paid to the Wet Zone was by Parakrama Bahu who as the Governor of the Southern district of Ruhuna took in hand the task of draining the land of its swamps and marshes, and of transforming them into cultivable paddy fields. Settlements grew up between the Bentota river and the Walawe Ganga known as the "*Dolosdahas Rata*." The *Culavamsa* speaks of the coconut palms and gardens of this area, a forecast of the present estates. With the languishing of Polonnaruwa, Sinhalese royalty found new life in the South; and Kotte and Sitawaka became centres of interest. The Wet Zone began on its career in the scheme of things, though the day was still far off for the full blooming of this part. The occupation of the Wet Zone developed a new economy, suited to the soil — cinnamon and the coconut, particularly cinnamon which made history, "the lady round which they all danced in Ceylon," the lady who so transformed the political picture of Ceylon, that it opened a new chapter in the history of the Island.

The occupation and settlement of the Wet Zone paved the way for the growth of the hill country — the Fourth Stage in the social life of Ceylon. At a time when the Dry Zone was flourishing, the hill country was mostly uninhabitable and so it continued for ages. It took long for the hill zone to find favour in the eyes of the people. Its hilly character was not propitious to a peasantry devoted to paddy cultivation.

The days of the hill zone began to brighten when Jayawcera Bandara made himself the chief of the principality of Gampola, about 1530 A.D., and men began more and more to adapt themselves to life on the hills. The people who took to life on the hills, lived a life of comparative isolation and these in time came to be known as the Kandyans. An economic structure of a different pattern developed in time in an environmental setting of its own; and Service Tenures, and the Functional Service castes, soon evolved. Cherishing a life and culture of their own, the Kandyans were soon differentiated from the rest of the people, who came to be called the Sinhalese of the Low Country. This distinction got reinforced and emphasized, when with the coming of the Portuguese in the 16th century, the people of the Low Country began to fraternize with the Portuguese. By this time the Kandyan Kingdom had developed from its small beginnings of the Kanda Uda Rata, to overlordship over a wide domain, excluding the Coastal areas.

How environment shapes the human factor, cannot be better seen than in the story of the Kandyan country and its peoples. Nature was the great mother here who provided its children, with the means of a healthy and co-operative life. Castes were localized each in its social setting, each linked in the production and the servicing of a particular item of product. Rice could not be cultivated on the hills with the same facility that it could be raised on the plains. The highlander solved this problem by cutting a series of terraces on the sides of the hills and in so doing displayed extraordinary skill in the process; and nothing today is so impressive or beautiful as the graded series of terraced fields. The economy in time took a step further with the raising of plantation crops of tea and cocoa.

The Goigama occupied the highest status as the agricultural caste of both the highland and the low lands. Round the kittul palm (*Caryota urens*) developed the Wahumpura Caste; the grass lands inspired the mat weavers, the Kinnarayas; and the clay of the fields and river beds stimulated the craft of the Potter, the Kumbakaraya; while the metal worker or the Artisan Caste made such articles of requirements as the chunam boxes, betel boxes and nut crackers, indispensable items of the

betel-chewing complex. The Kandyan country thus founded developed a functional socio-economical system, of interchange of articles and services among the several castes, in a vast and elaborate feudal machinery of social services of which the King was the source.

An ecological area with a character of its own is the Northern part of the Dry Zone, known to us today as the Northern Province. The topography of the North may best be featured in the words of Tennent<sup>1</sup> whose presentation of the subject is still the best that we have. "The greater portion of the North may be regarded as the conjoint production of coral polypi and the currents which for the greater portion of the year set impetuously towards the South. Coming laden with alluvial matter collected along the coast of Coromandel and meeting with obstacles south of Point Calimere, they have deposited their burdens on the coral reefs round Point Pedro and then gradually raised above the sea-level and covered deeply with sand drifts, have formed the Peninsula of Jaffna and the plains that trend westwards till they unite with the narrow causeway of Adam's Bridge, itself raised by the influence of the tides and monsoons.

The barrier known as Adam's Bridge which obstructs the navigation of the channel between Ceylon and Ramnad, consists of several parallel ledges of conglomerate and sandstone, hard at the surface and growing coarse and soft as it descends till it rests on a bank of sand, apparently accumulated by the influence of the current at the change of the monsoons.

On the North-West side of the Island where the currents are checked by the obstruction of Adam's Bridge and still water prevails in the Gulf of Mannar, these deposits have been profusely heaped and the low sandy plains have been proportionately extended; while on the South and East where the current sweeps uninterrupted along the coast, the line of the shore is bold and occasionally rocky."

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<sup>1</sup> Tennent, Emerson, 1859. Ceylon, Vol. I, pp. 12 - 13.

"This explanation of the accretion and rising of the land is somewhat opposed to the popular belief that Ceylon was born from the mainland of India by a convulsion, during which the Gulf of Mannar and the narrow channel at Pamban were formed by the submersion of the adjacent land. The two theories might be reconciled by supposing the sinking to have occurred at an early period and to have been followed by the uprising still in progress, but on a closer inspection of the structure and direction of the mountain system of Ceylon, it exhibits no traces of submersion. It seems erroneous to regard it as a prolongation of the Indian chains; it lies far to the East of the line formed by the Ghats on either side of the Peninsula and any affinity which it exhibits is rather with the equatorial direction of the intersecting range of Nilgiris and the Vindhyas. In their geological elements there is doubtless similarity between the southern extremity of India and the elevated portions of Ceylon, but there are also many important particulars in which their specific differences are irreconcilable with the conjecture of previous continuity. In the North there is a marked preponderance of aqueous strata which are comparatively rare in the vicinity of Cape Comorin; while the rocks of the former are entirely destitute of organic remains, fossils both terrestrial and pelagic, have been found in the Eastern Ghats and sandstone in some instances overlays the primary rock which compose them. Both in the flora and fauna of the Island there are exceptional peculiarities which suggest a distinction between it and the Indian continent. Towards the North, the offsets of the mountain system with the exception of those which stretch towards Trincomalee radiate to short distances in various directions and some down to the level of the plains."

Of the character of soil of Jaffna, Tennent enlightens us in these words<sup>1</sup> :—

"The sand which covers a vast extent of the Peninsula of Jaffna and in which the coconut and the palmyrah palm grow freely, has been carried by the currents from the coast of India and either flung upon the Northern beam in the winter months

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<sup>1</sup> Tennent, Emerson, 1859. Ceylon, Vol. I, p. 20.

or driven into the lake during the South-West Monsoon and thence washed on shore by the ripple and distributed by the wind.

The arable soil of Jaffna is generally of a reddish colour, from the admixture of iron and being largely composed of lime from the Coromandel coral, it is susceptible of the highest cultivation, promises crops of great luxuriance. This tillage is carried on exclusively by irrigation from innumerable wells, into which the water rises fresh through the madreporae and sands; there being no streams in the district unless those percolating can be so called which may find their way underground and rise through the sands on the margin of the sea at low water.

These phenomena occur at Jaffna in consequence of the rocks being magnesium, limestone and coral, overlying a bed of sand, and in some places where the soil is light, the surface of the ground is a hollow arch, so that it resounds as if a horse's weight were sufficient to crush it inwards. This is strikingly perceptible in the vicinity of the remarkable well at Putthur on the west side of the road leading from Jaffna to Point Pedro, where the surface of the surrounding country is only about 15 feet above sea level. . . . .

A similar subterranean stream is said to conduct to the sea from another singular well near Tellippallai in sinking which the workmen at a depth of 14 feet came to the ubiquitous coral, the crust of which gave way and showed a cavern below containing the water they were in search of with a depth of more than 33 feet. It is remarkable that the well at Tellippallai preserves its depth at all seasons alike, uninfluenced by rains or drought and a steam engine erected at Putthur with the intention of irrigating the surrounding land failed to lower it to any perceptible depth."

Jaffna Peninsula, about 35 miles long and from 8 to 25 miles broad, occupies an area of 1,220 square miles, covering most of the Northern Province. Excluding the Islands on the North Western border, Jaffna Peninsula is divided into four districts — Vadamarachie, Tenmarachie, Pachilapalai and Veligamam.

## The Islands and the Lagoons

THE North is all almost perfectly plain, different from the rest of Ceylon in its topography, as in climate and fauna and flora. Though plain land, it has yet its share of hard rocks. On the sea-board is the sacred spring of Keerimalai. Its very name signifies a hill, the hill of Nagula Muni who is believed to have lived in a rock recess, the Sage who was so shrunk with age and austerities, that he was likened to the Kiri (Mongoose).

Its indented coast line, with a chain of Islands garlanding its north-west margin, gives Jaffna a sea front distinctive of this part of Ceylon.

Geographically considered, Jaffna with its sprout thrust out into the sea, is comparatively recent formed of coral beds over-topped with sand brought down by the tidal action of currents from the adjacent Coromandel Coast. The sea in ages past had advanced inland, more than is evident today. A pronounced illustration of this are the marine grottos of Velvettiturai, teeming with marine fossils, which are easily collected here, as I did a few years ago. These grottos and caverns were once the den of sea pirates of the Middle Ages and of smugglers in later years.

In its meandering lagoons and the string of islands on the North-West, Jaffna has a fascinating landscape. Following a spell of visits of the old capitals of Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and Sigiriya, the tourist cannot do better than round off his sojourn in Ceylon by a tour of Jaffna and, if time permits, a visit to the necklace of islands. The lagoons wind in and out, garlanding the city all around.

Spanning the wide lagoon adjacent to the Dutch fort, is the causeway which has been slowly and steadily progressing for over a decade now, connecting Jaffna with the island of Velanai. On a calm day the sunset is a glorious sight. The mantle of darkness soon falls on the waters of the lagoon, gently heaving with the large boats carrying merchandise, the vallams and the fishing boats.

The islands distributed over the North-West, may best be visualised in relation to the port of Kayts, the gateway to the islands. The State operates a motor launch service to these islands. Mainly these are Eluvativu, literally the island of goats, Paruttitivu, barren and uninhabited, Analtivu, Nainativu better known as Nagadipa and Neduntivu or Delft.

The seat of one of the Naga Kingdoms of the proto-historic days, Nagadipa is linked with one of the three legendary visits of the Buddha to Lanka. The sights of the place are the Nagapooshani Amman Kovil and the Buddhist Vihara. Besides the name Nainativu and Nagadipa, are its other names famed in legends: Manipallavam, recalling the legends of *Manimekalai*, Manitheevu and Sambuddhativu. A name that highlights its character as the abode of the Naga, is Nagaleswaram. With its greater amenities, the island supports a population of over four thousand. A halo of spirituality endears the island to the Hindu, with its dedication to the Naga, enhanced by its legendary links with the adventurous career of Manimekala. Almost the only big shrine in Ceylon dedicated to the cult of the Naga, the temple draws vast crowds of worshippers and sightseers, during its annual ten-day festival, June to July.

From Nagadipa, the motor launch continues its sight-seeing excursion to Neduntivu or Delft, by which name it is reputedly known, since the days of the Dutch. Its present interest to the

tourist centres round its historic associations and its roaming ponies, a heritage from the Dutch days. The Dutch imported ponies and bred them as a side line. It is said that Lieut. Nolan, an Irishman first employed in the Dutch Regiment, had supreme authority over the Dutch stables, an assignment which continued in his hands when the Dutch were supplanted by the British, who kept up the show until abandoned in 1906. The crumbling ruins of the stables and the packs of ponies roaming about today tell a tale of the flourishing business days of old.

A reminder of the Portuguese days is a fortress in ruins. Palmyrah toddy is the common beverage, as in most other islands where fresh water is scarce. An interesting phenomenon here as elsewhere, is the water fairly fresh collected from pits dug in the sandy seashore.

The resources of the island are mats, cuttle-fish bones, shark fins and cattle. Houses here are of coral stones dovetailed into one another.

To the historian as to the student of folk-lore, Delft is linked with the story of Vedi Arasan, the Mukkuvar chief who held sway over the island in the medieval ages. His four brothers ruled over different parts of Jaffna, Viranarayan at Karaitivu (Karainagar), Valangu Devan at Mathagal and Eliandurvan at Keerimalai. The exploits of Vedi Arasan reached their summit in his encounter with Meekaman, who led the Chola troops against Vedi Arasan. The cause of the strife was the Chola King's desire to get for his daughter Kannika, the Naga gem (Nagamani) in the custody of Vedi Arasan. The incidents of this mission to the Mukkuvar Chief, to get the Naga gem and the battle that ensued, are woven round the folk drama *Vedi Arasan Nadagam*. The Mukkuvar of Puttalam and elsewhere value this drama exceedingly. The staging of the play has been one of their favourite recreations over the years past, as now on festival days.

While these are the islands on the sea-board, there are tracts of land cut off from the mainland by lagoons. A passing mention has already been mentioned of Kayts, the starting point over the tour of the islands. To the Tamils, Kayts is



alternatively known as Velanai and Tanal Tivu. Adjacent to Kayts is Karainagar, linked to Jaffna by a two-mile causeway. From Karainagar, ferry boat takes you to the insular Kayts.

Karainagar merits more than a passing mention. A very active settlement of the Mukkuvar, the name, we are told by Fr. Jayakodi, O.M.I., is derived from Kara, a shrub that once grew here profusely. We are here introduced to a Jataka Story, featuring a Brahmin sage, Akkita, who is said to have flown here from Benares, and here he lived in a rock cave eating nothing but Kara shrub. We are also told that the Tamil *Nam Pota* makes mention of Kara Divayina, a sacred centre. A flourishing and populous place today, we have here the Hindu College, Karainagar, one of the many educational institutions.

Now let us proceed further in our estimation of Kayts. The Portuguese called it by the name of "Cais" meaning a wharf. With the 't' added in course of usage, it evolved under the Dutch, to Kayts, its present form. Marco Polo's feature of the place in the account of his travels, added to its prestige.

The popular port of call, landing merchandise mainly food ships from India, Kayts played an important role in the economies of the peninsula. Today, country crafts laden with tiles from India land here. Anchored here may occasionally be seen, quaint sailing craft from far off Arabia, a reflection of the ages, when Arabs had active trade relations with Jaffna.

Stepping out of the boat which ferried you and your car across to the landing jetty, you are tempted to pop into the Rest House, to the right of you. The water here has a reputation of being remarkably free from salinity. You repose a little over a cup of tea before you start on your round of Kayts. You drive along the road with little evidence of any life. Absolute loneliness is the dominant note of this old world island. Presently you come upon the remains of a fort — the Urundi Kotta, the round fort, one of the few remaining relics of the Portuguese days. Leaving the fort, you drive along in silence until you reach the centre of the island. An array of houses cluster here, the popular residential quarters. The houses are of

the usual type over the rest of Jaffna, each secluded behind a hedge of palmyrah or cadjan leaves, held in place by live trees, the Surya tree, with thick spreading foliage and large yellow flowers. The hedge has its typical gateway, the *Sankadapadalai* which pushed open closes automatically by the action of the weight attached. Another attraction hereabouts is the causeway which has been under construction over the years. At the time of my visit the causeway was still in building. This has now been accomplished giving free access to Mandativu, another of the little insular tracts of this land of lagoons and islands. Continuing your progress, the scene changes and you see expansive fields barren of any cultivation. Some lanky and lean cattle were strewn about the fields nibbling the grass. A refreshing sight was a group of boys playing the animated game of "*Kitti and Pullu*" the same as the *Gudu* of the Sinhalese boys. Leaving the children behind, you are soon from where you started, the Kayts jetty and you are soon ferried across.

The man of the islands is a "Tivan," a term that contrasts the islander from the mainlander. The word 'Tivan' has acquired over the ages, a contemptuous application, scarcely fair to the hardy men of simple habits, with a cheerful and courageous disposition, born of his harder conditions of life.

Rising as it were, from the waters, is the Dutch outpost of Hamenhiel, which the purposeful Dutch, leaving nothing to chance, erected to guard the peninsula from approaches over the sea. The imaginative Dutch likened the whole island of Ceylon to a ham, and the fort to them was the heel of the ham, the Hamenhiel.

Keerimalai by the sea at Kankasanturai, is a place to visit at least for its legends, if not for its miraculous waters, the sacred "tirta" of its springs.

Legend has it that Marutapiravika Valli, a Chola princess, came to the springs in order to rid herself of the deformity of the horse face with which she was born. An ascetic had prophesied that her horse face would disappear on her bathing at the springs of Keerimalai — and so she did — it is said about 785 A.D., and she emerged out of the tank perfect in her proportions. And here in its vicinity she built as a thanks-offering,

the temple of Mavittapuram, literally the place where the horse face disappeared. The temple has ever since been among the fascinations of Jaffna.

Keerimalai has become famous. The name itself is reminiscent of the ascetic "Nakulamuni" whose abode was here, at the hill at the foot of which stands the present temple to Vishnu. The Arabian navigators spread the story of Keerimalai to the West, and Emerson Tennent<sup>1</sup> in his book on Ceylon, quotes Lane's Arabian Nights, to the effect that during the sixth voyage of Sindbad the Sailor, his ship was wrecked near a lofty mountain on the northern coast of Serendib where Sindbad collected pearls, hyacinth and ambergris. Tennent visualised this mountain as none other than the hill of Keerimalai, which it might well have been.

The place of the landing of Vijaya, is one of the favourite themes of historians and writers. One of the many places where his landing is placed, is Keerimalai. Elaborating this idea, Rasanayagam says "if indeed, copper colour had anything with Taubapanni, as stated in the *Mahavamsa*, there is no place where copper coloured earth can be found as close to the shore as at Keerimalai."

Romance and legends are inter-linked at Keerimalai. Here Arjuna, it is said fell in love with Nagakanny, daughter of a Naga King, and here King Ukkira Singhan, married the beautiful Chola Princess Maruta Piravika Valli on her sojourn at the springs, as narrated already. Apart from these stories, Keerimalai is a miracle. The spring is no doubt fresh water, despite its contact with neighbouring sea. There is the belief that the springs of Keerimalai have a connection with the "bottomless" well of Putthur, the water of which is as fresh as any water can be.

Keerimalai has lived up to its reputation. At all hours of the day, it is visited by bathers and sightseers. The faith in the miraculous cure of these waters is such, that a dip in the waters is the thing, whether to cure oneself of rheumatic aches and pains or to refresh and invigorate after the day's toil.

<sup>1</sup> Tennent, Emerson. Ceylon, Vol. I, p. 560 *et seq.*

The Putthur tidal well is intriguing. Though popularly known as the bottomless well of Putthur, it is really a tank in its rectangular proportions, about forty feet by thirty. Folklore speaks of it as opened by Sri Rama by a stroke of his arrow to provide water to refresh his men. Another story alludes to an old Hindu shrine, with an underground cave where hermits meditated. The spot is hallowed in the mind of the villagers with the name it bears, Nilavarai. "The reservoir, in popular fancy is anything over 200 feet in depth. It defies plumbing. It is remarkable that the waters never overflow its lime-stone banks nor does it recede, except for the phenomenon that it rises and falls by a few inches once in every twelve hours. This oscillation has remained a mystery. A folklore belief assumes that the well has an underground channel connecting it with the sea at Keerimalai, whence a subterranean stream flows inwards through fissures in the sides. This may account for the salinity of the water in the lower reaches of the reservoir. Springs of fresh water through the coral rock of the four sides of the well, and surface flow, may be the explanation for the fresh water at the top."

Though spoken of as bottomless, H. F. Tomlin who conducted pumping and plumbing operations in 1895, figures the depth as 145 feet on the northern aspect, 120 feet on the south side and 121 feet on the western side.

The Irrigation Department has installed a pumping machinery here and water is pumped out and diverted in channels for the purpose of irrigation. There is every indication that the place has been of sacred associations in the past. There is a small Hindu temple adjacent. The watchman of the Irrigation Department is also the *pujari*, the priest of this small modern shrine, *Navasaila Iswaran Kovil*, which according to him stands on the basement of an ancestral Hindu temple. By the side of this temple is a well, the water of which is pure and fresh. This is said to be an old well, renovated by the present priest in recent years.

Adjacent to this Hindu shrine, are the remains of what obviously has been a Buddhist shrine or monastery. The



place has recently been explored<sup>1</sup> and a limestone figure of the Buddha in standing posture, has been revealed. The figure in pieces, has been added to the Jaffna Museum collections of antiquities.

### Mannar

Separated from the Jaffna Peninsula by a narrow arm of sea, is the Island of Mannar, eighteen miles long by two to four broad. A meeting ground for several strains of people, the island has a picturesque society.<sup>2</sup> They are mainly the Vellalar, the Paravar (the original Bharatar), Kadayar, Karanjar, Kannadiyar (the Canarese), the Moors, the Mixties or Mesticoes, and the Parangi (the Portuguese Burgher). The Mixties alternatively called the Mesticoes or the Tuppahi, are the products of the matrimonial alliances between the Portuguese and the women of the soil. Portuguese soldiers safeguarded the Fort of Mannar all the years of their occupation from 1560 to 1658, when it surrendered to the Dutch.

The Paravar, the Kadayar and the Karanjar were the early inhabitants. It is said of the Kadayar that they traditionally owned the entire Island of Mannar. This may be so at a time when no power cared for this sandy wasteland. The Paravar community of fishermen and the Kadayar were the first to be converted to the faith of Roman Catholicism and they have ever remained true adherents of the faith. The sandy soil and the dry climate no doubt favoured the fishermen. The Arabs in the course of their commercial pursuits formed a settlement in the Island and their progeny are the nucleus of the Moors of today. Except for the Moor, the island is exclusively Roman Catholic.

Of more than ordinary interest are the Kannadiyar of Mannar, descendants of the original Kannada (Canarese) immigrants of the medieval days. These are now the main inhabitants of the village of Pallimunai, within the town limits of Mannar.

We are indebted to the Rt. Rev. Dr. Edmund Peiris, O.M.I., Bishop of Chilaw, for the insight we gain of this group,<sup>1</sup> "distinguished by reddish hued complexion and light grey eyes, the men are well-built and sturdy; the women tall and in spite of the hard life they lead, not devoid of beauty and grace."

The Kannadiyar (the Canarese), it is well-known, are the people mainly of Mysore and the districts of South Kanara and North Kanara now included in the State of Karnataka. From numerous references in the *Mahavamsa*, it is obvious that the several people who entered Ceylon either as peaceful immigrants or in the army of invading forces, included the Kannadiyar. During the reign of Mahinda V (1001 - 1017) there were Kannada and Kerala mercenaries in the Sinhalese army, as in the armies of Parakrama Bahu I (1153 - 1186) and Parakrama Bahu VI (1412 - 1467).

About thirty miles from Mannar, is the village of Arippu with its ruins overgrown with vegetation. Legends relate these ruins to the remains of the palace of Alli Arasani, a character linked with the romances of the Pandava prince Arjuna. The story is that the Queen had a residence built at Arippu, adjacent to the Pearl Banks of the Gulf of Mannar (to watch the operations of the pearl fishery).<sup>2</sup> This was the age, it is believed, when there was just sufficient land connection for the amazon Queen to take a horse ride over to the Indian coasts opposite. In its ruined condition, some of the structural features of the building could be traced, its massive walls built of burned bricks and plastered over with high quality adhesive plaster. Something of the outlines of a small room, could also be made out. This in its shattered condition may have been the treasure room of the Queen. Standing almost 150 square feet above the surface of the ground, the layout of the palace, appears to have been of regal dimensions. Mannar with its trade relations with India and lands overseas, may well reveal the glories of the past ages, if large scale excavations of the site are conducted which is equally true of many a site of ancient Jaffna.

1 Devendra, D. T. : *Tanks and Rice*. Colombo, 1965, "The Bottomless Well," p. 51 *et seq.*

2 Boake, W. J. S. : *Mannar : A Monograph*, 1888.

1 Peiris, the Rt. Rev. Dr. Edmund : "An Interesting Ethnical Group from Mannar." *Ceylon Historical Journal*, Vol. III, No. 1, July, 1958.

2 Governor North early in the 19th Century had his residence built to supervise the pearl fishing.

The legend of Alli Arasani is one that Kudiramalai shares with Mannar. We have the testimony of Sir Alexander Johnstone<sup>1</sup> that he has in his possession a history of the Queen, who ruled over the North West of Ceylon eighteen hundred years ago. Brohier<sup>2</sup> refers to the traditional reputation of this area in the words: "that an ancient town existed in the environs of this headland called Kudiramalai, is a fact which both traditional and historical speculations testify to. It is invested with a measure of renown which was wafted to the ends of the inhabited earth, for it would appear that even in ages beyond count, intrepid adventurers were lured to it by the precious pearls which the adjacent shallow sea produced."

That Mannar was much more significant in the fortunes of Ceylon than its present condition would warrant, is considered probable. The latest in this direction is the study by Nicholas<sup>3</sup> in the course of which he reveals that Mannar has claims to sustain the location of the ancient Capital of Vijaya, Tambapanni in the neighbourhood of Arippu.

The basis of this hypothesis is the statement in the *Dipavamsa*, the oldest of the Ceylon chronicles that Tambapanni was "on the most lovely south bank of the river" — the river which is undoubtedly the Kadamba-nadi, the present Malwatta-Oya or Aruvi Aru. Whatever may be said of the credibility of the story of Vijaya, "there is nothing in the story to create a reasonable doubt about the factual existence of a place named Taprobane, featured as one of the earliest ports and the first settlement of the Indo-Aryan immigrants and there is every reason to suppose that it existed at the time the chronicles were completed. Its situation according to the *Dipavamsa* was near the mouth and on the south bank of the Aruvi Aru. This also afforded a safer anchorage than over the shoals and sandbanks of the Adam's Bridge."

"The Pandyan Princess who came to Ceylon to be Vijaya's queen is said to have landed at Mahatittha (Mantai) and proceeded to Tambapanni. Here again was an advance of the Adam's Bridge passage and the employment of a safer route direct from the Pandyan Court, to a port in Ceylon north of Adam's Bridge. Vijaya lived 38 years at Tambapanni and every year he sent to the Pandyan King a present of pearls. We may infer therefore that Tambapanni was in the vicinity of the Pearl Banks. The next Capital after Tambapanni was Uptissagama and the Royal Capital was permanently established at Anuradhapura, so that the movement inland was out of the valley of the Malwatta Oya, from Tambapanni to Anuradhapura. The ruins of Tambapanni have not yet been discovered and if any remains exist, they may probably be not far from the sea in the neighbourhood of Arippu."

1 Sir Alexander Johnstone, J.R.A.S.(C.B.), Vol. I, p. 545.

2 Brohier, R. L.: Notes on Ancient Habitation near Kudiramalai. J. R. A. S. Vol. XXXI, No. 82. p. 59.

3 Nicholas, C. W.: Historical Topography of Ancient and Medieval Ceylon. J. R. A. S., Vol. 6, 59.

## Jaffna Relations: At Home and Abroad

**E**ARLY in the history of Ceylon, Jaffna came into close contacts with the Sinhalese monarchy at Anuradhapura. The geographical situation of Jaffna on the Northern seaboard of Ceylon, decided the role Jaffna was to fulfil in the life of early Ceylon. Jaffna indeed held the key to Ceylon of the early ages. The ports on her seaboard were the channels of communication between Ceylon and lands overseas. Envoys from Ceylon with gifts from Devanampiya Tissa (247-207 B.C.) to Emperor Asoka (274-237 B.C.) embarked at Jambukola, very likely the modern Jambuturai, in the vicinity of the present sea port of Kankasanturai and reached the port of Tamluk (Tamralipti) at the mouth of the Ganges in seven days. By the same route, the envoys returned with gifts from Asoka to King Tissa (*Maha. Ch. XI, 18 - 40*).

Adjacent to Jambuturai, the Jambukola of the *Mahavamsa*, is the site reputed by the name of Tissamaluwa (Tissa's Palace) marking the place where the sacred Bo-tree sapling was received by King Devanampiya Tissa on its ceremonial arrival from India. (*Maha. Ch. XX, 25-26*).

At the port of Jambukola, King Devanampiya Tissa ceremonially received the sacred Bo-sapling brought by Sangamitta and her retinue (246 B.C.), and conducted it in procession over a trunk road constructed from the Port to Anuradhapura. The far-sighted King commemorated the event by planting at the spot of landing, a sapling of the sacred Bo-tree and here the King erected the Pachinarama Vihara, later renovated by King Vijaya Bahu I (1055-1110 A.D.) (*Maha. XI, 23-28 ; XIX, 23-26 , LX, 20-25*).

After these events King Tissa directed his attention to Nagadipa, where he built the Vihara known by his name Tissa Maha Vihara, later renovated by King Kanitta Tissa (209-231 A.D.) The Vallipuram inscription of the reign of Vasabha (127-171) records that Piyaguka Tissa built a vihara at a site known as Badakan, possibly Vallipuram of today. Piyaguka seems to have given his name to the island on the Jaffna lagoon, now known as Pungudutivu.

The Piyangudipa of the *Mahavamsa*, this insular tract of Jaffna, has had a sacred heritage. Here dwelt a brotherhood of Bhikkus, led by the Thera Gotama. The chronicle speaks of the miraculous alms bowl filled with food — the bowl which fed the five hundred bhikkus, the King and all (*Maha. Ch. XXIV, 22 - 31*).

Dutugemunu, after his victory over Elara, felt sad "remembering that thereby was wrought the destruction of millions (of beings)." Eight arhants of Piyangudipa, were deputed to comfort the King. Appearing before the King, they announced: "We are sent by the brotherhood at Piyangudipa to comfort thee, O lord of men," and encouraged the King: "Cast away care from thy heart, O ruler of men." (*Maha. Ch. XXXV, 104-116*).

That Piyangudipa and its brotherhood of bhikkus made history, these narratives disclose. Yet another event recorded is of "the Thera Dhammadinna dwelling in Talanga who gave to twelve thousand bhikkus in Piyangudipa and then ate of it," stressed in the line "the Thera who received the food in his dish divided it among twelve thousand bhikkus in Piyangudipa and ate of it himself." (*Maha. Ch. XXXII, 52, 53 and 56*).

New light comes to us from the gold plate found at the site of the Vallipuram shrine to God Vishnu, a rare shrine in a region predominantly Saivite. The gold plate and its inscriptions have received considerable notice ever since it was first read by Parनाविताना (1938).<sup>1</sup> The latest observations are by Devendra<sup>2</sup>: "of all the ancient records no doubt the most interesting one was found at Vallipuram, one of the rare shrines dedicated to the God Vishnu to be found in the Jaffna Peninsula. This was a small gold plate of the first Christian century, the existence of which came into the knowledge of the Government epigraphist under romantic circumstances. The energy of a Buddhist monk enabled the scholar to study it and publish the results of his labours. Here was found supporting evidence too that Jaffna mainland was the Nagadipa of the pre-Christian times of Ceylon history, as well as inhabited by Sinhalese Buddhists."

To be true to the heritage of the times, sustained by Tamil literature of the day, and material objects since come to light, we may more properly say, "inhabited by Buddhists — Tamil and Sinhalese alike."

Now for a few of the salient points in the inscriptions. In the reign of King Vasabha who reigned at Anuradhapura (127-171 A.D.), Issigiriyan who ruled over Nagadipa, built the Piyangutissa Vihara at Badagara Attana. *Mahavamsa* makes no mention of Issigiriyan. He may have been one of the kinsmen of the King, sent to rule over Nagadipa (Jaffna).

An active Buddhist centre that the Island of Piyangudipa (Pungududipa), is revealed to have been in the days of Dutugemunu and earlier, the sacred Buddhist associations narrated above fall in line with the Buddhist legends sung in the Tamil epic *Manimekalai*, revealing the sacred associations of Buddhism with the region all around, reflections of which are chronicled in the *Mahavamsa*.

<sup>1</sup> *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, Vol. IV, p. 229.

<sup>2</sup> Devendra, D. T.: *Tanks and Rice*, Colombo, 1965, p. 15.

It is obvious that the Vihara took its name from Piyangu Tissa, who is honoured in the vihara known after his name, as seen in the inscription.

As for Badagara Attana, it obviously signifies nothing more than the *asthana* or site to the North. Badagara or Vadakara literally means the northern quarter, from Vadakku, Dravidian for North.

We have it also that an ancient Buddha image was found at the site "fifty years ago," and was presented by the British Governor to the King of Siam.

Continuing the chronicle, we are informed that King Mahalla Naga (196-202 A.D.), founded at Nagadipa, Salipabbata Vihara (*Maha. Ch. XXXV, 124*).

We may now extend our range beyond the confines of the Island and learn how Jaffna fared in its relations overseas. The safe roadsteads on its North Western horizon, were in the early days almost the only means of communication with the outside world. We have already referred to the port of Jambukola conspicuous in the early arrivals from North India, the communications between King Devanampiya Tissa and Emperor Asoka and the Buddha Mission bringing the sacred Bo-sapling. Jambukola is honoured by mention in the *Mahavamsa* :- "King Devanampiya Tissa did cause the whole of the road from the north gate even to Jambukola to be made ready" for the procession from the port to Anuradhapura (*Maha. Ch. XIX, 25*). Its sacred associations as the site of landing of the Bo-tree sapling invested the place with a significance of its own, kept green by occasional references in Pali and Sinhalese literature of later days.

The port that mattered more in Ceylon's relations overseas was Mahatittha, the first port to find mention in the *Mahavamsa*. Here landed from Madura the Pandyan princess who was to be the queen of Vijaya, the first king of the Sinhalese. The nearest port to South India, it was the port of entrance to arrivals from South India from the early ages. Known to the Sinhalese chronicles by the alternate names of Mahatittha and Matota, it figures in the Sangam literature by the Tamil name

of Mantai, a flourishing port from the early ages. At this port landed the Tamil colonists all through the history of the Island, as did the Tamil invaders of the Chola-Pandyan times. Boake<sup>1</sup> investigated the site as early as 1887. His conclusions convinced him that Mantai was the gateway to Ceylon from South India. The objects he recovered included copper tools and beads. Boake regarded it as a city with a long history. The site remained as Boake left it until Hocart decided to excavate it in 1925. In the brief notes Hocart has left, he described it as an excellent stratified site and anticipated what has since come true, that dating would be greatly facilitated by the discovery of coins. Shanmuganathan was the next to investigate the site in 1950 and 1951 (Paranavitana, 1951 and 1952). To judge from these excavations, it has been a city of considerable dimensions. The site of the port is a large mound of ruins from which ancient coins and beads are picked up after showers of rain.

That Mahatittha was an international port is obvious from the different types of pottery revealed at the site. Among these, is the Arretine ware of Italy, the sort of pottery which has been revealed too at the ancient site of Arikamedu, in the vicinity of Pondicherry, pottery which has been dated to about the fourth century A.D. Roman coins collected at the site leaves us in no doubt, of commercial relations between Jaffna and Rome of the early ages. Other countries represented in the antiquities thrown up at the site, are Arabia and China.<sup>2</sup>

Though Jambukola gained early reputation on its sacred Buddhist links, as already narrated, Mahatittha was not altogether omitted in Ceylon's contacts with North India. It is surmised that camouflaged under the name of Lankapattuna in Pali *Dathuvamsa*, the port at which arrived the sacred Tooth Relic, brought by the Prince and Princess of Kalinga, we have a sly reference to the port of Mahatittha.

1 Boake, W. J. S., 1887: Tiruketheeswaram, Mahatittha, Matoddam, or Mantoddai. J.R.A.S.(C.B.), Vol. X, No. 85.

2 Archaeological Survey of Ceylon, Report for 1950—Appendix I.

The ancient temple of Tiruketheeswaram now in process of reconstruction is an index to its status as a large city thickly populated from early times.

The city of Palaesimundus on a river of the same name, of which Pliny, the historian, speaks, is considered to be a reference to the city of Mantai on the river Palavi. The suffix Mundel is familiar today in such names in the vicinity as Kirimundal, Pisasu Mundal and Mundapiddi.<sup>1</sup>

That Mahatittha enjoyed its popularity until the 8th or 9th century, we may well conclude from the references to the Port in the Sinhalese chronicles and in recent writings.<sup>2</sup>

Among the sea ports on the Northern borders of Jaffna is Point Pedro, the Parutti Turai, the cotton port. The present name is a corruption of the Portuguese Pointadas Pedras "the Rocky Cape," a reflection of its rocky topography. Not far from the present resthouse stood the Baldaeus Tree, as the old tamarind tree was known, the tree under the shades of which Baldaeus, the Dutch missionary, preached Christianity. The tree perished in the cyclonic storm of 1957. Though there were talks of preserving something of its trunk as a memento of the past, nothing seems to have materialised.

1 Navaratnam, C. S.: Tamils and Ceylon, p. 249; Rasanayagam: Ancient Jaffna, pp. 101 - 102.

2 Perera, B. J.: Jambukola (Kankesanturai) and Mahatittha (Mantota) as Ports of Ceylon, C.H.J., Vol. 1 and 2—January, 1952. Shanmuganathan: Excavations at Tiruketheeswaram — 1951. Senaratne, S. P. F.: The Later Pre-history and Proto-history of Ceylon — Some Preliminary Problems — J.N.M.C., Vol. 1, Part I, March, 1965.

Vaithianathan, Sir Kanthiah: Tiruketheeswaram Papers, 1957.



## The Arya Chakravarties:

### The First Phase

FRIENDLY relations between South India and Ceylon progressed in the post-Vijayan epoch steadily contributing to the build-up of the Tamil edifice of Jaffna. With growing familiarity, the more enterprising were tempted to exploit the opportunities Ceylon offered for an adventurous career.

That the first of such enterprises should have stemmed from business relations, shows how trade spear-headed political adventurism. Sena and Guttika, sons of a trader in horses, were the first to stage an invasion of Ceylon. Coming with "a great army, they seized the Sinhalese kingdom from the reigning king, Sura Tissa (187 - 177 B.C.) and reigned together for twenty-two years (177 - 155 B.C.) justly." (*Maha. XX, 10-11*).

Elara, "a Damila of noble descent," was the next. Landing in the vicinity of Trincomalee, Elara advanced over Rajarata and seized the throne of Anuradhapura from the reigning king Asela (155 - 140 B.C.) and ruled 44 years (155 - 101 B.C.) "with even-handed justice toward friend and foe, on occasions of

disputes at law (*Maha. XXI, 13-14*)." As already narrated, the youthful prince, Duttagamini, ultimately triumphed over the ageing Elara and restored the Sinhalese monarchy.

In concluding this episode, from the fact that, as the *Mahavamsa* says, "When he had overpowered thirty-two Damila kings, Duttagamini ruled over Lanka in single sovereignty," (*Maha. XXV, 75*), we have an insight into the formidable nature of the task Duttagamini had to face to overcome the Tamil resistance.

Decades later, seven Tamils occupied Anuradhapura. Five of them, Pulahatta, Bahiya, Panayamara, Piliyamara and Dhatika, reigned in succession for a total of 14 years and seven months (44-29 B.C.). (*Maha. XXXIII, 87-61*). We are also told in "Rajavaliya" that during the reign of Vanka Nasika Tissa (168 - 171 A.D.) a Chola king descended on Ceylon and carried away 12,000 Sinhalese as slaves to work on irrigation works on the Cauvery River banks. Gajabahu I (171 - 193 A.D.), the son and successor of Tissa, avenged the outrage by invading the Chola country, redeemed the captured Sinhalese and brought to Ceylon a large number of Tamils. These are considered to have been established in a number of villages in Alutkuru Korala and got assimilated in the Sinhalese population.

This Sinhalese tradition of a counter invasion of the Chola country by Gajabahu, is not generally accepted by the South Indian historians.

Directly and indirectly these series of Tamil incursions considerably swelled the Tamil strength of North Ceylon already occupied from early ages by colonists from Tamilnad.

The trail of Tamil invasions apart, kings and leaders of factions enlisted Tamil mercenaries to fight their causes. The first of these to be chronicled was King Ila Naga (95 - 101 A.D.), who went to South India for reinforcements to assert his power over his rivals, the Lambakarnas. (*Maha. XXXV, 26 - 29*).

Later Abhayanaga (285 - 293 A.D.) did likewise, going over to "the other shore," where he recruited many Damilas, and marched to do battle with his brother, Voharika Tissa, (*Maha. XXXVI, 42-50*). A succession of six Pandyan chiefs occupied Anuradhapura in the course of the year 433 A.D. The invaders were repelled by Dhatusena (460 - 478), but dynastic rivalries



followed his death. The rightful heir, Mugallana, betook himself to India and returned with reinforcements after a stay of 18 years, and won back his kingdom from the usurper Kassapa, who ruled as king from his rock castle of Sigiriya.

Dynastic disturbances and civil strife increased during the succeeding years. Kings Silamegha Vanna (614 - 623), Agbo III (626), Datopa Tissa (628 - 641), Datopa Tissa II (650 - 658) and Manavamma (676 - 711), each in turn went over to South India for Tamil mercenaries. Manavamma, in his endeavours to keep his throne, turned to the Pallava king Narasimhavarman I, whom he helped against Pulakesin II, and was in turn helped by him to regain his throne at Anuradhapura.

While scenes such as these filled the annals of the monarchy at Anuradhapura, what was the state of Jaffna? In the ages following the dramatic entry of the Buddhist mission from India and the ceremonial coming of the Bo-tree, nothing much is known of Jaffna. It is reasonable to presume that Jaffna of these ages, was very much left to its own devices.

When Aggrabodhi died in 781 A.D., we are told the "chiefs of the districts of northern territory with the dwellers in the provinces seized the land by force and refused tribute to the king" (*Maha. XLVIII*, 83 - 85). This statement sheds light on this obscure phase of Jaffna history.

Two facts seem to stand out clear from this revealing observation — that there was no central authority in Jaffna and that the chiefs lorded it over themselves, with little or no interference from the central authority in Anuradhapura, having had an easy time of it, paying an annual tribute to the kings at Anuradhapura. Mahinda II, successor to Aggrabodhi, the chronicle continues, "crushed all the chiefs of the districts together with the dwellers in the province." This latter claim is not borne out by what happened subsequently, for the local chiefs of Jaffna gave support to the Pandyan king, Srimaravallabha (815 - 862), on his invasion of Ceylon in the reign of Sena I (846 - 868).

Tradition preserved in De Queyroz, tells us that "there seems to have been in the land a military order

of government, composed of Vidanes, Arachies and Mudaliyars." This confirms the pronouncement by "*Mahavamsa*" extracted above.

In this welter of political unsettlement, the story emerges of that much talked of romance of the time, the adventures of Uggira Simhan, adventures interpreted and misinterpreted by different writers. That the situation in North Ceylon was such that it could easily have fallen a prey to any political adventurer it is easy to see. "*Yalpana Vaipava Malai*" pictures Uggirasimhan as a prince of the dynasty of Vijaya himself. To link up Uggirasimhan with Vijaya might well have been just to give him a respectable ancestry. Whatever may have been his ancestry, there is no room to doubt his historicity, among the most lively of the traditions of Jaffna. Despite the flights of fancy which have been woven round his deeds, we may rightly accept the simple proposition of Uggirasimhan as an adventurer prince from South India, making capital out of the fluid political conditions of the time, 9th century A.D.

The Kalinga ancestry attributed to Uggirasimhan is the basis of calling the line of kings he founded, the Kalinga dynasty of kings. The dynasty founded by Uggirasimhan steadily evolved in time into the dynasty of the Arya Chakravarties. The first king to assume this title, is regarded to be Kulankai Chakravarti also known as Kalinga Arya Chakravarti. We have now come to the threshold of the line of the Arya Chakravarties.

### The Naga Era

Traditions narrated in the *Mahavamsa* and other Sinhalese chronicles, give us grounds to sustain an earlier epoch in Jaffna, preceding that of the Arya Chakravarties. In common with the ancient civilisations of the world, the legendary era of Ceylon is a transitional phase, a link between the unchronicled and the historic ages.

The *Mahavamsa* speaks of a strong Naga factor distributed in the different parts of Ceylon particularly significant in the North and South-west, ruled over by a line of Naga kings, with offshoots of the Naga over the North-west.

The *Mahavamsa* accounts present clear-cut images of the Naga kings of Ceylon, related to each other by kinship ties. Oriented to the Naga epoch of Ceylon, the Chronicle gives us colourful narrations of three visits of the Buddha to Ceylon. These legends of the three visits of the Buddha to Ceylon, are part of the Buddhist dogma of the Sinhalese. As positive reflections of the Naga traditions of Ceylon, particularly strong in the North and South-west of Ceylon, these have their import to students of history, and of the traditional culture of Ceylon.

I may here draw attention to an extension of the Naga cultural complex, further inland in the South West. I refer to the Nayimana Tamil Inscription<sup>1</sup> "The purport of the record is to register the grant by King Parakramabahu VI, of the pleasant village of Nayimana and adjacent lands to a Sattrā (Chatram) of the Devalaya, for the maintenance permanently of charity to twelve Brahmans, at the alms-hall of the Devalaya."

The first visit of the Buddha was to the wild region of North Central Ceylon, corresponding to the modern Mahiyangana, a stronghold of the ancient Yakkas and Nagas. The second visit of the Buddha was to Nagadipa, a name which the *Mahavamsa* applies to the entire Jaffna Peninsula. This visit was to settle a growing strife between the Naga King Mahodara, reigning at Nagadipa and his nephew, Culodhara, reigning at Kandamadanam, near Rameswaram, for a gem-set throne. The Buddha appeared on the scene, and seated on the throne of the Naga Kings preached a doctrine of reconciliation. As a result of this sermon, eighty *Kotis* of Nagas embraced Buddhism, in the words of the *Mahavamsa*. The third visit was to Kelaniya, at the personal invitation of Maniakkhika, the Naga King of Kelaniya.

Merged with the Sinhalese kingdom, Kelaniya progressively shed the Naga complex, though Naga traditions are a live factor of Kelaniya to this day. Nevertheless as a separate Naga kingdom, Kelaniya ceased to exist, and nothing more is heard of it in the subsequent periods. Against this silence, may be

contrasted the heritage of the Naga kingdom of Nagadipa, Jaffna Peninsula, the Manipallavam of the Tamil epic *Manimekalai*.

The past few decades have witnessed a revival of interest in the history of Jaffna. Mudaliyar C. Rasanayagam set the pace with his *Ancient Jaffna*, 1926. This and subsequent studies have given us the probability of a succession of Naga rulers. Subject to new light that may be shed in course of time in the wake of archaeological or epigraphical explorations, the studies so far done, give us a line of kings, with the Naga suffix. Such are the names, Ila Naga (95 - 101), Mahalla Naga (193 - 199), Kuja Naga (246 - 248), Kaunca Naga (243 - 244), Sri Naga I (244-263), Sri Naga (244 - 263), Abhaya Naga (285 - 293) and Sri Naga II (293-295).

As we glance at these names, it is evident that a number of them, are the same as those of the kings of Anuradhapura, as given in the *Mahavamsa*. This would seem to justify the inference that some of these kings may have been rulers of both Anuradhapura and Jaffna, pointing to an era of co-ordination of relations as of administration.

As already told, the Naga kings were succeeded by a line of kings bearing the high-sounding title of the Arya Chakravarties of Jaffna. Noted for the all-round progress of the land and its peoples for several centuries, of particular interest, is their link in the early stages with Rameswaram, a relationship which reveals the very genesis of this line of kings and in particular of the title Arya, which these kings assumed early. Rasanayagam's studies<sup>1</sup> of a few decades ago almost for the first time revealed to us that the Arya title would seem to be based on the claim of this line of kings that they are descended from two Brahmins appointed by Sri Rama, on his sojourn in Rameswaram after his encounters in Ceylon and the establishment of the Rameswaram Temple. The two Brahmins, tradition has it, exercised supreme authority over a colony of 512 Brahmins brought over from Benares and settled at Rameswaram, at the instance of Sri Rama.

<sup>1</sup> Archaeological Survey Memoirs, Vol. VI, 70-74.

<sup>1</sup> Rasanayagam, C. : *Ancient Jaffna*, Madras 1926, pp. 294-295

The tradition finds conspicuous mention in a number of poetical compositions. One of these is the astrological work, *Sekaraja Sekaran*, *Siruppayiram*. Verses 3 to 5 relevant to the present purpose, have been freely translated by Rasanayagam<sup>1</sup> in the following lines :—

“When Rama with his vast army like unto a dark ocean approached the Kandamadanam Hill, the shadow of the Rakshasa of great iniquity (Ravana), which had haunted him, vanished from his presence. Having noted this peculiar experience, he related the same to the learned Rishi (Agastya) of the Potiya hill. The latter revealed to him, the sacred importance of the place and Rama was impressed with its sacredness.”

Sri Rama thereupon established on the sacred spot the worship of Siva, and involuntarily gave the God and the sacred place his own name and sent for from Benares 512 Brahmins of the Pasupata sect well versed in the Vedas.

He gracefully directed them to officiate at the temple and invested two of them with the authority of sovereignty, granting to them the wreath of the sweet smelling *tulasi*, the title of the spotless Vedic Arya King, the beautiful parasol, the single-spiralled sacred conch and the victorious Nandi flag.

The settlement at Rameswaram of a Colony of 512 Brahmins from Benares, finds mention too in Tamil poem *Devi ula*<sup>1</sup> by Palappattadai Chokkanatha Pulavar.

These and other evidence from Tamil literature, testify to the establishment of a colony of Brahmins at Rameswaram under the administrative control of two chiefs vested with sovereign powers. To round off the picture of sovereignty, is the allusion to the royal emblems conferred on the chiefs—the parasol, the sacred conch, the flag of the sacred bull and the emblem of the *Sethu*.

<sup>1</sup> Rasanayagam, C. : *Ancient Jaffna*, Madras, 1926, pp. 294-295.

As to the first king of Jaffna who assumed this title, opinions differ. The views alternately held are that one of the kings of Jaffna married a Brahmin woman of the Rameswaram family or a Brahmin of Rameswaram married a Jaffna princess, and the descendants assumed the Arya title by virtue of the Brahmin descent. That the tradition of Brahmin descent swayed different historians, is seen from the statements of De Queyro, the historian of the Portuguese times and of Simon Casie Chetty of the Colonial days. Each speaks of matrimonial relations between a Jaffna king and a Brahmin woman of Rameswaram lineage. Casie Chetty bases his version on the traditions collected in the *Yalpana Vaipava Malai* by Mylvagana Pulavar, published in 1736. The first Arya king of Jaffna according to the latter was a Chola prince, and according to the *Kailaya Malai*, an earlier composition, a Pandyan prince.

These traditions apart, is the contemporary evidence of the Tamil poet Puhalandi of 12th century, a court poet of the Chola king, that on a visit to Kataragama in Ceylon, the poet had an audience of the King Arya Chakravarti, Singai Arya Sekaran. The King received him graciously and gave him rich presents worthy of a king. Later at the news of the death of the King the poet sings his noble qualities in eloquent verse.

The Brahminical status of the Arya Chakravarties indeed so much animated the Tamil poets that the sacred thread did not escape them, stressed in the line “Like unto the sacred thread on the breast of Sekaraja Sekaran.”

So far as the overlordship of the Arya Chakravarties over Rameswaram is concerned, an obvious pointer is the title *Sethu Kavalan* or *Sethu Kavalavan* borne by these kings and the adoption of the *Sethu* as their emblem. An illustration of this is the *Sethu* crest at the head of the inscription at Kotagama in Kegalla in Ceylon, the inscription which speaks of the encounter of the army of the King of Jaffna and Sinhalese forces commanded by the heroic Alakeswara. The *Sethu* legend is also one that occurs in Jaffna coinage of the times.

With the changing politics of the later ages and the ineffective hold of the kings of Jaffna over Rameswaram,<sup>1</sup> a new institution came into being in the year 1604, with the chief of Ramnad as the new Sethupati during the reign of Muthu Krishnappa Naik of Madura. The title Sethupati thus passed from the hands of the Jaffna king to the Raja of Ramnad.

Reminiscent of the intimate ties that subsisted over long ages between Jaffna and Rameswaram,<sup>2</sup> are these observations of Rasanayagam: "It would appear that a Pararaja Sekaran was reigning at Jaffna in 1414 A.D., for there were inscriptions on the base of the chief shrine of Rameswaram which recorded that the principle shrines there were built by Pararaja Sekaran in Saka 1336. The stones were hewn at Trincomalee, numbered on the spot ready to be put together and then transported to Rameswaram. Most of these inscriptions were either destroyed or removed and forged ones inserted during a suit between the priests and the Raja of Ramnad about 1866 A.D."

1 Rasanayagam, C.: Ancient Jaffna, Madras, 1926, pp. 284-286.

2 Rasanayagam, C.: — do — p. 366.

## The Legend of Yalpanan: the Panan Minstrel

UGGIRASIMHAN (795 A.D.), the reputed founder of the Kalinga dynasty, shifted his capital from Kadiramalai to Singai Nagar. Uggirasimhan was succeeded by Jayatunga (Jayasinga) whose reign gains in interest from the legend that the King was visited by the blind Panan minstrel, the Yalpanan of the legends. Pleased with his music, the King rewarded him by the grant of a sandy waste land.

*Vaipava Malai* calls the Panan minstrel, the blind poet Veera Raghavan. The story is one that occurs too in other folk-lore collections and poems as the *Kailaya Malai*, *Vaiyapadal*, *Trincomalee Kalvettu* and *Dakshina Kailasa Puranan*, as Rasanayagam tells us. In these legends, the Panan is not referred to by any name. In the telling and writing of it through the ages, the legend took several extravagant forms. One of these confuses the Jaffna capital Singai Nagar with Sengadagala Nagar, or Kandy; and the King, with the King of Kandy. Such extravagances apart, the core of the story, of the King of Jaffna presenting a tract of waste land to the minstrel, pleased with his singing, has come to be accepted as not devoid of historical



interest. Rasanayagam himself would seem to take it so, as may be surmised from these observations of his<sup>1</sup> :- "The Panan returned to India and probably induced some members of his tribe as impecunious as himself to accompany him to this land of promise, and it is believed that their place of settlement was that part of the city of Jaffna which is known at present as Pasiyur and Karaiyur, settlements in remembrance of the lutist Yalpanan. Coming to be so known to the mariners and traders who called at the ports close by, it would have lent its name in course of time, particularly among such strangers, to the chief town and ultimately to the district itself." But the name did not become popular among the inhabitants of Jaffna until the Portuguese built the town close to the Panan settlement and called it Jaffnapatam and the English called it Jaffna. To the man of the place "Jaffna town is still Pattinam" in the words of Paul E. Pieris,<sup>2</sup> who observes too that "the Portuguese settlement is 'Parangi Teru' in Vannarponnai."

The name Yalpanam<sup>3</sup> or Yalpanapattinam, gains in prestige in its occurrence in literature, as in the *Kokila Sandesaya*, a Sinhalese *Sandesa Kavya* of the middle fifteenth century, in which it is referred to under the name Yapapatuna :

"Enter thou, Yapapatuna, graced with stately buildings  
Emblazoned with golden flags;  
Gems and stones shedding brilliance transplendent,  
In charm and splendour vying with Vaishravana's City,  
Alakamanda."

The name also appears in certain Tamil inscriptions, as in a copper plate grant of Hiranya Garbhayaji Raghunatha Setupati Katta Tevar of Saka 1607 (Arch. Survey of South India, Vol. IV).

1 Rasanayagam, C.: *Ancient Jaffna*, Madras, 1926, p. 248.

2 Pieris, Paul: *The Kingdom of Jaffnapattinam*, 1645; London, 1920, p. 35.

3 Though other suggestions have been advanced in the derivation of the name Yalpanam, the simplest and the most direct is the derivation from Yalpanan, the Panan minstrel with the yal.

Whether the blind minstrel ever ruled as king or not, is not material. There is no justification to import any idea of sovereignty into the name and there is no evidence that he ever reigned as king.

The blind Panan may rightly be viewed as symbolic of an era of progressive infiltration of peoples from South India to North Jaffna. The story of early colonisations has been a favourite subject of Tamil poets of the middle ages of Jaffna. Among the more complete of these poetical compositions that have come down to us, stands *Vaiya Padal* by Vaiyapuri Aiyar, the court bard of King Segarajasekharan (1519 - 1565). The poem is outstanding for the first account it gives of the innumerable hosts of peoples who swarmed into North Ceylon. A vast assortment of peoples finds enumeration in this poem. Representatives of the wandering minstrel, of the tribe of our blind Panan with the Yal, are :

"Flutists, cymbal players and drummers,  
Players on Vanka and other reputed instruments."

The Panan today is a small group fast dying out, of physicians, singers and exorcists, mainly engaged in conducting the Naga cult in the Naga shrines of Southern Kerala.

In the colonisation of Jaffna, three main stages may be discerned. The earliest of these stemmed from almost all over Tamilakam, a name that signified the Tamil lands of peninsular India which included most of what is Kerala today. This phase of immigration may be traced to the early centuries of the Christian era. As already stated our main source of knowledge of this, the first well marked immigration movement, is the poem *Vaiya Padal*.

The next big event in the colonisation of North Ceylon, was the coming of the Vanniyar Chiefs and their retinue at different periods of the Chola and Pandya kingdoms of South India. Their first arrival centres round the epic recounted already of Marutapiravika Valli, a Chola Princess, who was on a pilgrimage to Keerimalai by the margin of the sea. The purpose of the pilgrimage was her resolve to get rid of her congenital horseface, by bathing in the holy waters of the sacred *tirtha* of Keerimalai,

still valued for its curative virtues. Her deformity steadily vanished. In grateful remembrance, she built at the site the temple which stands today, the Temple of Mavittapuram, literally the place where the horseface disappeared, as already narrated.

Uggirasimhan, a Kalinga Prince who happened to be in North Ceylon at this time evidently on an adventurous career, fell in love with her and married her. Vara Raja Simhan, the son born to the union, in fullness of time sent for a princess from Madura, to be his wife. The princess duly arrived, accompanied by a retinue of sixty Vanniyar chiefs, an event ascribed to about 3000 of the Kaliyuga Era. This was the prelude to a wave of immigrations. The King of Madura himself presently arrived and with him came a number of Vanniyar colonists.

At this stage another element entered Jaffna. This was the Mukkuvar, under their chief Vedi Arasan. Confronted by these new arrivals, the Vanniyar organised themselves into well-knit settlements.

Yet another wave of Vanniyar colonists accompanied Kulakkodan, the Chola chief on his pilgrimage to Tiruconamalai. This in brief sums up the story of the Vanniyar colonisation.

We now come to the Colonisation in historical times. This more or less, synchronised with the break up of the Chola and Pandyan kingdoms, merging themselves in the Vijayanagar empire. This in turn succumbed to the dominance of the Muhammadan power in 1605. Of the reaction of this on the neighbouring Ceylon, Rasanayagam<sup>1</sup> observes:— "In times such as these, many respectable Vellala families may have emigrated to Ceylon. Some of these settled in Jaffna and others sought refuge under Sinhalese kings and having accepted positions of honour and trust, became the progenitors of some of the most respectable Vellala families of the South of Ceylon. Such a migration of Vellala chieftains is highly probable and there are hundreds of families in different parts of the Jaffna peninsula who trace their descent from one or other of these colonists."

<sup>1</sup> Rasanayagam, C.: *Ancient Jaffna*, 1926, pp. 335 - 336.

## The Arya Chakravarties:

### The later period

THE chronology of the Arya dynasty of Kings in its early stages, is obscure. During the occupation of Ceylon by the Chola, first half of the 11th century, Jaffna rulers were but reflections of the sovereignty of the Chola kings. The relations of Ceylon with the royal dynasties of South India, the Chola, Pandya and the Vijayanagar, are major events in Jaffna politics, separately narrated further on.

Vijayabahu I (1070-1114), the liberator of the Sinhalese monarchy, married a princess of the Kalinga dynasty, Thilokasundari,<sup>1</sup> and this brought about closer social contacts with Polonnaruwa. With Parakramabahu I (1153-1186), taking up the reins of administration at Polonnaruwa, Jaffna became subsidiary to his overlordship. This was an obvious corollary to his Tamil descent, apart from his own personal gifts as a ruler. In passing, the kinship relations may here be mentioned

<sup>1</sup> "The charming young Princess of the Royal family of Kalinga," *Cul.* 59, V. 29-30.



in brief.<sup>1</sup> Mitta, the sister of Vijayabahu I, was given in marriage to a Pandyan Prince. Manabharana, Kitti Siri Megha and Sri Vallabha are the three sons by this union. Parakramabahu is the son of Manabharana and Ratnavali, daughter of Vijayabahu and his Tamil queen, Thilokasundari. Parakramabahu I thus coming of Tamil lineage, easily ingratiated himself to the Tamils of Jaffna. Sri Vallabha, the uncle of Parakramabahu, exercised authority in Jaffna in the name of the king.

The next monarch who exercised kingship over Jaffna was Kalinga Magha.<sup>2</sup> Jaffna chronicles refer to him as King of Jaffna under the name of Kalinga Vijayabahu or Singai Aryan (1215-1240). The *Pujavali* and the *Culavamsa* also rightly refer to Magha of Kalinga as a Tamil king. Gnanaprakasara clarifies that the name Kulankai Vijayabahu of the *Yalpana Vaipava Malai*, is very likely a misreading of Vijaya Kalinga Chakravarti. The latter was followed by Kulasekara Singai Aryan (1240-1256) under the throne name of Segarajasekaran. He was succeeded by his son Kulotunga Segarajasekaran (1256-1279). In general, the Arya Chakravarties were patrons of Tamil literature. The rule of Kulotunga Segaraja, is marked by the visit of a blind Vellala poet, Andakakavi Vira Raghavan Mudaliyar. The king gave him royal gifts. The work he composed during this visit, *Arurula*, is reputed to have become a standard work. The main political event of his reign was the dispute that arose over the rights to the Pearl Fishery at Mannar between the Arya Chakravarti and King Bhuvanabahu I (1273-1284), differences which led to a resort to arms. In the developments that followed in the wake of these antagonistic relations, the name figures prominently of Kulasekara, the Pandyan King (1268-1309) who interceded on behalf of the Sinhalese. This and other related matters, complicated by the version of the *Culavamsa* (90 : 43-47) which gives a different colour to the entire episode, are separately dealt with in the chapter, Ceylon and the South Indian Royal Dynasties.

1 "He (the king) fetched the Pandu king who came of an unblemished line, and wedded him his Royal sister Mitta by name. She bore him three sons, Manabharana, Kittisirimegha and Srivallabha. To Manabharana he gave his daughter Ratnavali," *Cul. Ch.* 59 : 49 - 51.

2 *Culavamsa*. Ch. 80, pp. 132 - 134, Vol. II.

Kulotunga was succeeded by his son, Vikrama Singai Aryan (1278-1302), known by the titular name of Pararajasekaran. The reign is noteworthy for the visit about 1293 of Marco Polo. In the account of his travels, Marco Polo refers to the King of Ceylon as Sandemain, who it is conjectured could not have been any other than the King of Jaffna, Singai Aryan.

His son, Varothaya Singai Aryan (1302-1325), succeeded assuming the name Segarajasekaran. His reign is significant for the first of the Jaffna Pandya relations, with Sundara Pandya soliciting aid of the Jaffna king against his rival Vira Pandya, events related in a subsequent chapter.

When Varothaya was away in India, the Vanniyar chiefs rose in revolt, a rebellion quelled on the King's return to Jaffna. A man of letters himself, the period of Varothaya Singai is conspicuous for his encouragement of Tamil arts and literature. He founded an Assembly of Poets, an institution which was in later years of value to the advancement of Tamil culture.

Varothaya was succeeded by his son, Marthanda Singai Aryan (1325-1348), under the name of Pararajasekaran. Conspicuous in Jaffna history, is the visit to his court in 1344 of the Arab traveller, the scholar pilgrim, Ibn Batuta,<sup>1</sup> on his way to Adam's Peak. The testimony he has left in his writings is rightly valued for the status it discloses of the sovereignty of the Arya Chakravarti: "The king of Ceylon Arya Sakarti by name has considerable forces by sea. When I was first admitted to his presence he rose and received me honourably and said: "You are my guest for three days. Security shall be provided to the people of the ship, because your relation, the King of Malabar, is my friend." After thanking him I remained with him and was treated with increasing respect."

For the earlier ages, the 9th and 10th centuries, we have the testimony of a number of other Muhammadan pilgrims to Adam's Peak, travellers who have left their own impressions. Among these are Suleiman and Abu Zaid, who speak of two

1 The *Rehla* of Ibn Batuta ; Translation and Commentary by Mahdi Hussain, Gaikwad's Oriental Series, No. C. XXII. Baroda, 1953, pp. 217 ff.

kings in Ceylon, one of whom was the ruler of an island called Zapage. Masudi, another pilgrim, refers to a Maharaja of Zabedez, another version obviously of Zapage, referring to Yalpannam.<sup>1</sup>

Marthanda Singai was succeeded by his son Gunapooshana Singai Aryan (1348-1371), who favoured the title Segarajasekaran. His reign is noteworthy for the visit of the Italian John de Marignoli who spent some time in Jaffna on his way to China. Jaffna of the days is considered to have been administered by the Queen Mother, Regent for her minor son, Gunapooshana. His reign witnessed remarkable progress in the country in the field of agriculture and education. The Vanniyars who rose in revolt during the period were subdued, with the aid of the Vanniyar Chief of Omuntai who was rewarded by elevation to the position of the first chieftain of the Vanni.

Varothaya Singai was succeeded by his son, Jayaweera, under the name of Segarajasekaran. His reign witnessed the greatest challenge to the Kingdom of Jaffna, whose growing power found resistance from Kotte, which from now on steadily rose to be the chief Sinhala ascendance. The immediate cause of action between Alagakkonara, the power behind the throne at Kotte, and the Arya Chakravarti arose over the payment of tribute which Jaffna claimed from the time of the arbitration by King Kulasekkara Pandya, in the dispute between King

Bhuvanaka Bahu I and the Arya Chakravarti recounted already. Conscious of his growing strength, Alagakkonara, the chronicles tell us, did not hesitate to capture the emissaries of the Arya Chakravarti, sent to collect tribute, and had them hung up. Hostilities ensued. "Kindled with rage," Arya Chakravarti sent his powerful army reinforced by troops from Chola by land and sea. The division overland was by Matale to Gampola and the division by sea made for Negombo, Colombo and Panadura. Both sides claimed victory. According to *Rajavaliya*, Alagakkonara met the Tamil forces at Gorakana and Dematagoda, and burned their ships at Panadura. A record of obvious interest is the inscription discovered at Kotagama by Bell which purposes to eulogise the Aryan King in the course of an expedition against the Sinhalese King in the 14th century. The inscription which is in Tamil reads :

கங்கணம் வெற் கண்ணினையாற் காட்டினார் காமர் வளைப்  
பங்கயக்கை மேற்றிலதம் பாரித்தார் பொங்கொலிநீர்ச்  
சிங்கை நகராரியனைச் சேரா வனுரேசர்  
தங்கள் மடமாதர் தாம்.

translated in these words : <sup>1</sup>

"The innocent women-folk of the chiefs of Anuradhapura who did not submit to Aryan of Singai Nagar of foaming and resounding waters, shed a flood of tears from their glinting pair of eyes and performed the funeral rites (to their deceased husbands) by pouring water on gingelly seed placed on the palms of their bejewelled lotus-like hands."

The general political situation is summed up by Codrington in the words, "there can be little doubt that the Jaffna Kingdom was for a time paramount in the Low Country."<sup>2</sup>

Political events in Kotte took a dramatic turn with the coming into power of Parakramabahu VI (1415-1467), the king who brought all Ceylon under one umbrella. At the head of the army he placed the valiant prince known to Jaffna as Sembaha Perumal, and to the Sinhalese annals as Sapumal

<sup>1</sup> Among the earlier chronicles we have the account by Cosmas who sums up Ceylon and its historical background of the days of the Arya Chakravarties in these words : "It is a great Island of the ocean lying in the Indian sea called Serendib by the Indians but Taprobane by the Greeks. The stone, the hyacinth, is found in it; it lies beyond the pepper country. Around it there are a multitude of exceedingly small islets, all containing fresh water and coconut palms. These (islands) lie as close as possible together. The great island itself according to the accounts of its inhabitants is three hundred gaudia or nine hundred miles long and as many in breadth.

There are two kings ruling at opposite ends of the Island, one of whom possesses the hyacinth and the other the district in which are the port and the emporium, for the emporium in that place is the greatest in these parts . . . . The natives and their kings are of different races. The temples are numerous and in one in particular, situated on an eminence is the great hyacinth as large as a pine cone, the colour of the fire and flashing from a distance especially when catching the beams of the sun, a matchless sight."

Tennent, E., Ceylon, page 197.

<sup>1</sup> Bell, H. C. P. : Report on the Kegalla District, p. 85 ; and Navaratnam, C. S. : *Tamils and Ceylon*, pp. 132 - 133.

<sup>2</sup> Codrington, H. W. : *The Gampola Period of Ceylon History*, J. R. A. S. (C. B.), No. XXXII No. 86, 1933.

Kumaraya. Sembaham and Sapumal are the Tamil and Sinhalese terms respectively for the same flower.

Intolerant of the independence of the Jaffna Arya Chakravarti, the king sent two expeditions against Jaffna with injunctions conveyed through Sapumal Kumaraya. The *Rajavaliya*<sup>1</sup> pictures the situation in these words: "He (King Parakramabahu) considers it unseemly that the Arya Chakravarti should exercise kingly power in Lanka. He thereupon issued pay to the great army and despatched it with the Senanayaka Sapu Kumaraya. This destroyed several towns belonging to Yapapattuna and returned again to the capital. A second time the great army was collected and despatched with the Pannikkis and Walimuni people of the two Konnakkara castes. The forces which were encamped at various ports were repulsed and the Senanayaka Sapu Kumaraya mounted on his sable steed led the great army within Yapapattuna Nuwara. After this he captured the Aryas there in nets like to a herd of deer and won for himself the name of Arya Vettayarum Perumal. Taking with him a vast treasure, arms, elephants and horses, he appeared before Parakramabahu Maharaja." King Parakramabahu VI, passed away after a reign of 52 years and was succeeded by Sapumal Kumaraya, who in 1450 marched upon Jaffna at the head of his army and seized the throne of the Arya Chakravarti under the name of Bhuvaneka Bahu.

Jaffna's independent existence thus experienced for the first time, a rude shock. In the process of the military exploits, the capital Singai Nagar was a mass of ruins. The new ruler thereupon lost no time to build a new capital, Nallur, literally the new town, glories of which are reflected today. The city thus founded filled its role as the capital of Jaffna from 1450, until replaced by the modern town of Jaffnapattanam by the Portuguese in 1620. Though speculation has been rife over Nallur, evidence is overwhelming that the city, as the capital of the Kingdom arose on the occupation of Jaffna by Sapumal

Kumaraya, who assumed kingship under the name of Bhuvanekabahu. In the Sinhalese poem *Kokila Sandesaya*<sup>1</sup> of the 15th century, which commemorates the Sinhalese conquest, the city is featured under the name Yappa patuna, a poetical version of the Tamil Yalpana Patinam. That the name of the conqueror of Jaffna, finds a place in the *Kattiyam* chanted during the festival days at the Nallur Kandaswamy temple, is yet another positive testimony, of its foundation by King Bhuvanekabahu.

The Arya Chakravarti who was thus overthrown by Bhuvanekabahu, was Kanagasuriya Singai Arya. For a period of 17 years, from 1450 to 1467, the latter balanced his life between dedication to spiritual causes on the one side and preparations for regaining his throne on the other. Confident of his striking might after a long period of military strategy, Singai Aryan led his army with the reinforcements from South India and marched to the capital. Entering Nallur by its western gate, the Sinhalese ruler was taken by surprise. Vigorous fighting ensued. Well trained in military tactics, Pararajasekaran, the eldest son of Arya Chakravarti, showed both skill and mettle and inflicted a telling defeat on the Sinhalese forces and regained the kingdom of Jaffna. The line of Arya Chakravarties interrupted for a period of seventeen years, was thus re-established and continued in power for another long spell of rule, of a century and a half, until finally overpowered by the Portuguese in 1620.

King Kanagasuriya Singai Aryan (1467-1478), after his victory and reinstatement retired in time, handing over the kingdom to his son, Pararajasekaran (1468-1579). The new king in his new capital Nallur, interested himself in matters spiritual, and is remembered for his services to Saivism. He built three new temples at Nallur. One of them is the Veerakali Amman Temple, a temple which gained prominence in the political events of the later days, as will be revealed in its place as we proceed.

The period of his reign is noteworthy too for cultural advancement, the foundations for which were laid by the King's

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by : Paul E. Pieris in *The Portuguese Era*, Vol. I, pp. 22 - 28.

<sup>1</sup> Perera, P. S. : *Kokila Sandesaya*, Colombo, 1906.

brother, Segarajasekaran, who revived the Tamil Assembly of Poets. Scholars of repute were recruited from South India and manuscripts collected and published. A great library was established at Nallur—the Saraswati Mahal Alayam. All this stimulated popular interest in Tamil literature. Two outstanding contributions of this period are the translation into Tamil of the Sanskrit classic *Raghuvamsam*, and the writing of *Pararajasegaran Ula*, a chronicle of Jaffna.

A tangled web of events followed in the reign of his successor, Sangili Segarajasekaran, who ascended the throne, overpowering and getting rid of his two elder brothers, the Crown Prince, Sinha Bahu and Paranirupasingam. How history shaped the destinities of Jaffna in the time of Sangily and his successors, and ushered in an altogether new era, will become clear when we follow the course of events which brought the closing phase of the Arya Chakravarties<sup>1</sup> into conflict with the Portuguese—the first of the Europeans to play their several roles on the chessboard of Ceylon politics—narrated in its place further on.

Here let us pause awhile to take a short survey of the ancient capitals of Jaffna from the past to present times, and also to review the relations of Ceylon with her South Indian neighbours, the Chola, the Pandya and the Vijayanagar royal dynasties.

<sup>1</sup> An interesting dissertation on the Arya Chakravarties will be found in "The History of Ceylon," (University of Ceylon, 1959-1960), Volume 1, Part 2, Book 5, Chapter 5, "The Northern Kingdom", by S. Natesan.

## The Capitals of Jaffna

RESEARCHES on the probable capital of the Naga line of kings of Jaffna, favour the present village of Kantharodai as the site of the Naga capital of Jaffna. Paul E. Pieris,<sup>1</sup> who carried out a series of explorations of the site in 1918 and 1919, has left an account of the glories of Kantharodai. Among the antiquities unearthed are a collection of coins both of the punch-marked and other types, pieces of statuary, remains of a flourishing industry in Chank, and a number of copper rods, with smooth rounded ends, not unlike the collyrium rods obtained from pre-Dynastic Egypt and other ancient sites. These antiquities are an index to the richness of the region and the standard of life of the people of the age. Specific mention has already been made, of the village of Kantharodai, and what it signifies in the chronicle of Ancient Jaffna. Memories of the past are still evident today, as it struck me on my first visit to the place about a decade ago. Roman coins are occasionally picked up on the site after a shower of rain.

<sup>1</sup> Pieris, Paul E.: Nagadipa and Buddhist Remains in Jaffna, J.R.A.S. (C.B.), Vol. XXVIII, No. 12, p. 65.



Kantharodai, nevertheless was not its original name. Its earlier name is considered to have been Kadirmalai.

More prominent in the annals of Jaffna of the age are the two seaport towns, Jambukola, and Matota. Whether as centres of commercial activity or of contacts with the world outside, these two cities enjoyed a long reputation as already narrated.

At Mahatittha arrived in the 4th century A.D., the Kalinga prince and his wife disguised as pilgrims, with the sacred Tooth Relic from India, during the reign of the Sinhalese king, Kirti Sri Mevan. The numerous Hindu temples in the region around bear witness to its status as a popular settlement. The more significant of these shrines today is the Tiruketheeswaram Temple. A great emporium of trade, the port maintained its importance as the main sea port of Ceylon until about the 8th or 9th century A.D.

Much of its past remains obscure. What the site has yet to reveal is the note on which Pridham<sup>1</sup> the historian of the British Colonial days, ends his account of the port: "The whole district of Mantota (Mahatottam — Great Garden) is surrounded with a halo of interest for the antiquary, and it is far from improbable that measures that cannot but fail to be taken sooner or later, to restore the former fertility to the neglected but very capable district, may evoke some relics of the past, to elucidate what is now shrouded in mystery." This wish has yet to materialize. Surface studies, whatever their dimensions, or literary compositions, however helpful, cannot give us an adequate knowledge of the past, until ancient sites are excavated and reveal what now lies submerged.

At this stage, we may pass on to another name, a name which has very much coloured Ceylon history. I refer to the rather elusive city of Tamraparni, of the location of which nobody seems to agree. *Mahavamsa* leads with the colourful remarks that Vijaya and his men "came to Lankadipa when they disembarked and went ashore.... The red coloured dust

of the ground covered their palms and hands; hence the name of the place was called Tamba panni (copper coloured). Tamba panni was the most excellent town in the most excellent Lankadipa."

Speculations over the place of the landing of Vijaya have ranged from North Ceylon to the South, at the mouth of the Kirinda Oya by the side of the present Kataragama, the main seat of the God Kadira in Ceylon, and over the West coast, close to the present town of Puttalam. If red coloured dust is the criterion, many a site will fit in with the idea, as Ceylon soil is largely lateritic, particularly over the coast.

Tamraparni indeed has had a classical lustre of its own, apart from its bearing on the history of Ceylon. Kautilya in his *Arthasastra* speaks of the pearls of the Tambraparni river of the Pandyan country, the river that flows through the plains of the district of Tinnevely. It may here be mentioned in passing that on the banks of this river stands the ancient village of Adichanallur. Excavations carried out by Rea of the Archaeological Survey, have disclosed the area as an extensive pre-historic settlement. The objects excavated range from stone artifacts to urn burials. A significant discovery at Pomparippu<sup>1</sup> on the Puttalam-Marichukkaddi Road, of West Ceylon, discloses urn burials of the same type, as those of Adichanallur, an interesting pre-historic link with South India.

The name Tambapanni finds mention too in the Asokan Edicts of the 3rd century B.C. Asoka no doubt adopted a name with a long reputation as the classical name of the Island of Ceylon. Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador at the Court of Chandragupta (322 - 296 B.C.), uses the name Taprobane for Ceylon. The name, it is obvious, has had a wide usage in the ancient annals, little related to the "red hand" symbolism of the *Mahavamsa*. Milton in his '*Paradise Regained*' has but recalled a classical halo in the line, "from Hellespont to the utmost Indian isle Taprobane."

<sup>1</sup> Pridham, Charles : Ceylon and Its Dependencies, London, 1949, Vol. II, pp. 499, 500

<sup>1</sup> Archaeological Investigations near Pomparippu : *Ceylon Today*, Information Department, November, 1956, pp. 13 - 15.



It seems obvious that the name Tambraparni and its various forms, signified the whole Island and not any particular city that Vijaya founded as *Mahavamsa* presents it. If too literal an interpretation is not imported into the context, it may well be that after reaching Tambraparni, the Island of Ceylon, Vijaya in due course founded a city and called it Tambraparni, wherever its location might have been, and whether spread over with copper coloured dust or not.

To resume our enquiry into the capitals of Jaffna. Following the era of Naga kings, Uggira Simhan establishing himself over Jaffna from the 8th century A.D., shifted his capital from Kadiramalai (Kantharodai) to Singainagar, alternatively known as Singapura, on the maritime region of the east coast, which from now on developed into a vigorous social and commercial centre with contacts with south eastern lands of the Coromandel coast of South India. Reminiscent evidently of these relations are the existing village sites, notably Kovalam and Nagarcoil, places of the same name in Travancore.

Singainagar continued to be the capital of the Arya Chakravarties for long ages. The sands all over the sea margin here are strewn with debris and structural remains. This not a little intrigued me at the time of my first tour of the area on my way to the shrine of Nagarcoil. Locally known as the Naga-tambiran kovil, its precincts are left to the wilds befitting its association with the Naga. The coastal region awaits systematic excavations to reveal to us what lies underneath the surface. Among the other sites on this coast are the villages of Ambana, Kudarappu, Chempian Pattu, Mulliyan, Vettilai Kerni and Vallipuram, the latter noted for its shrine dedicated to God Vishnu. Antiquities have been unearthed over the region by Paul Pieris and others. A significant find was the one discovered at Vallipuram in 1846<sup>1</sup> of a large hoard of about 7000 coins and gold jewellery enclosed in a glazed jar deposited at the foot of a human interment. On the finger bones was a ring.

<sup>1</sup> Stark, Hon. Mr. Justice: "Some of the Coins, Ancient and Modern of Ceylon" J.R.A.S. (C.B.), Vol. 1, 1847-48, No. 3, p. 158; Navaratnam, C. S.: *Tamils and Ceylon, Jaffna*, 1958, p. 98.

These remains have all the characters of a consecration and ceremonial burial, of an important personage, perhaps a local chief interred with his hoarded wealth.

Singainagar flourished as the capital of the kingdom until replaced by Nallur from 1450 as already narrated.

The antiquities excavated at the ancestral sites in the Jaffna peninsula are so objective an index to the life and culture of the peoples of this ancient land, that herein I append a list as complete as possible, of the antiquities<sup>1</sup> that have come to light in the course of the past few decades and exhibited in the galleries of the Jaffna National Museum.

The finds are significant reflecting as they do, the life and culture of the age and await studies in all their bearings. A number of these go back to a period of time when Jaffna traded with Rome and other lands overseas. In this regard the discoveries have a correlation with similar finds on the Malabar and Coromandel coasts and elsewhere in South India.

<sup>1</sup> Excluding the antiquities excavated at Kantharodai and elsewhere during the past three years. These await fuller study.

**Antiquities from sites in Jaffna in the Collection  
of the Jaffna National Museum**

<i>Site</i>	<i>Antiquities</i>
Tiruketheeswaram	— Stone sculpture of five-hooded Naga, 6th century A.D.
Mannar	— Stone bath and stand, 8th century A.D.
Kantharodai	— One stone linga with a circular pedestal, 6th century A.D.
"	— One stone slab of Buddhist railing in limestone, 6th century A.D.
"	— One cubical limestone sculpture of Buddhist railing, 6th century A.D.
"	— One stone slab with frieze in floral design, granite, 6th century A.D.
"	— Three coping stones in limestone, 6th century A.D.
"	— One octagonal pillar in limestone.
"	— Two relic boxes in limestone.
"	— Ten conical finials in limestone. Average size: 2 ft., 6th century A.D.
"	— One coral stone stupa.
"	— One figure of Buddha standing, in limestone — head missing, 6th century A.D.
"	— One Buddha figure in limestone — headless, 3 ft. 6 ins. high.
"	— (Anganamai Kadavai) — Limestone sculpture showing feet with anklets.
"	— One stone pillar with inscription in Sinhalese, 5th century A.D.
"	— One stone pillar with a statue of lion, 6th century A.D.
Paranthan	— One figure of standing Buddha in limestone, without head and hands, 6 ft. high. From Murasumuttai.

Putthur	— One damaged statue of seated Buddha in limestone, head severed from the body and hands broken. Near the tidal well, Nilavarai.
Kantharodai	— One limestone head, probably of Bodhisathva.
"	— One phallic stone pillar in limestone, height 11 ins., circumference 18 ins.
"	— One phallic pillar in limestone, about 2½ ft. high.
Nallur	— One stone sculpture of Saniswaran, Saturn, on a Crow vahana, 13th century A.D.
"	— Siva as Dakshinamurthi, in granite, with dwarf Muyalagan under the feet, 11th-13th century A.D.
"	— Mahalakshmi on Makara, in granite, under a thiruvasi, 11th - 13th century A.D.
"	— Karthikeya in granite on peacock vahana facing left (unusual), 11th - 13th century A.D.
"	— Figure of Valli in granite, 11th - 13th century A.D.
"	— Thevani, consort of Muruga, in granite 11th - 13th century A.D.
Kayts	— Image of Lakshmi, gold-plated, 11th century A.D., 2½ ins. high — discovered at Naranthanai — found under a huge stone with silver Chola coins of Rajaraja.

## Jaffna and the Portuguese

THE closing phase of the era of the Arya Chakravarties, saw the Portuguese spreading their tentacles over Jaffna. The Chronicle of the times shows an inter-linking of the political situation over the North and South of Ceylon. The three major factors that occupied the state of Ceylon politics were the Arya-chakravarties of Jaffna, the Sinhalese monarchy centred in the Capital of Kotte (Jayawardhanapura, Kotte) with two powerful militant kinsmen at Rayigam and Sitawaka, and the Portuguese cleverly manoeuvring the political chessboard to their benefit entrenched in their stronghold in Ceylon.

More than elsewhere in Ceylon, the conversion zeal of the Portuguese spearheaded their territorial expansion over Tamil Jaffna. The founding of the Society of Jesus in 1540, set the pace for the propagation of the Catholic faith over the East. Among the earliest to be converted were the Paravar (the Bharatavar) of the South Coromandel fishing coast. This was the prelude to the mass conversion of the people of the island of Mannar on the other side of the Palk Strait. News reached the King Segarajasekaran VII of Jaffna, more familiarly known to history as Sankili. The king did not hesitate to order the massacre of the new converts, and large numbers were put to

the sword, the Martyrs of Mannar, estimated at about 600. A crime against humanity, it was also a breach of the terms of agreement which Sankili had earlier come to with the Portuguese, promising facilities for religious propagation and accepting the Portuguese overlordship of Jaffna with the stipulation to pay tribute to Portugal. Smarting under this humiliation, the Portuguese planned retribution which nevertheless could not be carried out, pre-occupied as they were in the South. It was not until fifteen years later, in 1560, that an expedition set out to Mannar commanded by Constantine de Braganza, who seized and occupied Mannar in the name of the King of Portugal. Sankili fled to Valli, pursued by the Portuguese. Sankili sued for peace and accepted the terms of surrender, payment of tribute and freedom of missionary propaganda.

For reasons of security, the Portuguese stationed a garrison in Jaffna. The soldiers soon ran amok, oppressing and committing crimes. Exasperated at their misdeeds the people attacked the garrison, and the soldiers to save themselves fled to Mannar.

Meantime the situation up South took a dramatic turn. The death of King Bhuvanakabahu VII, the weak King of Kotte sparked off a series of skirmishes between the Portuguese and Vidiya Bandara, the Regent to the infant King Dharmapala. Vidiya Bandara fell into the hands of the Portuguese and was kept a close prisoner. Escaping from restraint, cleverly rescued by his valiant wife Samudra Devi, Vidiya Bandara fled in hot haste to the Court of Sankili in Jaffna. Sankili gave him a warm welcome. In the midst of the rejoicings held to celebrate and mark the occasion, an ammunition dump in the vicinity mysteriously exploded and in the skirmish Vidiya Bandara lost his life.

Sankili's tyrannous rule ended with his death, about 1565. Kasi Nayinar seized the kingship. He was as bad as Sankili and the Portuguese, it is said, had Kasi Nayinar poisoned, and Periya Pulle lifted to the throne, loyally agreeing to the Portuguese terms of the payment of tribute and freedom to spread Catholicism. Periya Pulle enjoyed but a brief spell and Puviraja Pandaram, an adventurer, seized the throne from Periya Pulle and resisted the Portuguese. The

latter made short work of him and he was put to death in 1591. The Portuguese summoned a meeting of the people at Nallur, the Convention of Nallur, 1591. General Furtado got the people to consent to accept the King of Portugal as their supreme head in return for the maintenance of peace and order. A nominal ruler was chosen in the person of Edirmana Singam, son of Periya Pulle. Rival claims to the regency resulted in civil war. The Portuguese met the situation by deposing Edirmana Singam who was replaced by another Sankili. The latter promptly violated the terms of the payment of tribute and the promised freedom of propagation of Catholicism. Captain General Constantine de Sa, lost no time to retrieve the situation. An expedition under Philip de Oliveria was sent to Jaffna to subdue Sankili, who was duly brought a prisoner to Colombo.

Portuguese operations were strengthened by deputation of Luiz Tiexeira. The combined forces terrorised Jaffna. Captain General Constantine de Sa now took a decisive step and once for all terminated in 1620 the face-saving device of a nominal king. The kingdom of Jaffna was thus annexed to Portugal, 1620.

Thus ended the dynasty of the Arya Chakravarties of Jaffna, who, despite formidable obstacles, preserved the integrity of Tamil society and culture for long ages and defended the homelands of the Ceylon Tamil against the incursions of the Portuguese.

Meanwhile over the political horizon appeared a rival altogether new. The Dutch had already endeared themselves to the Court of the King of Kandy, who by now had gained ascendancy over the rest of the Sinhalese chieftains.

Alarmed at the move of the Dutch to gain control of the harbour of Trincomalee, with the connivance of King Senerat, Constantine de Sa hastened to fortify the harbour. To make way for the fortifications, the sacred shrine on the top of the hill was razed to the ground. De Sa equipped the fort with artillery and left for Colombo, leaving a strong garrison to guard the fort. Raja Singhe who succeeded Senerat as King was quick to offer the Hollanders facilities and trade monopoly if

they would come to his aid against the Portuguese. The assistance was readily given and in a series of engagements the resisting Portuguese forces were overwhelmed. The combined Sinhalese and Dutch forces now attacked the Portuguese garrison at Trincomalee and the garrison surrendered to the Dutch.

Early 1658, Ryckloff Van Goens with a powerful flotilla of ships anchored off Trincomalee and subdued the Portuguese settlements over the fishing coast. Later, a combined force of Dutch and Sinhalese from Colombo landed in Mannar. The Portuguese forces either crossed over to India or fled to Jaffna. The Hollanders now followed up their success and advanced on to Jaffna. On the 20th March the attack began on the Portuguese entrenched inside the Fort. The besieged Portuguese held out grimly for three months. Realising the futility of further resistance they gave up the resistance. On 22nd June, 1658, the garrison surrendered. The next day the Dutch held a thanksgiving service to the Almighty God within the Portuguese Church of Our Lady of Miracles.

With no hope of retrieving their lost position either in India or in Ceylon, the Portuguese acknowledged defeat on all fronts. Don Philip Mascarenhas was deputed to wind up their interests in Ceylon. Thus ended the Portuguese domination of Ceylon.

The Portuguese occupation of Ceylon lasted from 1597 to early 1658, under the administrative head of the Captain-General, subject to the control of the Viceroy at Goa. Jaffna was under a separate administration with a Captain Major, a Factor and an Ovidor, a judge.

In matters of religion, Ceylon was placed under the diocese of Cochin, with a Vicar General. In Jaffna the missionary work was under the Franciscans and later the Jesuits, who established a college of higher education, given free.

The Dutch pursued a policy of repression against the Roman Catholics and in 1699, under the orders of Governor Van Reede, all Roman Catholic churches and convents were ordered to be closed. The Roman Catholic faith nevertheless survived the

Please see Tamils of Ceylon, p. 168.

repression and continued to exercise its influence over its adherents in parts of Jaffna, particularly over the island at Mannar.

## Jaffna and the Dutch

IN the history of European powers in Ceylon, a common factor is that each of these made use of the political dissensions of the land and appeared in the guise of affording protection to the ruling Sinhalese State of the day, against their adversaries, in return for the privilege of opening a settlement in Ceylon and freedom to carry on trade. The Portuguese as we have seen, made capital of the situation that faced King Parakramabahu VI of Kotte against his powerful belligerent kinsmen at Rayigam and Sitawaka. The Dutch in their turn steadily gained the favour of the King at Kandy and gained a foothold promising protection to the rising Kandyan power.

In the possession of Jaffna, the Netherlands East India Co., came by a rich legacy, with no one to contend the sovereignty of the Peninsula and they soon set out to the responsible task of administering the territory. Unlike the Portuguese, the Dutch began developing the resources of the land and giving the people a measure of security and comfort.

Land claimed their first attention. Almost the first thing they did was to conserve the food resources and the Dutch aimed at self-sufficiency in food. Scarcity of labour to work

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This summary of the Portuguese relations in Jaffna, follows closely the account by Paul Pieris, our main authority on the Portuguese era.



the fields, was solved by importing several thousand slaves, who on coming were branded with the mark of the Company and set to reclaim the rice-fields. The reference to 'Slaves' lets us into a social institution that was strong at the time, the system of Kudimakkals, literally the "Sons of the Soil," the agrestic slaves. Incidentally we are informed that poverty and indebtedness had so seriously affected the villagers that large numbers had been obliged to sell themselves into slavery, that the Dutch passed a regulation forbidding the purchase or taking in mortgage, of the last property of any person which was essential to his maintenance. This may have had a favourable reaction on the Kudimakkal institution, of the history of which and of its incidence, we will have more to say in its place.

Conserving the water supply was taken up in earnest. Paul Pieris thus enlightens us on this aspect of the welfare measures :—

"Instructions were given for repairing Kattakarai, the tank which had once fed the wealthy province of Mantota, and which like so many hundreds of others was now lying in a ruined condition; its extent was so immense that it was named the Giants' Tank by the Hollanders, who anticipated that the land which, its waters could irrigate, alone would be sufficient to feed the entire North. The sluices of the Musali River had to be kept in proper order further to ensure the supply of water and the Tamils of the peninsula were induced in spite of their strong prejudice, to settle as cultivators in Punaryn. The numerous wells which have always formed so striking a feature of the dry Tamil kingdom, was to be attended to and the cattle which has been killed off by disease and the demands of the European soldiery replaced by importations from India."

The main source of revenue was the land.

How to get the most out of the land and make it pay its way, was ever present in their mind. All efforts were directed to making records of lands. The first land register, the tombo, was commenced in 1646.

Land assessment was based on the *lachim*, the unit of land, computed of four sowing measures. With more land brought

under cultivation from time to time, a fresh tombo was started every fifteen years. A separate tombo was opened for the district of Mannar.

The system of land tenure existing from the early days was stabilised.

Ancestral royal lands were the *Muttettu*, the holders of which were liable to cultivate the lands free of charge for the benefit of the Company. Lands on which the cultivators gave half share to the company, were the *Ande* lands. *Otu* was the land on which one tenth of share was made over to the Company. No duty was levied on *paraveni* lands or lands given free as rewards for services rendered to the State or *Raja Kariya*. This varied with the caste, subject to continuance of the due performance of service to the State. These lands descended from father to son, with the same liability to service. Such lands could not be mortgaged or sold. In the rare event of the failure of the heirs, the land lapsed to Government. Such lapsed lands were called *Malapala* lands. Lands which have had to be abandoned on grounds of lack of productivity or other unforeseen causes, were *Nilapala* lands.

The most enduring of the legacy of the Dutch today, is the heritage of the legal system, the Roman Dutch Law as known today, the basis of the prevailing law of all Ceylon.

In Jaffna the Dutch are particularly remembered for their painstaking study and codification of the Customary Law of Jaffna, the *Tesawalamai*. This was the work of Claaz Isaaksz, the Dissawa of Jaffna, who was directed to make a collection of the customs of the land, a work that took him three years. The completed code was referred to a body of twelve learned Tamil Mudaliyars and was adopted as the authoritative law of Jaffna, the *Tesawalamai*, by an order of 4th June, 1707. The implications of the Code are so significant that they are covered in some details further on. Land disputes were heard and disposed of by the Land Raad Courts, which were opened for the purpose. In the settlement of these disputes due regard was paid to the local customs. Plakaats and Ordinance prepared by Maetsuyeker, were introduced, incorporating the statutes of Batavia. These measures gained for the Company the confidence of the people.

The Dutch are remembered today in Jaffna, among other things, for their stimulation of the industries, an aspect separately dealt with under the section of "Industries and Arts."

At the head of the Administration was the Commandeur, who ranked next to the Governor in Colombo. The kingdom of Jaffnapatam ruled over by the Dutch, covered the entire Jaffna Peninsula extending to the borders of Trincomalee, in the east, and to Mannar in the west. To the south was the province of Wanniyar, ruled over by semi-independent chiefs, the Wanniyar, over whom the administrative control of the Dutch was but nominal. A thorn on the side of the Dutch, how to get the best from the Wanniyar, without open conflict with the Wanniyar, was a perpetual source of anxiety to the Dutch.

Portuguese officers in administrative assignments were sacked and four Tamil Mudaliyars were appointed over the four provinces of the Peninsula.

The Dutch occupation of Jaffna lasted from 1658 to 1796, when they were displaced by the British. The course of events that developed in the political landscape of the later days of the Dutch and led to their ultimate downfall are reviewed in the succeeding chapter, "Jaffna and the British." Here it may be mentioned that the political forces arrayed against the Dutch: the mighty arm of the British, allied to the strategy of the Kandyan Monarchy, were too formidable for the Dutch to resist, and easily fell to the superior strength of the British.

The Dutch indeed left more lasting memorials of their hold over Jaffna than elsewhere in Ceylon. Among the sign posts of the times are the several place names that the Dutch bestowed on the islands on the borders of the Peninsula. These names are all but lost today. Nevertheless they bespeak a historical era charged with the mentality of the Dutch. Karaitivu was renamed Amsterdam Island; Analativu changed to Rotterdam; Nayinativu became Haarlem; Pungudutivu, Middleburgh; Neduntivu, Delft; and Valanai became Leyden. Of these the only name that has stood the test of time is Delft, linked with the Delft ponies which still roam over the island.

Of the architecture of the Dutch, Tennent remarks: "Of all the settlements of Holland in the Island none is still so thoroughly Dutch in its architecture and aspect as the town of Jaffna. The houses like that of Colombo, consist of a single storey but they are large and commodious, lofty ceilings and spacious apartments."

The most striking of the Dutch monuments in Jaffna is the Dutch Fort, perfect in all the essentials of a fort. A well preserved building within is the extensive State House, the residence of the Dutch Governors. Known today as the King's House, it is still used as a residence by State guests and touring officers. On the green quadrangle facing the King's House is an old sun dial. By the side is the Dutch Church, a massive structure with little of the look of an ecclesiastical style of architecture about it. The floor is strewn with granite tomb stones commemorating the glorious dead.

How Jaffna stirs up feelings to this day in the Dutch was brought home to me one day reading an article in the journal "*Fair Ceylon*" of September, 1946. The article narrated the experiences of the Dutch in the Prisoner of War Camps of Japanese occupied Java, as told by one of the evacuees harboured in Ceylon. The evacuee who narrated this particular statement entitled, "How Jaffna may have got the name?", is Frau Christina Beauker de Roo. The rest may best be conveyed in the words of the writer in the pages of the "*Fair Ceylon*":—"Is your home in Kandy?" Mrs. Beauker asked me. "No," I said. "I reside in Kandy till my work at the camp is over. My home is in Colombo." On a further question, I informed her that my birth place was Jaffna. "Jaffna!" she exclaimed, "strange I come from Delft in Holland. In Delft there is an ancient cemetery called Jaffna." "That interests me," I said. "We have a place called Delft off Jaffna. May be the Dutch invaders gave us Delft and took Jaffna." "It cannot be," she said. "They must have given both Delft and Jaffna. The cemetery I speak of is old, very, very old. It is at least over 500 years old. It is not an ordinary cemetery too. It covers a big area and is the most beautiful spot in Delft. Only the best of aristocrats were buried there, and it is studded with the most expensive and extravagant old monuments."

"There is a chapel in the Fort in Jaffna, here in Ceylon, which is paved with big slabs of stones showing the Coat of Arms of many a Dutchman," I mused. "May be the early death of many aristocrats among the first invaders who had something to do with the naming of Jaffna," I wondered.

The main interest that this intimate dialogue discloses is not that it contributes to the derivation of the name Jaffna, but the deep emotions which link up Jaffna with the Dutch who entered into their affairs in Jaffna with a zeal for the advancement of the land that came into their hands as successors of the Portuguese.

## Jaffna and the British

THE English had an easier time establishing themselves on the soil of Ceylon than either the Portuguese or the Dutch. The Dutch practically played into their hands. The declaration of war by France against England and Holland in Europe in 1780, gave them an opportunity to stage a dramatic entry into Ceylon. The French from their vantage position in South India had early cast longing eyes over Ceylon. In March 1692, Admiral de la Haye appeared at Trincomalee harbour but sailed away in July, leaving behind a garrison at Kottiar. This latter surrendered to the Dutch. The English remained rather inactive thereafter except for a gesture by Admiral Boscawen against the French on behalf of the Dutch. Events in Europe stimulated hostilities in the East. Anticipating designs by the French, the Dutch turned to the English, now their allies for aid against the French. Lord Hobart from Madras was quick to grasp the opportunity and promptly ordered the occupation of the Fort of Trincomalee which was taken in August, 1795. From Trincomalee the English marched on to Batticaloa and took the Fort of Ostenberg. These developments were not lost on the Court at Kandy.

Faced by the general unrest and rioting by the people against the oppressions of the Dutch Company, King Kirti Sri

in 1761, had initiated friendly relations with the English at Madras. This resulted in the Pybus Mission to Kandy. The terms the English dictated at the time were too drastic to be acceptable to the King. Nor could Pybus give a possible assurance that the British in return for the concessions, would come to the help of the King. Though the Pybus Mission failed at the moment, the contacts made were to bear fruit in the context of the later developments which automatically brought the English in close relation with the Ceylon scene. A mission from the Kandyan King headed by Dumbarala Rala soon left for Madras by way of Jaffna. These negotiations resulted in the signing of a treaty with Lord Hobart in February 1796. The treaty gave the English the right to establish a factory in Ceylon, with freedom to trade and other facilities. From this point the British policy took an aggressive turn. Joined by reinforcements from Nagapatam, the English advanced on Jaffna. The Dutch were unable to resist and "the fine Fort on which much money and labour had been spent, yielded without firing a shot." At this juncture news reached the Dutch from Batavia, that peace had been concluded in Europe between Holland and France. Faced with the aggressive Sinhalese and the shifting attitude of the English, who did not want to give up the advantage they gained, the Dutch concentrated all their forces to the defence of Colombo. Galle was given up and all reinforcements from Galle, Jaffna and the Wannai and Mannar were rushed to Colombo. Meanwhile in January, 1796, the English under Col. Stuart marched out of Trincomalee and advanced on Colombo. On news of his coming, the Dutch evacuated Kalpitiya and Chilaw. Reaching Negombo, the British occupied the sea port town without any opposition and marched on to Colombo, within the fortifications of which the Dutch had assembled in strength. Finding resistance of no avail, peace was concluded. Discretion was indeed the better part of valour and the Dutch quietly acknowledged defeat. Governor Van Angelbeck opened secret negotiations and announced that all hostilities had ended. It was felt that Van Angelbeck had betrayed to the British. The Dutch possessions all over Ceylon passed into the hands of the British.

## Island-wide Distribution of the Tamils

THE Tamil division of the Eastern Province includes a number of groups, common both to the Eastern and Northern Provinces. Among these are the high caste Vellalar, and the Kudimakkal groups, the Nalavar and the Pallar. The Mukkuvar also are common to both the Northern and Eastern Provinces. The Eastern Province is of particular interest for groups distinctive to this region. One of the most unique is the caste group of the Seerpadam. Here they treasure traditions recalling their ancestral descent linked to Queen Seerpada Devi, the daughter, as traditions say, of a Chola King, wife of Prince Sittaturai, son of Uggrasimhan of Jaffna legends, linked to the cultural background of Mavittapuram, the Jaffna coast temple in the vicinity of Keerimalai — legends already featured in Chapter 8.

The Seerpadam of the Eastern Province still treasure, what is called a *Kalvettu*, which I collected in the context of my studies in the series of the Ethnological Survey of Ceylon, (No. 7 *Spolia Zeylanica*, National Museum, Colombo).

I may here give some social and cultural data of this group extracted from my study, above alluded to.

The main habitat of this society are the villages of Tiruneelavanai, Periya Kallar, Kotta Kallar and Kumana Vali of the Eastern Province.

A survey of this group in the village of Tiruneelavanai, reveals interesting cultural data of value. Of special interest is the collective farming prevailing in this village. The total population here at the time of my studies, approximated 4,000, collectively owning 800 acres of cultivable land, traditionally settled on them by "Kandy Arasan," the king of Kandy. These 800 acres of land are allotted annually to 88 householders by a committee of eight elected by the 13 kudis, or clans, constituting the entire social group. The thirteen kudis are, Chinatirani Kudi, Padayanda Kudi, Pattuvali Kudi, Kaladevan Kudi, Kankeyar Kudi, Usadi Kudi, Chinna Mudduvan Kudi, Velvelan Kudi, Mudevan Kudi, Vellala Kudi, Surya Nati Kudi, Paradesi Kudi, and Kottapalachi Kudi.

Of these, the first seven are the earliest, the rest having evolved in later days, even during the last few decades. Each Kudi has a Kudi Muhammakara or Adappan at the head, who regulates the social life of the Kudi. The 300 acres of cultivable land being inadequate for distribution in any single year to all the families of the village, any of those who do not get any land at the annual allocation, help the others in agricultural work, paid in kind.

A Rural Development Society opened under the auspices of the Rural Development Officer, looks to the living conditions of the folks. In addition to the 300 acres of cultivable land, 20 acres of land are cultivated, the proceeds of which are utilized to maintain the temples and their services and annual celebrations at these shrines. The deities worshipped are Skanda (Murukan), Pillayar (Ganesa) and Kannaki Amman.

Marriage is traditionally matrilocal, the husband taking his residence in the house of the wife, bestowed on her by her father, as *Sidanam* (Dowry).

As referred to above, an interesting find collected in this village is a folk poem, "Prince Sittaturai and Princess Seerpadam Devi," the traditional ancestress from whom the people trace their origin. The poem, sings the miracle relating to the Mavittapuram temple, of the Chola Princess Marutapiravikavalli, born with horse-face, and of her penance at the sacred springs of Keerimalai.

The poem is a sacred chronicle of the Seerpadam — beginning with a narration of the legend of the Princess' penance at Keerimalai, set out in the lines :

"At Keerimalai, she plunged in the waters,  
And her horse-face vanished,  
And she emerged, a maiden in all her charms,  
Joyous she sent messengers to her father the king, for  
Skanda's Golden Image."

Duly the messengers arrive with an image of the God Kankesan (Skanda), and landed at the port which thus received its historical name, Kankesanturai. The scene of the landing of the image, is dramatically staged with all pomp and ceremonials at the magnificent annual festival of the Mavittapuram temple.

The folk poem continues its narration of the arrival of Prince Balasimhan, the son of Uggra Simhan. Balasimhan reigned as king on the lands bestowed on him, with his wife Queen Seerpadam. An impressive retinue of hosts of various groups accompany the King and Queen to this part of the Eastern Province. Among them are the Vellalar. Names are mentioned of the prominent men, Kannapa Mudali, Pervala Muthunayaka Chetti, Chandrasekhara Sowikarar, Achutha-ankarar, Ariwal Parvatipillai and Kachanni Letchumipillai and others.

As a group, they are intensely proud of their high social status, featured in the *Kalvettu* in these words: "Tamil is a heavenly language, sweet and pleasant. There is nothing that is not in it. Learned assemblies examined its literary merits critically. Agastya, the sage and poet, learned the language from Skanda, Son of Siva. Tolkapiyar was his disciple. He composed a celebrated grammatical work in three parts. This



far-famed work on Tamil grammar, gives also the social conditions of Tamilnad. The chapter on Porul, deals with established usages and castes or varnas.

"Our Island is styled Nithila-dwipa from pearls abounding the seas around her shores. In this island of Ceylon, live very many peoples — divided into various castes or varnas, on the basis of occupation, and the natural divisions of the soil they occupy. Irrespective of this classification, to the South of Batticaloa are the Seerpada, the ancestral name derived from Queen Seerpada. A few may cavil that the people of the Seerpadam dynasty are not of high caste. This is wrong. Established usage, traditions and the tribal banners which Queen Seerpada gave to the people, all unmistakably testify to their high status. Queen Seerpada came early in the Christian era, and she established the dynasty and gave them their caste banners. This is borne out by the Satsana Chola copper plate grants. In the banners, figure the sceptre and the lotus flag. Besides these, are many other symbols of royalty according to the Konesar Copper Plates."

The high social prestige that the Seerpadam foster among themselves, was brought home to me by a special deputation of leaders of the community from Batticaloa, who sought an interview of me, at my residence in Colombo, after I had done a survey of their social life in their villages in the vicinity of Batticaloa. They stressed their high social status, and their advances in the life of the society, among whom are a number of Government officers, doctors, advocates, and teachers, well represented in the deputation that met me in Colombo.

I may make a passing reference to the Kudimakkal groups of the Eastern Province, the Nalavar, and the Pallar. As generally in Jaffna, too, in them repose a number of folk plays, better conserved here than in Jaffna. The two forms of folk plays, conserved here, are the *Vatamoti Natakam* and the *Tenmoti Natakam*, which are living arts in the life of the people, plays distinguished by traditional dances special to this region.

Yet another group common to both the Northern and Eastern Provinces, is the Parayar.<sup>1</sup> Among other villages, is

<sup>1</sup> A fuller study of the group will be found in my "Ceylon: A Pictorial Survey of the Peoples and Arts" 1963.

Saintamarudu, in Kalmunai. A distinction here, is the group name, Valluvar Kulam, to denote them, a name which has a long tradition behind it. Engaged in a number of pursuits, including farming work in the paddy-fields, an air of contentment prevails here, which was obvious on my tour of Kalmunai. In their role of drummers, their traditional occupation in the early days, they are much in evidence here, at temple ceremonials and festival days.

In the Tamil division of the North Western Province as well, are a number of groups, common to the Jaffna Peninsula. The most prominent of these are the Mukkuvar, who occupy the whole territory between Puttalam and the Kalpitiya Peninsula. The Mukkuvar of the Eastern Province have a rich heritage of Natakams which enliven their social life on all festival occasions.

### The Oli of South West Ceylon

Of special interest for their subtle Tamil origins scarcely obvious today, are the Oli of the Southern Province of Ceylon. Best seen in the villages of Bope and Tiranagama in the Galle district, and Medavatta and Bandattara in the vicinity of Matara, the Oli are a social group mainly functioning as astrologers and ritual priests conducting the magical curative rites of the Tovil and the Bali and the ceremonial propitiation of the benevolent spirit, Gara Yakka.<sup>1</sup>

Etymologically, the word Oli signifies the concept of hiding or concealing. The term is derived from the word 'Oli' in Dravidian languages, in Tamil as in Malayalam, meaning "to hide."

Alone of the past research workers in the cultural field of Ceylon, Hugh Nevill gives us an exposition of the group name in these words: "I think they are of the same race as the Velliyara of South India, wherever there are members of the Chetti caste. They no doubt came with one of the many

<sup>1</sup> For an insight into the present mode of life of the Oli, see Raghavan, M. D., "Ceylon: A Pictorial Survey of the Peoples and Arts" Colombo, 1962, pp. 158-161.

immigrations of Chetti or Hetti to Ceylon as dancers of the Gara Yakka. (*The Taprobanian*, Vol. I, 1889). A valuable clue as this obviously is, I could not place my finger on the Tamil origin of the tribe, until very recently on a reference to the Oli in the Tamil poem, the *Pattup-pattu* (The Ten Poems), an anthology of Tamil poems highlighting historical and political situations and personalities.

Two of the poems, *Porunararruppadai* and *Pattinappalai* sing praises of the Chola King Karikala Chola. *Pattinappalai* tells us that Karikala Chola followed up his victory over the Chera and the Pandiya by marching against the Oliyans and that they submitted to him.

From inscriptions of Mamallapuram, we gather that the Oliyans originally inhabited the Tondaimandalam region and were subdued by Karikala, who is reputed to have established Tondaiman Ilantirayan, his grandson on the throne of Kanchi. At the time of the composition of the *Manimekalai*, a Chola king was the ruler of Kanchi. (R. Nagaswami, 1967).

In combination with the Naga, the Oli figures in early Chola times. Among the personalities featured are Oli Nagan Madaiyan Alagaiya Chola, Oli Nagan Chandra Sekera and Oli Nagan Narayanan.<sup>1</sup>

Evidences such as these, though they do not yield a full picture of the history of the Oli or their functional services, they nevertheless reveal the Oli of South Ceylon, as originally a Tamil group of South India. In the context of our present studies of Tamil elements and reminiscences in the constituents of the Ceylonese Social Systems, the Oli of South Ceylon is unique for their subtle Tamil connections, as Nevill discloses.

## PART III

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<sup>1</sup> Kanakasabai, V.: *Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago*, p. 44.

## The Social Structure of Jaffna

THE Ceylon Tamil belongs territorially speaking to two main Tamil Provinces of Ceylon, the Northern and Eastern Provinces, to which should be added Puttalam and Kalpitiya in the North Western Province. Apart from these traditional home-lands, the Tamils are a strong minority in most parts of Ceylon, particularly the Central and the Western provinces.

The most noteworthy feature of the social system is that the classical Varnashrama Dharma with its four-fold division of the Brahmin, Kshatria, Vaisya and Sudra has little application to Jaffna. The social system of the Ceylon Tamil has been appropriately termed the Dravidian system, with the Dravidian culture predominant. True to the concept of the Jaffna social system, the Saiva Gurukkal, a Vellala, fills his role in the social life of Jaffna, a stronghold of Saivism. Among the great contribution of Jaffna to Hindu culture, stands this intensive growth of Saivism, deeply rooted in Saiva Siddhanta philosophy, with its all-embracing creed of devotion to Lord Siva and His several manifestations. The Vellala Gurukkal is the spiritual

preceptor of the laity, as distinguished from the Brahmin priest with his place in temple rituals. The Brahmin in Jaffna is largely a heritage of the generations of priests indispensable to temple services.

### Caste in the Dutch Times

The character of the colonisations of Jaffna outlined already in an earlier chapter, gives us a background against which to view the caste in Jaffna, the nucleus of which we may rightly trace to the groups represented in these series of immigrations. Our first insight into castes of Jaffna we owe to the Dutch, specifically to the Memoirs of Thomas Van Rhee, Governor and Director of Ceylon under the Dutch. His enumeration of the Jaffna castes is so remarkably comprehensive of the picture of the society of the Dutch times, that I herein reproduce it in full, faithful to the original:—

1. The Bellalas — the most numerous of all the castes.
2. The Chiandos, "few in number."
8. The Tanakaras.
4. The Paradesses.
5. The Maddapallys — employed to assist in the kitchens of the Brahmins.
6. Malleales Agambadys.
7. Fishers — six different classes — Carreas, Mockeas, Paruwas, Chimibalawas, Kaddeas and Timilas, required to serve as sailors on board the Company's vessels 12 days in the year.
8. The Moors — bound to assist in launching boats and hauling them ashore.
9. The Chitty — assist the Cashier in counting copper coins when they carry on their trade in the bazaar.
10. The Silversmiths.
11. Washers — "bound to deck the houses and churches with white linen for the land-regents and other qualified officers of the company when on circuit."
12. Weavers.

13. Parreas.
14. Christian Carpenters; Heathen Carpenters.
15. Christian Smiths; Heathen Smiths, small in number.
16. Potters — required to deliver pots and tresellen for use in the fortification works.
17. Pallas or dye-root diggers — bound to dig for dye-roots and deliver them to the Lord of the land for payment.
18. Dyers — bound to dye-cloth for the Lord of land.
19. Oil-makers — bound to buy up oil for the Company and deliver it to the Stores at cost price.
20. Toerambas are the washers of the Nalawas.
21. Chivias — bound to bear the palanquins of the Commander and the Dissave and provide their houses and the guards of the castle with water.
22. Foudadoors — make copper ware for the Company.
23. Cabinet makers.
24. Shield makers.
25. Masons.
26. Tailors — bound to deck with white linen, houses of high officials arriving at Jaffnapatam.
27. Shoe-makers.
28. Painters.
29. Barbers.
30. Brahmins — perform no service to the Company, but pay 2 fanams a year as pole tax.
31. Tawassys.
32. Palwelys — launching and hauling ashore the Company's vessels, clean and white-wash the church in the castle and the houses of the Commander and the Dissave.
33. Parruas — assist the Cashier at the castle to count copper coins.
34. Marruas — bound to serve as Lascorines.
35. Pallas — slaves of the inhabitants, bound to feed the Company's elephant one day each month with ola.

Carry palanquins and the luggage of qualified officers.

36. Nalluwas — slaves as above.

Palla slaves living in Weligama are the bondsmen of the Company and bound to work in the Gun Powder Mills for 3 to 6 days in the month and provide grass for the horses.

37. Kalicarre Pareas are also bondsmen of the Company.

38. Kottoe-carre Pareas do

39. Chiandas Weulepedre, bound to carry the luggage of the Company.

40. Wallias or Beultekares required to hunt and supply hares for the Commander's kitchen.

41. Covias or slaves of the inhabitants born here. Perform no service.

The functions noted against each group give us an insight into the very purpose of such an exhaustive list, — prescribing the services each caste has to give to the Company. Some castes are denoted purely by their work, as the carpenters and the cabinet makers. Some are distinguished by their religion, Christian Carpenters, Heathen Carpenters, Christian Smiths, Heathen Smiths. Three names, evidently in Dutch are the Foudadoors (22), who make copper wares for the Company, Weulepedre who carried the luggage (39) and Beultekares (40) "required to hunt and supply hares for the Commander's kitchen." Paradeses (4) literally, outsiders, may be a general term to cover people of no fixed abode, wandering minstrels and the like from South India. Tawassys (31) from *tapassi*, are hermits or sanyasins.

Two groups who do no service to the Company are the Brahmins (30) and Covias (41). Parruwas (33) are no doubt the Paravar, the Bharatavar as they are known today. Marruas (34) are the Maravar, enlisted as Iascorines (soldiers). The Pariah appear under the three names, Parreas (13), Kalicarre Pareas (37) and Kottoe-carre Pareas (38). The latter evidently are those who weave Kottoe or baskets. Kalicarre, may be Kulicar, or labourers. Weavers (12) may denote the Andhra

group of Chenia Chettis brought by the Company from South India, to promote cotton weaving.

Supplementary to the enumeration of the Castes, by Governor Van Rhee, we have an earlier account by Baldaeus, the Dutch Minister and historian, of the social life of his days. Valuable for the insight it gives into the contemporary social scene, its value as a background against which to view Society today, is obvious. His presentation of the social field is so graphic that extracts from his chronicle, are herein reproduced, as much of it as are relevant to our present purpose :—

" The Bellalas wear a kind of garment from above the navel turning betwixt the legs like a pair of drawers. They also make use of *seripous* (or soles) tied to the bottom of the feet with leather straps, the upper part of the feet being bare, to prevent their sweating. Upon the belly they have a kind of bag (called Maddi) being part of their garment, rolled together, wherein they keep their arec and betel, and some paper to make use of upon occasion. On the right side, they carry a kind of knife in a sheath, and an iron pen pointed with silver, as is likewise the sheath, in which they keep also a piece of steel to sharpen their knife upon.

They make holes in their ear from their infancy, which being adorned with golden pendants, draw them down to their shoulders. They live upon husbandry and are rich in cattle, such as cows, goats and buffaloes. Their habitations are both convenient and neat with pleasant gardens, well planted with betel and furnished with excellent springs which provide them during the dry summer season with water for the watering of the gardens. Their harvest is in January and February; their winter or rainy season being in November and December. In some places, *viz.*, in the low marshy grounds, they have harvest twice a year. They thresh their corn, after the manner of the Israelites, with oxen, not muffled; these tread the seed out of the ears.

During the rainy season, it rains with such violence that the fields are all overflowed. This continues for two months and it happens that for eight months after, it rains not above



three times, which is the reason, that they are obliged even to water the Coco-trees, till they are six years old. If you dig about two feet deep you meet with rocky ground, so that if you will have a spring you must cut them out of the rocks, with vast charge.

The Bellalas make likewise butter but not after the manner we do in Holland. They make a kind of a mill like a star at the bottom. This they roll betwixt both hands till the butter comes. Some of our Dutch women make also good cheese, but it is not regarded among the inhabitants; but butter is in great esteem among them as well as among the Moors; nay the family of Commetty, use butter like drink. Milk turned to curds, called by them *tayir*, is also in great request with them and used like a cooling medicine in fevers and the small-pox which are very frequent here.

Their cattle they keep both day and night in the field though towards night they drive them into a certain enclosure. They are never housed in the winter, but feed in the grounds where the corn first sprouts forth, and afterwards are fed with hay till harvest time. If the cattle happen to break into a neighbour's field, the owner is obliged to make good the damage.

The Bellalas are generally the richest in the country; they don't marry except in their own family and commonly in the spring; if it happens to be a fruitful year, they are more inclined to marry. They are very litigious and will go to law for a trifle because they are constantly envious at one another."

In the following paragraph, we have a short account of the Brahmins of Baldaeus' time, with the insight it gives us, of the success of the Dutch missionaries in gaining converts, — the nominal Christians they are pictured to be:—

"The Brahmins living in Jaffnapatam, or any other part of the Indies, are for the most part, men of great morality, sober, clean, industrious, civil, obliging and very moderate both in eating and drinking. They use no strong liquids, wash or bathe twice a day, eat nothing that has had or may have life, yet are much addicted, like all the rest of the Indians to pleasure,

"Notwithstanding they are Christians, they carry still certain heads and like those of the Coromandel, never marry out of their families, but frequent their brothers' and sisters' children. Though they bear the names of Christians and know how to discourse rationally, of the Ten Commandments and other points of the Christian doctrine, they still retain most of their pagan superstitions. If you tell them of the Christian liberty in victuals and drinks, they reply that they are not ignorant of it, but as the essence of Christianity does not consist in eating or drinking, so they did not think themselves obliged to feed upon such things as are contrary to their nature and education being from their infancy, used to such tender food which agrees best with their constitution, and makes them generally live to a great age.

"They are not ignorant of the course of the stars, in calculating the eclipses of the Sun and Moon; know the Seven Stars which they call Arumien, *i.e.*, six fishes, because they say, 'we see no more than six.' They understand also the names of the stars, but this must be understood from the most learned among them."

From this account, we are left with the impression that in the days of Baldaeus, the Brahmins were numerically stronger than they are today.

Continuing his chronicle, Baldaeus enlightens us on the marriage customs of the time:—

"Among some of the Christians in Ceylon, obtains a certain custom to this day, to tie the *tālī* or bracelet of the bride about the bride's neck, a thing introduced by the pagans and imitated by the Christians, for the inhabitants of Coromandel look upon it as a ceremony so necessary towards the confirmation of the marriage that whenever the husband dies, the *tālī* she wore about her neck on her marriage day, is to be burnt with her.

"As maidens without a good portion, are a bad commodity here, hence it is that frequent collections are made to help the poorer sort to husbands. They are of opinion that a single man,

is but half a man; nay those who neglect or lose any time in propagating their own kind, are not far different from a murderer and a destroyer of humankind, which is the reason that they often marry their daughters at 10 or 11 years of age and nothing is more frequent than to see them bring forth children at 18 or 14.

"After they have been three times proclaimed from the pulpit, the marriage ceremony is performed by the Minister; the house where the wedding is kept being generally adorned with a kind of triumphal arch raised without doors, made of big-tree branches, flowers, pomegranates and such like. The richer sort seldom fail to give a good entertainment to their friends, of venison, hares, partridges, fish, fruits, preserves, etc., and the evening is spent in dancing, singing and diverse other diversions. However, strong liquors are never made use of on such occasions, unless the Hollanders (who can't be without them) bring some along with them. These marriage diversions, continue sometimes four or five days successively.

"I remember that during my residence here, sometimes children of eight or nine years of age would have been engaged in mutual promises of marriage, in mine and their friends' presence; which I always opposed, fearing not without reason that they might repent their bargain, before they came to a marriageable age. For the rest, they constantly observe this custom, that the female is younger than the bridegroom; nay they seldom will choose a maid, that has already had her monthly times; this custom is so strictly observed on the coast of Coromandel, that if a Brahmin's daughter remains unmarried till that time, she must lay aside all hopes of it for the future.

"One laudable custom they have, which is that scarce ever children marry here without the consent of their parents; a custom not only agreeable both by express command of God, expressed in diverse places of the scripture and the practice of all ages even among the pagans, but also consonant to the civil constitutions and the decrees of the Council or Lateran and other Councils."

A summary account now follows of the other castes in the Social system and their way of life:—

"The tribe or family of the Chivias used formerly to attend the service of the kind of Jaffnapatnam, but now do all sorts of drudgery as carrying water and wood for the Dutch inhabitants; they make use also of them for littermen, 10 or 12 of them being sometimes employed at a time, to carry a good bulky Hollander, 10, 20 nay 30 leagues in a litter. However they are too proud to carry any ordinary person who must be contented to be carried by the ordinary coolies or labourers who live all over the country; whereas the Chivias inhabit in the district of the church of Chunducouli.

"Those of the tribe of the Parruas do not live in such great numbers in Jaffnapatnam as they do about Tutecoryn; they apply themselves to the sea and especially in diving for sea-horse teeth and pearls. They generally speak Portuguese and are an active sort of people.

"The Chittis live for the most part upon the linen manufacture and traffic, the word Chitty signifying as much as a merchant; they are a crafty generation.

"Each of these tribes do not marry into any other, besides their own, nay commonly in the same family. Besides which, each handicraftsman, educate his son to the same trade he is of; thus a weaver's son, follows the weaving trade, as the smith's son does that of a smith.

"The tribe of the Carreas live upon fishing, which they perform with monstrous large net; they inhabit near the sea-shore of Jaffnapatnam, and the banks of the salt river. Those of the tribe of the Mockeas are likewise fishermen.

"The Nalluwas are generally slaves to the Bellalas and much blacker than the rest. Their business is to gather the liquor that flows out of the coco-tree, to dig the ground, tend the cattle, water the trees, and such like drudgeries as is commonly done by the coolies or ordinary labourers.

"The Parreas are the most despicable of all, their employment being to carry out dung and such like filthy things.

"It is observable that the tribes of the upper rank, look upon the inferior ones with a great deal of scorn, these being obliged to salute the others in the street with deep reverence and other ceremonies to show their submission. On the other hand, all the men of what rank or quality so ever, exercise a great authority over their wives, whom they rarely honour so far as to eat with them, but commonly dine alone. None of all these tribes eat cow's flesh, which is the reason that no cows are killed but by the Dutch, the cow being looked upon among the rest as a sacred creature.

"For the rest, the generality of the inhabitants of the kingdom of Jaffnapatam are naturally ingenious and have a strong memory; they are very sober and moderate in their diet and (except the Nalluwas and the Parreas) very clean in their apparel, not quarrelsome but very free with their tongue.

"Besides artisans and handicraftsmen whereof there is plenty in Jaffnapatnam, they have certain persons who apply themselves to the law, and in the High Court of Justice composed of Hollanders and Indians, where sit always (besides the Modeliers) a certain person well versed in the laws and constitutions of his native country. They have also their Advocates who make very long speeches in their pleadings.

"Neither are they destitute of Physicians, such as they are; for to speak the truth they are more than empirics, who practice according to certain books and traditions transmitted to them by their ancestors and confirmed to them by their own experience. They know not what anatomy is and very little of purging medicines which are often used in this hot climate. However when a purge is to be given, whether a potion or pills, the composition is always made of fresh herbs and if it works too strong, they mix some powdered pepper with water and apply it to the navel in the nature of an ointment. I can tell it by my own experience that it is a good remedy against belly ache and looseness.

"They have also good stores of surgeons and barbers, the last carry always a small looking glass along with them. Their razors are thicker on the back than ours; they not only shave

your beard and head, but pare your hand and toe nails and cleanse your ears.

"Weavers are here in abundance. They sit flat upon the ground and their feet placed in a hole dug for that purpose whilst they are at work. Calico printers are numerous here, who have a way of preparing their colours that they never go out by washing, though those printed at Jaffnapatam are not near, not so good as those of the coast of Coromandel and especially those done at Masulipatnam.

"They are excellent workmen in ivory and ebonywood, as likewise in gold and silver and will come with their tools which are but few, to work in the house of the Dutch. They are exactly well-versed in the assaying of gold. They are well provided with smiths, carpenters and bricklayers, as most places in Europe, though a carpenter or bricklayer gets not above five or six pence a day."

The picturesque narration above of the social scene in the days of the Dutch, gives us the appropriate setting to the brief survey of the caste in Jaffna today.

## The Vellalar

AT the apex of the Social System today is the Vellalar, who correspond essentially to the South Indian Tamil caste of the same name. As the largest and vitally most significant in the agricultural economy of Tamil Nad, different writers have left interesting accounts of their traditional culture. Among these are the writings of H. A. Stuart and W. B. Francis, both of the I.C.S., accounts which Thurston<sup>1</sup> embodies in his work, *Castes and Tribes of South India*. They are herein reproduced in brief. First is the account by Stuart. The Vellalas are the great farmer caste of the Tamil country, strongly represented in every Tamil district. The word Vellalam is derived from Vellanmai, Vellam, Water and Anmai, management, meaning cultivation, tillage. Oppert considers Vellalan to be etymologically connected with the Pallan, Palli, etc., the word Vellalar meaning the lord of the Vallas or Pallas.

The story of their origin is as follows: "Many thousands of years ago when the inhabitants of the world were rude and ignorant of agriculture, a severe drought fell upon the land and the people

<sup>1</sup> Thurston, E.: *Castes and Tribes of South India*. Vol. VII, pp. 361 - 388.

prayed to Bhudevi, the Goddess of earth for aid. She pitied them and produced from her body a man carrying a plough. The man showed them how to till the soil and support themselves. His offsprings are the Vellalar, who aspire to belong to the Vasya caste, since that includes the Govaisyas, Bhuvaisyas and Dhana Vaisyas (shepherds, cultivators and merchants). A few therefore constantly wear the sacred thread, but most put it on only during marriages or funerals as a mark of the sacred nature of the ceremony."

Another version of their origin finds recorded in the *Baramahal Records*: "In ancient days when God Parameswaradu and his consort Goddess Parvati Devi resided on the top of the Kailasa, they one day retired to amuse themselves. Viswakarma, the architect of the Devas, happened to intrude on their privacy. This enraged them, and pronounced that as he had intruded in their seclusion, they would cause an enemy to be born in the Bhuloka and he would punish him appropriately. The divine pair also apprised Viswakarma that the person would spring into existence on the banks of the Ganges. Viswakarma lost no time to betake himself to the banks of the Ganges, and awaited the birth of the enemy. One day Viswakarma observed the ground to crack near him and a Kiritam (crown) appeared to emerge out of the bowels of the earth. Viswakarma lashed at it with his sword, which cut off the headgear. Nothing daunted the figure completely emerged with a bald pate, holding in his hand a golden plough share. Round his neck, were garlands of flowers. Viswakarma made a second bid to strike him. Gods Brahma, Vishnu and Siva intervened in time and prevailed on Viswakarma to leave him alone. Peace was concluded on the understanding that the *pancha jāti*, the five artisan castes, silver-smiths, carpenters, ironsmiths, stone-cutters and braziers, would take a place subservient to the earth-born cultivator. The Gods also conferred on the latter, the titles of Bhumi Palakudu, Saviour of the earth, Gangakula, descendant of the Ganga and Murdaka Palakudu, the protector of the plough, with which he took his birth. The Gods also ordained that as he had lost his diadem, he would not himself be eligible for sovereignty, but that the sovereign would be crowned as such by the cultivator. Gods also invested him with the sacred thread and gave the



daughters of Gods Indra and Kubera to him in marriage. Siva gave over to him the white bullock on which Siva was riding, and God Dharmaraja gave his mount, the white buffalo. The cultivator thus consecrated had 54 sons by the daughter of Indra and 52 by the daughter of the God Kubera. These sons married 106 daughters of Nala Kubarudu. These sons-in-law of Kubera came to an agreement with Kubera that 35 of them should be called Bhumi Palakulu, the tillers of the ground; another 35 formed the Vellal Shetti, with traffic as occupation; and 35 named Govu Shethu, employed in breeding and feeding of cattle. The remaining one was surnamed Agamudi, the outsider. The latter had 2,500 children who formed a separate caste, the Agamudi Vellala Varu."

Supplementary to this we have the descriptive account by W. B. Francis in the pages of the Madras Census Report 1901: "The internal structure of the caste and its self-contained and distinct sub-divisions and the methods by which its numbers are enhanced by accretions from other castes, are typical of the corresponding characteristics of the Madras castes. The four main divisions are: (1) The Mudali, Reddi and Nainar, titles of the dwellers in the Pallava country, the Tondaimandalam, the present Chingleput and North Arcot districts. (2) the Soliya Vellalar, men of the Chola country, the present day Tanjore and Trichinopoly districts, who bear the title Pillai. (3) the Pandya Vellala, of the Pandyan Kingdom of Madura and Tinnevely, who also take the title of Pillai and (4) the Konga Vellala of the old Kongu Country, corresponding to the districts of Coimbatore and Salem, called the Kavandans. These resemble one another in essential customs though no marriage alliances are as a rule allowed between these divisions. Each of these is again split up into sub-divisions of a territorial origin, the members of which, do not intermarry.

The Tondaimandalam Vellalas are sub-divided into the Tuluvas, originally of the Tulu country; the Poondamallee Vellalas, from Poonnamalle near Madras and Koundaikattis, who do not shave their hair, and tie up in a knot. These do not intermarry.

The Solia Vellalas are sub-divided into the Vellan Chetties, meaning the Vellala merchant, who are again split up into three or four other territorial sub-divisions; the Kodikkals who grow the betel vine, and the Kanakkilinattar, inhabitants of Kanakkilinadu. The Pandya Vellalas are sub-divided into the Karkattas or Karai Katus, a territorial sub-division, from a place Karai Kadu; the Nangudis and Panjals, the origin of whom is not clear; the Arumburs and Sirukudies, from Pandyan villages; the Agamudiyans, recruits from the caste of this name; the Nirpuris, wearers of the sacred ash and the Kottai Vellalas or fort Vellalas. The last of these live in Sri Vaikuntam fort in Tinnevely. Females observe the strictest gosha and do not marry out. They are fast dying out.

The Kongu Vellalas are sub-divided into the Sendalous (the red-haired), the Padatalais, army leaders, the Vellikai (the Silver-handed), the Pavalamkatti (coral weavers), the Malaiyadi (men of the foot hills), the Tollakadu (of the wide ear lobes); the Attangarais (of the river bank), all non-intermarrying groups.

Apart from these are members of other castes, without any real connection with the Vellalas, nevertheless pretending to be Vellalas. Francis observes "the caste is so widely diffused that it cannot protect itself against these invasions. After a few generations, the origin of the new recruits is forgotten and have no difficulty in passing themselves off as the genuine Vellalar. The same phenomenon occurs among the Nayars of Malabar."

Thurston incidentally remarks how puzzling the variations in the cranial measurements of the Vellalar taken at random, are likely to become. He instances a number of the extraneous elements making their entry in the Vellalar fraternity. "Such are the Vettuwa Vellalar, really Vettuwans; the Puluwa Vellalar, really Puhuvans; the Illam Vellalar, who are Panikkans; the Karaturai Vellalar, who are Karaiyans (lord of the shore); the Karukamattai (palmyra leaf stem) Vellalar, who are Shanar; the Gazulu (bangle) Vellalar, (the Baliyas); the Guher (Rama's boat men) who are Sembadavans and the Irkuli Vellalas, who are Vannans. The children of dancing-girls call themselves Mudali and in time claim to be Vellalas. Even Paraiyas assume



the title Pillai, and eventually pass off as Vellalar." In Travancore, males of the Devadasi caste call themselves Nanchinad Vellala. A Tamil proverb has it that a Kallan may come to be a Maravan. By respectability he may develop into an Akamudaiyan and by slow degrees become a Vellala. The proverb Thurston refers to is obviously this :

" Kallar, Maravar, Kanathaakampadiyar  
Mella mella vandu Vellalar avar."

According to another proverb, the Vellalas are compared to the brinjal (*Solanum Melongena*), which mixes palatably with any ingredient. Even these do not exhaust the Vellala complex. Thurston in the course of his further analysis of the Vellalar constituents, enriches his account with mythological and historical data of some of these sub-divisions.

Jaffna as the home of the immigrant Vellalar, reflects much of their South Indian connection. The Jaffna Vellalar answer mainly to a ten-fold division : Thera Kula Vellalar, Solia Vellalar Pandi Vellalar, Kongu Vellalar, Karala Vellalar, Kondai Vellalar, Karkatha Vellalar, Kalla Vellalar, Maran Vellalar, Shampodi Vellalar.

Karkatha Vellalar is considered to be a sub-division of the Pandya Vellala. Thurston narrates an interesting mythology of the origin of the name. " In the days of old, a quarrel arose between the Pandyan King and God Devendra. The God was so enraged that he withheld the rain clouds from Pandya Desa. The people were sorely distressed and laid their complaints before the King, who marched his army against Devendra, defeated him in battle and imprisoned the clouds. In consequence as no rain fell anywhere, all joined in prayers to Devendra who sent an embassy to the king and pleaded with the king to release the clouds. The king demanded a security for their future good behaviour. At this moment, the Vellalar of Pandyan kingdom stood security for Devendra and clouds. From this incident this particular division was surnamed Kara Kava Vellal Varu, the redeemer of the clouds (*the Baramahal Records*).

The Madura District Manual tells us that the Karakata Vellalar were accustomed to purchase and keep slaves of the Poliya caste, offering thirty fanam for a female and fifty for a male. An interesting ceremony of lighting the auspicious Vilakkidu Kalyanam, is performed for girls of Karakata Vellalar in the seventh or ninth year. The ceremony consists in worshipping Ganesa and the Sun. The maternal uncle gives the girl a necklace of gold beads and coral and a new cloth. This ornament, the Kodashimani (the hooked jewel), is worn all through life.

The Kondai Vellalar, or the Kondai Kattis are so-called from the peculiar way in which they used to wear their hair — a custom no longer observed. The Konga Vellalar differ strikingly from the rest in their customs.

At Mallakam and at certain other places, a section of the Vellalar is called the " Madapally Vellalas." This introduces us to the Madapallies, a community originally with a strong individuality all its own, until their gradual assimilation in the Vellala fold in the later ages. There is no knowing who the Madapallies were or whence they came. The sense of exclusiveness grown round the name, has found varied explanations at the hands of various writers. That they are " immigrants and colonists " as *Vaiyapadal* states, takes us nowhere, as this is true of all Jaffna groups, Madapally or not. " Madapally " as signifying " Royal Kitchen " is the explanation of Rasanayagam. Boake in his Monograph on Mannar, features them as " Bastards of Royal descent." Whether of royal descent or not, " Bastard " is not an appropriate term to apply to a whole community of peoples.

Madam<sup>1</sup> is the term for a Brahmin house, or a King's Palace. Associated with royalty, the term appears also in the word " Madappad " " a domain, royal farm or King's granary." " Palli " has a sense of sacredness attached to the name, as in its meaning of a " house of the gods " — temple, mosque or church. *Keralolpatti* or the poetical chronicle of the beginnings of Kerala, uses the word " Palli " in the meaning of a " titular god in a Brahmin village."

1 Gundert : Malayalam/English Dictionary.

The very word Madapalli occurs in Kerala as meaning<sup>1</sup> a "school" for the kings or as "an institution for training for hunting." While these are its various etymological significations, its application to the social element of medieval Jaffna, is not clear in the absence of a clear insight in the traditional culture of the group. That as a class they were distinct is obvious from the various connotations of the name. They may well have had a descent from royalty, or may very likely have been a group descended from Brahmins degraded and exiled from the Brahminical status. This latter surmise, finds a close parallel with the community in Malabar known as the Plappallies,<sup>1</sup> a community originally of Nambudiries, exiled and degraded from the orthodox social order.

The Brahmin extraction of the Madapallies is evidenced by the Upanayanam, the initiation ceremony, of wearing the sacred thread, and other special observances. With a sense of their own importance, it is easy to understand the scramble for supremacy between the Madapallies and the Vellala of the days of the Dutch, who surmounted the difficulty by appointing one officer from each of the groups as Kanakapulla to the Dutch Commander.

In the history of orthodox Kerala, instances are numerous, of communities originating from Brahmins ex-communicated for social offences, mostly of the nature of minor departures from the path of orthodoxy. The Madapallies of Jaffna may easily have been a society taking their descent from such an exiled Brahmin group of Malabar. Despite their social exile, such groups maintained something of their original position, the women invariably consorting with Brahmins only as the Plappallies referred to above.

Tiruvalluvar applauds the farmer in his own sententious manner: "They alone live who live by tilling the ground; all others but follow in their train and eat only the bread of dependence." Centuries later appeared Kambar, the great poet. Born

and nursed in a typical rural setting, Kambar in his work *Er Elubadu* gives us a picturesque account of the farmer and of the farming process. The poet reveals himself to be well informed of the technique of cultivation and toils of the farmer. This description reads as a good study in technology; the *Kolu Munai*, the plough tail-end, the *meli*, the plough stilt; the *Ultrani*, the plough iron-share; and the *nuga tadi*, the plough stem. Of the integrity of the simple farmer, Kambar pays a well merited tribute in these words, "the holy rituals conducted by the Brahmins professing the four Vedas and the abundance of the king, both depend on the plough stilt, and on the man wielding the plough whose plighted word will stand despite the *pralaya* deluge." In the same strain are these words of the poet on the social status of the farmer: "those alone born in the farmer community are born to save this world." He places the farmer in the third division of society with the rider that "in some respects they are even superior to others." Kambar enlarges on the comments in the *Kural* with these remarks: "just as the king has his army, so has the farmer the army of the ploughmen, which even the king's forces cannot rival." The poet of the common man that Kambar was, than of the royalty that the poets of the Middle Ages generally were, Kambar calls upon the kings to step up the life of the farmer, and indulges in a dig at the kings in the words: "how could the Chera, Chola, Pandya or any other king have established himself without depending upon the fertile heads of the crops in their soils." The pomp and glory of the kings, he derides and poses the question whether it is not more meritorious to be by the side of the Vellalar and watch the processes of cultivation than to be by the side of the kings seated under their imperial umbrellas?"

The Vellalar, the topmost in the social life of the Tamilnad, has been a topic of interest to Tamil writers from ancient times: Verse 82 of the *Kural*, in the words:—

"*Irunthombi il Valvathellam Virunthombi  
Velanmai Seytharporuttu,*"

reveals the Vellala as a name integrating the twin ideas of Vellala in being generous in their hospitality and of their descent from the Vels sung in the Sangam poems. Sangam literature,

<sup>1</sup> Subramanya Iyer: *The Plappallies*, The Malabar Quarterly Review, Vol. V, 1907, pp. 301-304

we are informed, holds up the character of the Velir chieftains, of satisfying the wants of the people. The *Kural* defines Velanmai, as doing good to those who sought one's help. This line of thought has led to the inference that the people called Vellalar are related to the Vels or Velir chieftains spoken of in the Sangam literature. The alternative definitions of the word Vellalar, are from Vellam meaning water, and from Vel, the Velir chieftains of the Sangam tribes. It is held that the term Vellala, is always written with the 'e' elongated, while in Vellam, it is shortened. The historic development of the term Vellala has been in the direction of Vēl, Vēlan, Vēllalan.<sup>1</sup>

## The Kurukulathar

A SOCIETY with a rich background of traditional culture and an acknowledged record of services to Ceylon from the early Middle Ages to modern times, is the Karava of both the Sinhalese and Jaffna Social System, synonymous with the name Carea, as alternately known in Jaffna. "A group of sea farers and fighting men that they were in the Middle Ages" (Haimendorff, 1961), their lineage goes back to the far distant past, a lineage reflected in the name Kurukulathar, by which they are widely known in Negombo and elsewhere as in Tamil Manampitiya in the district of Tamankaduwa of Polonnaruwa. Essential factors of their history and culture have already been covered in my book, "*The Karavas of Ceylon, Society and Culture.*" A few of the more outstanding of their foot prints in their career over Ceylon, may here be outlined in brief, progressively leading to the Jaffna scene and the heroic stand of the kings of Jaffna against the might of the Portuguese.

Almost the earliest of the sources for an understanding of the Karava of Ceylon, is the inscription on the "The Tamil Householders' Terrace" revealed at ancient Anuradhapura, "an inscription in old Sinhalese in the oldest type of Brahmi characters, on an assembly hall of the Tamils in Anuradhapura, one of

1 Arokiaswami, M.: *The Origin of the Vellalas*, J.I.H. Vol. XXXIII, Part I, April, 1950, and *Early History of the Vellar Basin*; J.I.H. Part I, December, 1954.

whom appears to have been their chief." (Addendum, to the *Mahavamsa* and J.R.A.S.(C.B.), XXXV, p. 54). Two of the names are Kubira and Karava Navika. Kubira is obviously a derivative of the name, Kuru-bira or Kuruvira, a Kuru warrior. Karava Navika clearly signifies a Karava sea captain.

The name Kuruvira occurs too in one of the ancient Karava inscribed swords, preserved in the Colombo National Museum.<sup>1</sup> (J.R.A.S. (C.B.), Vol. XVIII, No. 56, 388 - 391 ; 447 - 449).

Of interest is the Tirumukkudal inscription of the Chola king Virarajendra (1062 - 1067), recording his invasion of Ceylon. The Chola king's war in Ilam "cast a gloom on the army of the Sinhalese, wherein Kurukulattarayan who wore a golden anklet . . . . fell down and was slain" (*Epigraphia Indica* Vol. XXI, Part 5, No. 38, pp. 220 - 250 ; and South Indian Inscriptions, Vol. VII, p. 53, No. 126, 1933). Commenting on this inscription, Nilakanta Sastri aptly comments :—

"Significantly enough there are many Kurukularajas found all over the Tamil country at this time and the Karavas are doubtless closely connected with them." (*Bulletin of the Institute of Traditional Cultures*, University of Madras, UNESCO, Madras, Part I, 1961). This finds a substantial parallel in the name of Kurukulatta Rajan, the Commander of the Velaikkar forces of Vijayabahu I (1055 - 1114).<sup>2</sup>

In the category of the Sinhalese folk literature, we have the *Kadaiampot* of the 13th century which speaks of king Gajabahu (174 - 196), on his return from South India, after attending the inauguration of the Pattini Cult by Cheran Senguttuvan

1 Fernando, H. F. & F. A. : *A Dip into the Past*, Colombo 1920, pp. 16 - 17.

2 Codrington : *A Short History of Ceylon*, 57.  
Geiger : *Army and War in Medieval Ceylon*. C.H.J., Vol. IV, 154.

Wickremasinghe : *Epi. Zey.* II, p. 247.

Raghavan, M. D. : *The Karavas of Ceylon — Society and Culture*, 1961, pp. 8 - 9.

(*Cilappadikaram*), bringing with him a retinue of the Kurus, whom he settled in what has since come to be known as Alut-kururata — the new Kuru colony, a name which distinguishes it from the Paranakuru rata, and which survives in the modern Four Korales district.

Yet another Sinhalese chronicle is the *Kurunagala Vistaraya*, which embodies the origin of the name Kurunagala from the original Kururata. (Hodder : J.R.A.S. ; C.B., Vol. XIII, pp. 35 - 57).

In the series of arrivals of Karava clans from South India, we have the largest number coming during the reigns of the Kotte Kings, of whom the name prominently figures, of Raja Simha II (1635 - 1687), with earlier reflections from the reign of Parakramabahu VI (1486 - 1509). The events find narration in the Sinhalese chronicle the *Mukkara Hatana*, the manuscript of which is one of the Hugh Hevill collections of the British Museum. (Or-6606, 53). The events are substantially contained in another manuscript work, published in the '*Silumina*' of November 1, 1936, by Andreas Nell, under the title *Rajasimha Kate Pravrti*.

The immediate stimulation for this large mobilisation of Karava warriors, was the threat posed by a new aggressive force, the Mukkuvar. The Kotte royalty turned to the Rajas of Kanchipuram, Kaveripattanam and Kilakarai, South Indian settlements of the Karavas, territories situated at this period in the Vijayanagar empire. After their successful encounter against the Mukkuvar at Puttalam, the king settled them at several places on the western littoral and in the hinterland, areas which are today among the ancestral settlements of the Karava, including Negombo. Some of them were granted lands by the Kings of Kandy, at Ratalawewa, Ambana,<sup>1</sup> Padavita and Tamankaduwa. Here are found a representative collection of their ancient banners (E. W. Perera, *Sinhalese Banners and Standards, Memoirs of the Colombo Museum*, 1916).

1 Lawrie, A. C. : *Gazetteer of the Central Province of Ceylon*, Vol. II, 1898.

At this juncture on the Ceylon horizon appeared the Portuguese (1505). Coming from Goa, they prevailed upon the King at Jayawardhanapura Kotte, to grant them a piece of land, to erect a trading settlement. Once firmly established, they steadily advanced. The closing phase of the Arya Chakravarties, saw the Portuguese extending their operations over Jaffna. The chronicles of the age, show an interlinking of the political situation between the North and South Ceylon. The three main forces that occupied the stage of Ceylon, were the Arya Chakravarties of Jaffna, the Sinhalese Monarchy at Kotte, Rayigam and Sitawaka, with the Portuguese manoeuvring the political chessboard to their benefit.

The Arya Chakravarties maintained an efficient navy, "manned and officered by the Karavas" (Rasanayagam: *Ancient Jaffna*, pp. 211 - 212), an evident testimony to their sea-faring and fighting qualities of the medieval days. This recalls the first fleet of the Sinhalese, inaugurated by King Muggalana (496 - 513), manned by Tamil sailors as the Sinhalese "were shy of the sea" (Tennent: *Ceylon*, Part 4, Ch. III, p. 441). At the port where Ibn Batuta landed in 1344, he is credited with having seen the great fleet of the Arya Chakravarties, collected here. According to Ibn Batuta, Arya Chakravarties had "considerable forces by the sea," which testifies to the strength of his navy, "a navy that later fought before the walls of Kotte." (Rasanayagam, p. 211, and Navaratnam, C. S., *Tamils and Ceylon*, 1958, p. 230).

King Sekaraja Sekaran VII, better known to history as Sankili, hard pressed by the Portuguese, applied for help to the Naik of Tanjore. The latter at once responded and sent a powerful force of Vadugas "headed by a Kinglet of the Careas, called Varnagulata, a great enemy of the Portuguese." Queyroz terms him "Regulo of Tanjore Careas, the most war like in the Naigue's dominions. (Queyroz: *Conquest of Ceylon*, translated by Fr. S. G. Perera, p. 468). He is alternatively referred to as "Chem Nayque, that king of the Careas who has previously come to Chankili." (Fariar Souza).

Distributed about in the chronicles of Jaffna of the Portuguese and Dutch eras, are features supporting the social standing of the Careas, in the caste structure of Jaffna. Among these

may be cited three original certificates of "En registration of Slaves," issued in 1819, in favour of the great-grand father of K. James Rasiah, Jaffna. The name of the holder of the certificates appears as "Bastianpillai Constantine Sathria of Jaffna Pattnam."<sup>1</sup> This sustains the status of the Karava and generally of their privileges to services by the Kudimakkals, a term freely interpreted by the Europeans as slaves.

We have also the high authority of Rev. Fr. S. Gnanaprakasara, who in his *History of the Catholic Church in Ceylon* p. 116, states that "in terms of the Aryan caste system they should rather be called Kshathriyas, following a derivation of the two names from Paurava and Kaurava respectively."

E. Thurston, a former Director of the Madras Museum, the author of *Castes and Tribes of South India*, testifies to their heredity and expounds the term Kurukula vamsam, in these terms: "a name derived from Kuru, the ancestor of the Kauravas assumed by some Pattanavans. Pattanavan means literally a dweller in a town or Pattanam which word occurs in the names of various towns on the sea coast, as Nagapattanam, Chennapattanam (Madras). The Pattanavans have two main divisions, Peria (big) and Chinna (small).... Some Pattanavar have caste titles, as Varnakula Mudali, after Varuna, the God of the Sea, Kurukulavamsam the ancestor of the Kauravas." A modern survival of the terms Peria Mudali and Chinna Mudali, we have in the names of the Tamil Karavas of Mannampitiya in Polonnaruwa.

The name Pattanam is a topographical factor of Jaffna in the names Jaffnapattan or Jaffnapattam, in Careapatao, and Careapattanam, two towns of Mannar in the Portuguese days. This finds verification from Fr. Anriquez Anrique the first parish priest of Mannar who writes on 22nd December, 1564: "In Mannar there are two villages of Christians of the caste of the Careas," two Careopattanams. The small and the big. The big village of the Careas consisted of the Kareas and Paravas who migrated

1 See M. D. Raghavan, *Karava of Ceylon, Society and Culture*, 1961, Plate 1, for a facsimile of one of the certificates.



from the Fishery coast of Tuticorin in 1560 (letter of Fr. Annrique, dated 19 December, 1561). The Peria Kareapattanam here mentioned is San Thome Pattanam, now the Moor village of Erukalampiddi in Mannar. The Sinna Kareapattinam is Pattim. It was here that the first converts of St. Francis Xavier were put to death by Sankili (Fr. A. J. B. Antoninus, O.M.I.: "The Martyrs of Mannar," 1944).

The kings of Jaffna allotted to the Karavas, the western sector which has since been known as Karayoor, marked Cereoor in the Dutch maps, bounded by Nallur in the East, Chunduculi in the South and Wannarponnai in the North-east. (Earliest Dutch Topographical Map (1720) in *Land, Maps and Surveys* p. 142, Brohier and Paulusz, 1951). It is the part today occupied by the Jaffna town proper, within which are found the Cathedral, the Seminary, St. Patrick's College, Holy Family Convent, St. James' Church, Central College, the Court House and the Fort.

Under the Dutch in 1790, Warnakula - Suriya Don Diego Mudaliyar held the high office of Respadore, to whom poet Don Philip of Tellippalai dedicated a devotional poem *Gnananth Purana*, in 1823. The author speaks of his patron, as Don Diego Mudali, a prince of Kurukulam, recalling the original home of Kurunadu, as the *Soodamani Nigandu* has it. True to the entries in the Dutch Thombos, the Karava of Jaffna continue to register themselves as Kurukulam in land deeds.

These various stages in the social life of the Jaffna Karava, may be traced to the colonisations of Jaffna embodied in folk compositions, *Kailaya Malai*, *Pararajasekaranula*, etc., and in the comprehensive chronicle *Yalpana Vaipava Malai* by Mylvagana Pulavar. Of specific interest for the enumeration of the caste groups that colonised Jaffna is the oft quoted *Vaiyapadal*<sup>1</sup> by Vaiyapuri Aiyar, the court bard of king Jegaraja Sekeran (1519 - 1565). Relevant in the present context is this verse: "Kuchiliyar, Agampadiyar, Kothirathar, Kovilarkal, Kopalara-

nor, Dancers, People of Naga Nainative, Kuyar and of Manmunaitivu, abounding in fish, Varunakulathar, Malayalathar, Silliar of Achchamai and Arya Vankissa Marayar."

An obvious index to the hosts of colonists entering the Jaffna peninsula in the early days, may be traced to the social context of the sea coast town of Matota, a sea port of great consequence in the story of Jaffna, the port prominently featured in the *Mahavamsa*. Here the Kurukulathar of Varnakula, descendants of early colonists, are largely agriculturists. The traditions are the same here as elsewhere in Ceylon, and they possess a flag similar to that preserved in the family of Kadirgammam Thampi, of Tammankaduwa, in Polonnaruwa district of North Central Province.

To conclude with a reference to the present social tendencies in the Careas of Jaffna. During my visit of Jaffna in 1965, it was revealed that the Careas are progressively inclined to demarcate between two classes of the group, the Melongi and the Keelongi, the former the socially advanced class with benefits of higher English education, and employed in educational or other fields in Government or private services. The other section denotes the class that pursues fishing, mainly deep-sea fishing, as their main avenue of livelihood.

1 For a free translation of a few of the verses, See M. D. Raghavan: 'India in Ceylonese History, Society and Culture, New Delhi, 1968, p. 58.

## The Brahmin

**T**HE social retinue that accompanied the Bo-Tree (227 B.C.) in its progress from India to Ceylon, included "eight persons from Brahmin families" besides a cross-section of other Indian social groups.<sup>1</sup> A great deal of the reflection of the Hindu Social System is obvious in the Middle Ages of Ceylon. The Brahmin was honoured in the several roles he filled, as *amatya* or minister, guru or leader, and *purohit* or priest. Resistant as a rule to outside influences, the Brahmin no doubt held his ground as a separate caste entity, until in course of ages, he merged imperceptibly in the Sinhalese Social System.<sup>2</sup> The last we hear of the Brahmin in his priestly role, is in the reign of Parakramabahu VIII of Kotte (1486 - 1518), with the king bestowing the village of Oruvila in Aturugiri Korale to two priests (E - Z, Vol. III, p. 51 - 66). As a social unit of his own,

1 Geiger, W.: *The Mahavamsa*, Ch. XIX, V. 1-4; p. 128.

2 For an account of the destiny that overtook the Brahmin in Ceylon, see Raghavan, M. D.: "India in Ceylonese History, Society and Culture: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, New Delhi, (Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1964): "Caste in the Sinhalese Social System," pp. 28 - 81; and

Navaratnam, C. S.: "A Short History of Hinduism in Ceylon," Jaffna, 1964, pp. 101 - 108.

the Brahmin ceased to exist. Reminiscent of the days of his past life in Ceylon are a number of places — names such as Brahmanavatta, the Garden of the Brahmin, Bamunugama, the village of the Brahmin, and Agraharam, a village in South Ceylon.

In mediaeval Hindu Jaffna, the Brahmin did not figure as conspicuously as he did in the rest of Ceylon. His role in Jaffna was and is purely as priest in the Hindu temples. The concept of social precedence between the Brahmin and the Vellalar scarcely arises in Jaffna. Nevertheless, society pays him due regard by virtue of his priestly role. This does not affect the outstanding social status of the Vellalar, at the apex of the Jaffna Social System.



## The Vanniyar

**THE** Vanniyar, as the name denotes, are the peoples of the Vanni<sup>1</sup> — the part specifically of North Ceylon bounded by the Jaffna Lake on the North, by the Aruvi River on the South, Trincomalee on the East and the district of Mannar on the West, an area unique in many ways.

Though nominally under the Dutch, the Vanniyar chiefs enjoyed a measure of independence inherited from the early days

1 The name Vanni has caused some confusion and misinterpretation. An obvious example of such a misinterpretation is the foot-note 2 on page 136 of the *Culavamsa*, Vol. II: "The name (Vanni) does not occur in the older *Mahavamsa*, nor in the *Culavamsa* of Dhammakitti. The Vannis live today, but a few hundred in number, in small villages on the northern frontier of the North Central Province. They go in for agriculture and preferably for hunting. Their origin is unknown. The surrounding inhabitants call them Veddas as a rule and the Census of 1921, evidently includes them among these. They themselves repudiate all connection with the Veddas on whom they look down upon with contempt."

Ryan calls attention to this confusion in these words:—"The Vanniyar are not to be confused with the semi primitive people called the Vanniya in the Padaviya tank area, west of Trincomalee. These are probably of mixed Sinhalese and Vedda stock, referred to by Ievers as Veddas. Described in some detail by Parker, they may still be identified." (Bryce Ryan: *Sinhalese Village in Transition*, pp. 143-144).

of the Tamil kings of Jaffna, and the Sinhalese kings of Kandy. The latter made a virtue of necessity, consented to receive an annual tribute of presents from the Vanniyar chiefs who were appointed as the regional governors.

As the largest division of the Dutch kingdom of Jaffna, the Dutch looked to the Vanni for the largest income, largely derived from the sale of elephants in the Vanni jungles. To ensure this revenue, the Vanni was divided into a number of provinces, farmed out to the Vanniyar, under the name of Mayorals, on the terms of an annual supply of 42 elephants.

The Memoirs of Van Rhee are a record of the relations of the Dutch with the intractable Vanniyar chiefs. Stern measures were contemplated but seldom put into effect. Governor Van Rhee freely gives vent to his indignation in these strong words: "By birth subjects of the Company, and by descent no more than ordinary caste Bellalas, the Vanniyars have in course of time become conceited and imagine the title of the Vannia is one invested with awe and so important that although they received it from the Company they do not need to respect the Company or those placed in authority here, and they seem to be in doubt whether they ought to share their due obedience by appearing before its officers."

The British succeeded to the heritage of the Vanni from the Dutch. The Vanniyars under Bandara Vanniyar rose in revolt. After considerable resistance, the rebellion was subdued and peace restored.

The story of the Vanniar colonisation is one that we have to piece together from a number of sources. One of the chronicles relied upon is the *Vaiya Padal* by Vaiyapuri Aiyar, the Court poet of King Sekharaja Sekaran. The story in short is this: Chinkan (Uggira Sinkan), a Kalinga Chief assuming kingship, sends messengers to the Pandyan King at Madura for a princess to be his wife. The Madura King nominates Vanniyars of Taranipar Kulathar, of royal lineage, to accompany the princess to Lanka. A series of colonisations followed. Vanniyar colonisation and overlordship as disclosed in the *Vaiya Padal*, reveals to us that the land Vanni has taken its name from the people Vanniyar.

Of their origin in South India, Gustav Oppert (1893), enlightens us in these words in his "Original Inhabitants of Bharta Varsha or India." Deriving the word 'Vannia' from the Sanskrit 'Vahni' meaning fire, Oppert explains that Agni, the God of Fire, is connected with regal office as kings hold in their hands the firewheel or Agneyachakra and the Vanniyars urge in support of their name, the regal descent they claim. "The existence of these fire races, Agnikula or Vahnikula Vanniya in North and South India is a remarkable fact. No one can refuse to a scion of the non-Aryan Warrior tribe the title of Rajputra, but in so doing we establish at once Aryan and non-Aryan Rajputs. The Vanniyan of South India may be accepted as a representative of the non-Aryan Rajput element."

The condition of the Vanni and its people in Dutch times may best be understood in terms of the account left by Nagel, Regent, August 1785.<sup>1</sup>

Of the earlier form of government, Nagel tells us that when the Portuguese left, "the elders of the provinces were by election of their chiefs and probably placed a president at Parengichettikulam as chief of the Vanni" and this continued until 1661, when they came under the Dissawa of Jaffnapatanam. This was subsequently changed and the country placed under the heathen with the title of Wannias for an annual tribute to the Dutch Company of 30 elephants. Under their chiefs, the country and the people declined. "The chiefs oppressed the inhabitants with their haughtiness not only plundered the inhabitants but also travellers to and from Trincomalee and Mannar. They had their service bands of runaway slaves and other deserters to execute murders and other villanies." It was easy to live on plunder, and cultivation of lands declined.

With no laws in writing, they ruled despotic and contrary to the laws of nature. All crimes were expiated with money.

<sup>1</sup> The Vanni, 1793, J.R.A.S. (C.B.), Vol. XXXVIII, Part II, 1948, pp. 69-74.

In the concluding paras, we are given an informative account of their customs and ways of life: "A marriage was confirmed or celebrated in the presence of washerman and barber of the village. The bridegroom presents the bride with a piece of cloth and binds a necklace round her neck; the present of the bride, or marriage gift, which is written and signed by the friends and relations, consists generally in a cow, buffaloe, copper plate to eat out, chopping knife to chop the jungles, with sometimes a piece of ground, the whole being not worth ten rixdollars; this confirms the marriage. The friends are treated with rice, milk, and betel and they amuse themselves by singing and dancing at the sound of the Tamblingero and Rabano, and this marriage continues legal as long as it pleases the Vannia not to annul the same. Little is to be observed with respect to the births of their children. When young, the ears of both male and female are bored and instead of gold they have rolled up olas in them as gold *joys*<sup>1</sup> would be taken from them by the Vannias.

"Their manner of living was and is still the same. A few sticks bound together in the form of an umbrella and covered with straw shelters them from rain. The walls of their houses are covered 3 or 4 foot high with earth to protect them against the weather and for them it is a fine dwelling which I am sure they would not wish to exchange for a larger one although they could get it, for they say that evil spirits reside therein. Rice, butter and milk is their food. Potherbs are not planted by them; a few banana and pimento trees are all that they plant and what I can say is that it only proceeds from laziness. They live near their fields and crawls. If it rains in the months of October and November, they plough their fields with buffaloes.

"They sow their fields and fence them with bushes and watch them until the crop is gathered or otherwise it would be devoured by wild animals.

"Others who have no fields cut down a jungle, put it on fire and sow on it paddy and other fine grain which is not as Natjery

<sup>1</sup> Jewels: cf. "Joy tax" or tax on jewellery (From the Portuguese Joia, P.E.P.).



or Warregoe as it yields hundredfold. So that two parras which are sown produce a sufficiency of a whole family for a year and this grain does not, when sown require water, but it must be watched the same way as paddy.

"Little or no coin either gold or silver or copper has been circulated amongst them; their clothes, iron and copper they got, as is stated above, in exchange for paddy and butter from the Jaffna pedlars who go about with bags and they give them their articles at a year's credit in order to receive in return at the next harvest paddy at the rate of eight strivers per parra. The smith for making implements, the carpenter for making the plough and the washerman and barber are paid with paddy.

"Their burials are as simple as their manner of living. When anybody dies, the neighbours are invited and hired to bewail the death of the deceased. Two days and even more, a loud feigned crying is carried on; so as to be heard far off, and the body is wrapped up in a piece of cloth of two cubits (if they have it) or in a mat when they hang it to a stick and two men carry it away. The man who goes before carries one *Inchiado* to dig the grave, and the males of the family follow the corpse. The depths of their graves is one or two feet, for it would be too much trouble for them to dig it deeper; and at night the jackals come and get out the bodies and devour them, so that the next morning the bones are only found remaining about which they are very indifferent. The hut or place where the deceased resided is abandoned and the remaining family go and settle themselves somewhere else.

"They do not dig wells to get good water as it would give them too much trouble and they therefore use the water which the rain leaves in holes and tanks although the same be full of filth, for they not only wash their bodies which are often filled with eruptions but also clean their private parts and besides the buffaloes lay the whole day in them. So that I believe that there is no nation so very dirty and indifferent as the inhabitants of the Vanni.

"Their spirits consist of a sort of bark called Welenpalloe distilled or Palmeira sugar which is done very simply by binding two pots, the one on the other which are soldered, with clay in

top and a hole is made to which a small bamboo tube is fastened also with clay, to get over the spirits into another pot which is placed underneath and this liquor is very spirituous but has a very disagreeable smell but might be rendered agreeable by putting when distilling some odoriferous ingredients therein.

"They make use of leaves of trees instead of plates to put their victuals in. Simple nature reigns amongst them. Hundreds of them have neither been at Jaffna or ever seen a good house. Their dwelling places are always situated in the jungles, and for security sake they do not cut away the bushes before their houses so that at a distance of from 20 to 30 paces their huts are not to be seen. Simplicity is found in the highest degree amongst them. When the company's buildings were first erected it was interesting to see them how they gazed when they came to Moletivoe, and their attention is so very great when seeing their effigy in a looking glass that no noise whatsoever can draw it away. A standing clock and pictures are uncomprehensible and surprising things to them."



## The Mukkuvar

THE legends of the Mukkuvar go back to the far off ages of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* epics. Vyasa, the author of *Mahabharata*, figures in the traditions as the son of the Brahmin saint Parasara, born to the beautiful Satyavadi, alternately known as Parimalakanti, a Fisher maiden. This indeed upholds the faith that in ancient India, "caste had little basis on functions or services." This same Satyavadi was later wedded to King Santanu, who caught a fleeting glance of her on the banks of the Ganges. Daughter of Dasa, the Chief of the Fisher tribe, her father would not consent to an alliance of his daughter to the King, unless Bhishma, the king's son, renounced all claims to the throne. Bhishma not only renounced all rights to the throne, but also remained single all his life.

Their colourful traditional background is not altogether lost on the Mukkuvar of today. Their mode of life varies under the varying environment in the different parts of Ceylon. Though generally known as one of the Fishing caste, this statement should not be interpreted too literally. Today there are rich business men among them in the different regions of Ceylon. Jaffna is no exception, though there are a number of fishing

villages where they pursue their fishing craft as they do in Karainagar. Education is fast raising their social and economic status in Jaffna as elsewhere. This is generally true today of a number of other Jaffna groups also who are fast changing under a variety of forces.

The Mukkuvar may best be considered on a regional basis. The Eastern Province division is mainly agricultural, the thriving villages of the Western Shore in particular, separated from the mainland by the wide Batticaloa lagoon. Their traditional cultural values are particularly maintained in this isolated settlement. In general in the Eastern Province, the leaders are the rich agriculturists, followed by a large middle class and a class holding smaller plots of coconut or betel plantations.

Puttalam, with its dry hot climate, supports large plantations of the tobacco, a major industry in Kalpitiya. The tobacco season finds all the households here busy gathering and storing the tobacco leaf. Mannativu, within the district of Puttalam, has a fairly flourishing business in cattle rearing. The milk finds a ready market in Puttalam.

Religiously considered, in the North-western Province, they are largely Roman Catholics, with a strong minority of the Muslim Mukkuvar in the village of Kottantivu. In the Northern and Eastern Provinces they are largely Hindus.

Among the many cultural factors, the most significant is the matrimonial family system that largely regulated their social life until a few decades ago. The system has been changing in the last decade under a variety of influences, though reflections of the system could still be analysed and studied in the more traditional habitats, as on the Western Shore.

The main fishing villages of Jaffna are Chulipuram on the mainland, and Karaitivu, the latter connected with the Jaffna mainland by a two-mile causeway — a delight to cross over at all times and particularly so, in the rising tide when the lagoon is dotted with the fishermen walking about with the net hanging over their arms, ready to be flung over an approaching shoal of fish. The name Karaitivu gives place to the more

familiar name Karainagar, a populous village and a place steadily growing in interest and importance, with the conspicuous educational institution, the Hindu College, engaged in its great work of educating the rising generation.

Though the contact of the Mukkuvar with the outside world is limited, theirs is a highly socialised life. Pleasant conversationalists, they flash a smile at anybody who is interested in their work at sea. They patiently listen to all your enquiries and spring a mild surprise on you as you hear their experience and their folklore, full of informative value. Their respect is great towards other castes and religions.

Marriage is an elaborate institution. A community of mixed religions, Tamils, Moors and Christians in the different parts of Ceylon, the Mukkuvar of Jaffna are Hindus mostly and follow Hindu customs. All irrespective of religion have the ceremonial of the bridal knot or the *tali* — a tribute to their Tamil heritage. The customs themselves vary in the different Mukkuvar habitat.

To arrange a marriage in the good old days, according to the Jaffna traditions, negotiations proceed, it is remarked, till seven pairs of footwear get worn out on either side. The bridegroom's party takes the initiative in the deliberations. When the two parties agree, a formal invitation is sent to the bridegroom's house indicating acceptance of the girl. This invitation confirms the marriage. A simple ceremony called "ponnuruku" (gold melting) is performed at the bridegroom's house where a piece of gold is melted by the goldsmith who is commissioned to make the *tali*. The Muhurtam, the auspicious date and time for the marriage, is fixed by the experienced elders.

On the marriage day, the bridegroom keeps himself trim by a hair cut. He gives away the new upper cloth worn by him to the barber for his services. His new *vēshti*, the cloth worn round his waist, is gifted to the dhobi. Other dhobies and barbers also join to sing songs and to bless him with long life and prosperity. He takes a bath and comes out well dressed, and is taken in procession to the bride's place, along with his relatives and friends.

The bride is given a bath at her house, and dressed for the occasion. In the presence of friends and relatives, the priest duly calls on the couple to occupy the bridal seat. The bridegroom sits by the side of the prospective brother-in-law while the bride sits by the prospective sister-in-law. The bride sits to the left of the bridegroom.

The priest chants mantrams or sacred hymns before the sacred fire and gives the *tali* to the bridegroom to be worn around the bride's neck. After this ceremony, the bridegroom and the bride become man and wife. With mutual feasts on either side, the marriage ceremony comes to a close.

The bride's father provides her a dowry in money and property — the *sidanam*. The object of the dowry is to provide all convenience to the new couple to start life. Today, if one holds some academic qualifications, or is wealthy, his price in the marriage market shoots up. The bridegroom wears a series of earrings, 'Periakuppikadukan' on the lower tip of the ear, 'Sinnakuppikadukan, Muttukadukan, and Kayikadukan' higher up. A few of the men wear the Kadukan permanently on the ears, but most take them out after the marriage. Women wear Kal Modiram, toe rings, on the toe, next to the big toe on either foot. The Mukkuvar of today feel hesitant to wear the whole set of ear ornaments, yielding to the modernising tendencies among other societies. A decade more, and the practice of men wearing ear-rings at the marriage may be altogether abandoned. There is another custom, that of giving a brass plate to the bridegroom. The bride's father keeps a coconut, some betel leaves, and arecanut in the plate, and hands it over to the priest. After the tying of the bridal knot, the *tali*, the priest hands over the plate to the bridegroom. To the man and his wife, this is a precious memento of their marriage.

Death with them is as complicated a process as marriage. It is an insult to leave the dead body unhonoured and unsung. Important relatives are informed personally. Usually, all the people are informed by announcing loudly as they go from street to street in the early hours of the day following the death.

Hearing the announcement, all the people of the community gather to express their sympathy to the near relatives of the dead. By about ten in the morning, the corpse is given a bath. The priest comes and chants the sacred hymns, and offers prayers to the departed soul. Women gather together and wail. This is popularly known as *Oppari*. Barbers and dhobies render their share of help. The corpse is afterwards lowered into the coffin and taken in a procession to the cremation ground.

Other social functions like birthdays, christening ceremonies and the puberty of the girls, also follow age-old traditional Tamil customs. In all social functions, relatives and friends are invited to a feast. Betel leaves and tobacco are served to all the people that gather.

"Puberty" ceremony in Mukkuvar girls of Jaffna has its own customs. A rectangular '*kolam*' (a design with rice flour) is drawn on the ground in a room and the girl sits on the *kolam* and is required to be so seated for seven days. During this period she is fed on '*arimāṭṭu*' (cooked rice flour) and egg. On the eighth day, she is given a bath. The first bucket of water is offered by her uncle, and the others by the other relatives. The soiled cloth is given to the dhoby, who gives her another cloth ceremonially pure, in exchange. Thus ends the ceremony.

There is no community without petty quarrels. They do exist in Mukkuvar community too. But comparatively, these are fewer. This may partly be attributed to their social consciousness, and partly to their lack of time to get into talks, highly conscientious as they are of their own occupation.

Mukkuvar claim territorial rights in the waters in which they fish, a convention strictly observed in North Ceylon. According to the national fisheries laws,<sup>1</sup> the public can fish any-

1 English Law of Fisheries: The classification may be reduced to fisheries which are exclusive and which are not. In exclusive fisheries, the rights of fishing belongs to the owner of the soil or is derived from him.

International Law: Outside the territorial waters, fisheries are not subject to legal regulation. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. IX, p. 303.

where in the sea, unless it is exclusively and legally possessed by an individual or a group of individuals. The Mukkuvar of North Ceylon claim that they have hereditary rights over the sea. A determined lot, they even go to the Courts to fight it out. Even among themselves they cannot tolerate, if one group encroaches into what they consider the territorial waters of the other. Some have written documents of rights over the seas.

Women play a vital role in the economics of the group. When the husband is out on the sea, she runs the house. She collects all the fish and takes them to the market for disposal. With the money realised, she buys the rice rations and food-stuffs, and gets ready with tasty dishes for the hungry husband. She looks after the children and teaches them the art of making baskets, and helps her husband in preparing the nets. She is powerful at home, as her husband is powerful at sea.

A Mukkuvar family on an average earns rupees five a day on fishing, depending mostly on the fish catch, and the number of adult male members of the family. It also depends upon the number of nets and the skill in using them. Above all is the "luck" of the day. If they are fortunate in catching the sea animals like turtles and sharks, they may earn up to Rs. 100/- a day.

Woman is the moving force that regulates the economics of the Mukkuvar family. Obviously, in North Ceylon from fish alone they earn enough money for a fair living on their own standard of life, and a little to spare, meeting all the expenditure. A gold chain or two, may go to make up the jewellery of the woman. Any money left over is given to anybody who is in need on a fairly reasonable rate of interest. An awakening is evident in their domestic standards. In habitation, they are putting up compact stone houses instead of age-old thatched mud-walled huts, with an entrance and a window. When they are off-duty, they come out decently dressed.

On no account does the woman leave the money in the hands of her male counterpart, lest the money be wasted in drinking and gambling. Yet columns of cycles may be seen of an evening moving towards nearby towns to see pictures, while the woman waits at home.

Such relaxation apart, they are not very much given to recreation. Day and night they are on the sea. They wait for the tides to come and again wait for the tide to recede. Despite this, they are worldly wise. A socialised group, the limited leisure they have, they devote to community work. They have their own assemblies, *kūṭṭam*. At these assemblies, presided over by their head, the *periyavan*, are voiced their grievances and communal needs. They have community centres for pastime, and co-operative units to help them in the disposal of fish. They are slowly becoming politically conscious. They contest local, rural and urban elections to get a fair deal for their community. There are Kariars, Mukkuvars, and Timilars among the fishermen of North Ceylon. The Mukkuvar maintain a status in keeping with their social past. Some decades ago, there was a Mukkuvar of Batticaloa who had an only daughter, Amba, for whom he had great affection. He very much longed to give his daughter in marriage to a man of high caste. He effected the marriage by taking a Vellalar from Tambulivil, near Batticaloa, as his son-in-law.

They gather for religious functions and contribute among themselves to found temples to their gods and deities. Their chief deity is Mari Amman. They dance the Karagam dance sacred to the goddess. Religious functions take place in temples annually. They love the Sea God, Ayyanar, and offer him prayers annually, in the month of Panguni (February). At the Ayyanar temple, the priest is either a Brahmin or a Saiva Vellalar, styled Kurukkal. On the 7th day of the annual festival, comes the turn of the Mukkuvar, when the god is carried in procession on a frame of planks, on the shoulders of the Mukkuvar. On the other days, the Vellalar conduct the God round the streets.

In Jaffna Peninsula, though it is not a favourite sport among the Mukkuvar, kite flying is one in which they show some sustained interest. The blowing of the monsoon winds gives stimulus to the professional as well as to recreational interests, and they are happy during the season. With the blowing of the winds, come shoals of fresh varieties of fish. At this time of the year, they may be seen making the gigantic musical kites

which are an unique feature of Jaffna, and send them flying up into the air. Tuned by the monsoon winds, the kites soar up in the heavens, singing a chant obvious to the musical ears.

The mythological cattle brand marks of Karainagar give an idea of their traditional social status. They have two brand marks on their cattle, the Chank and the Wheel, the Shanka and the Chakra. These brand marks are not suggestive of the social function of this community, like the Karayar's symbol of a boat, or the Potter's symbol of a pot, but are symbolic of the legendary descent from the race of Sri Maha Vishnu.

The temple to the North of Karainagar serves the spiritual needs of the whole village. The temple is believed to have been founded by the Manigar Kander who lived more than a 100 years ago. The tradition is that he went on a pilgrimage to the sacred shrine of Nataraja in Chidambaram, South India, and offered prayers to the God that he may be blessed with a child. Sleeping in the temple premises one night, Goddess Amman appeared to him in his dream, with the injunction that he should go back to his village and build a temple to the Goddess. Returning to Karainagar, Kander sought local aid, and all, irrespective of caste or creed, voluntarily subscribed towards the expenses and the temple was soon a reality.

Now for some observations on their cultural and educational status. In our pursuit to understand them, we almost strike at a cultural mine. In them there are artists, poets, musicians, literary men and those interested in a scientific approach to their practical problems. Not less than fifty per cent of these adult fisher-folk are interested in Tamil literature. There are those who memorise poems from *Tirukkural*. They sing many a *tēvaram*. The interpretation of the verses in different ways, is a feature that attracted us most. Once a familiar fisherman of Karainagar went on reciting poems from *Tirukkural*. To find out if he knew any meaning, we teased him saying that there is practically no use in getting the poems by heart without knowing the meaning. With a vengeance, he recited a few of the verses and gave out the meaning of each. He indirectly made us feel that by prevailing on him to recite verses from *Tirukkural*



and expounding them, our intentions were not pure. But he would forget our bad motive, if we were prepared to remember the good he aimed at. Though their accent is a trifle jarring to our ears, they speak chaste Tamil. They can read and write fairly, a good percentage of them.

Once we were out at the beach to photograph the nets. We heard two voices, one reading and the other giving out the meaning, with a commentary on *Kambaramayanam* in a pandanus grove. The subject was the description of the River Ganges. They were appreciating Nature's rich foliage, the sounds of birds in the twilight of the golden yellow evening, and the music of the river as it descends down on the rocks. We were eager to know more by drawing them out directly and approached them. Disturbed by our presence, they stopped reading. We tried to persuade them, that we would also like to share with them the literary genius of Kambar. They were taciturn. We failed to move them, and they busied themselves getting ready for the sea. Thus we lost a Mukkuvar interpretation on the appreciation of Kambar.

Some of them have a literary disposition to satire. They speak in simple Tamil rich in meaning. In every human society, satire grows on social contact. It is very much of a wonder how some of the Mukkuvar are literary-minded, living as they do in a society which has not seen anything except fishing until a decade ago — at least that is our impression.

The simple *Catamaran*, an anglicisation of the word *Kattumaram*, a number of logs lashed together to form a composite structure, is the fishing craft most popular in Jaffna waters. The smaller type is the *teppam*, three-logged, 9 to 15 feet in length. The logs in a *teppam* are joined together by wooden pegs. The larger type made of five logs is the *Kattumaram*. The central log is the foundation, on which the other logs are lashed together by ropes. Soaked in water on return from the sea, the logs are dismantled and left on the sands to dry. Practically unsinkable, cheap to make and to maintain, it is greatly favoured. Launched out into the sea, the craft is rowed about for a short distance by the *Chukkan*, the paddle. Half submerged in the water, the

crew of three are continually drenched by the waves. At some distance from the shore, the sails are spread out, making it easy sailing, with short mast, the large triangular sails. A number of these sailing in close formation, makes a good picture, viewed from the shore.

Extensively using the gill net, *Catamarans* cover an inshore fishing area, to a distance of 3 to 4 miles. Reaching the fishing grounds, the sails are lowered, and the nets are set across the shoals of fish. The lower edges of the net are heavily weighed with coral stones, so as to stretch the margin and let the net sink deep into the sea. The top is lined with wooden floats, which guide the position of the net as it sinks. The entire net drifts along with the current. When the fish comes up against the net, it pushes its head through the mesh, and gets entangled between the body and the head. The size of the inter spaces  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 7 inches, determine the kind and size of the fish, the net can catch. The main types of net are known by the particular kind of fish, as seer net or the mackrel net.

With the sail down, a *Catamaran* can remain close to a set gill net without drifting far. Most favoured in Jaffna, the *Catamaran* diminishes in range along the western shore. A total of about 1,500 *Catamarans* are known to have been registered over Ceylon waters.

The outrigger canoe, the *Oru*, of the western coast, is almost unknown in Jaffna. Apart from the *Catamaran*, is the small dug-out canoe, the *toni* and its larger version, the *Vallam* of Jaffna.

## The Chandar

THE main Chandar villages of Jaffna are in Anaikoddai, Vannarponnai, Navali, Changanai East, Sandilipay and Alavaddi. One of their strongholds, Anaikoddai has a total population of about four thousand four hundred living in about 680 houses.

The cultivation of gingelly and the extraction of the gingelly oil are in their hands. The business in gingelly seeds and oil and paddy cultivation sum up their activities. Coconut has little place in the economy of their life. A man of average means has an extent of paddy lands which brings him about ten bushels of paddy, which with a Chekku oil mill he owns, keeps his family in happy contentment.

The functional classes give their share of services to the Chandars, the Pallar in farming and in the work on the Chekku. He climbs palms and cuts the cadjan. At funerals he cuts the firewood and prepares the funeral pyre. Separate families of Vannan (washerman) and Ambattan (barber) serve their domestic needs. At a wedding the washerman spreads the Nilapavadai for the couple to walk over and decorates the wedding pandal with *tirasila*, the canopy under which the couple sits.

Jaffna shrines have their own legends. Among such is the stimulating story at the background of Murthi Nayanar Temple of Anaikoddai. A brother and sister were taking oil through a lonely path when they heard a child's voice, "Take me, take me." They did not pay heed or search for the child. Another day the same call was heard. Looking around they noticed an image of Vinayaga (Ganapathy) with "Kolu" (plough) mark. They took it and a temple was in due course built at the site — the Murthi Nayanar Temple. This episode is said to have taken place some ten generations ago. The reputed finders of the figure were Kandar and his sister.

The Saiva Siddantha religious system of Jaffna fosters a priesthood of its own, represented in the Saiva Gurukul. Hindu children, at about ten years of age, undergo a rite in initiation, in Saiva Manthiram. The Saiva Guru of Jaffna takes the place of the Brahmin priest who performs the Upanayanam in Brahmin society.

What is of interest is that while Upanayanam introduces the Brahmin male child into the Bramachariya Ashram, in Saivite Jaffna, both boys and girls are initiated in the *Diksha*, if my information gathered from a knowledgeable Chandar householder is correct. It is declared that a woman who has not undergone *Diksha* cannot cook or serve food to a man who has been initiated in the Saivite faith. This means that no such woman can be a wife to a man who has gone through the rite.

The *Theechai Manthiram* is intoned by the Gurukkal in the ears of the initiate under oath of secrecy. The child undergoing the ceremony stands in relation to the Guru as his Sishya or disciple, the same as that between the Brahmin Purohit and the Brahmin boy who goes through the Upanayanam. The child is now prepared for his adult life. Taking his morning bath, he chants hymns and wears the holy ash on his forehead, hands and chest.

It so happened that it was on a Friday that I was at the Chandar village of Anaikoddai. The household was busy cleaning the premises. The floor received a renovation in cow-dung solution in charred coconut husk. After the cleaning

operations the mistress of the house bathed, performed the Anuttanam, and cooked and served food to the family. Sounds of a bell announced puja in progress. Puja is offered every Friday to goddess Saraswathi, symbolised by a Yantraya or magical design on a brass plate with a picture of Saraswathi installed on a table.

In Jaffna you hear it said that the Shanars of South India became Chandars of Ceylon. Tinnevely and Travancore are their main centres. The cultivation and exploitation of the coconut palm has been their traditional function. Involving as it did, the extraction and sale of intoxicants, they were relegated to a low social status which they would not easily accept.

Assertive as a class, caste disputes brought them into conflict with the higher castes. Social clashes and over-population led sections of them to cross the narrow straits and settle in Ceylon where their industrious habits soon found vent in new occupations. In their homeland they have advanced in education and occupy responsible positions in public life and as the keen businessmen they are, wealth accumulated. All this has improved their social outlook in South India.

An interesting point in connection with the Chandar was my discovery of about seventy-five Chandar families occupying the village of Tettapola in the district of Puttalam. Other Chandar villages are Daluva and Nayakar sena. Except for a small section of Hindus in the latter, all are Roman Catholics. Yet another discovery was the revealing information that in the village of Pitipana, Seeduwa and Nallandaluva are small communities of what are popularly called "Sinhalese Chandars," who speak Tamil. Between these and the Puttalam Chandars, marriage alliances are entered into. A daughter after her wedding retains her rights to parental property, an interesting survival possibly to safeguard the rights of women under matriarchy. As a consequence, apparently, no dowry is given.

An offshoot of the large body of Shanars of South India, the Puttalam section of Chandars are among the early arrivals from South India, landing, it is said, at Madikkettan Oda at Kalpitiya.

Typical of the average life of a Chandar householder is the case history of Vythilingam Thillaivanam whom I interviewed at his house in Anaikoddai village. Studied in a vernacular school upto sixth standard. Leaving school at 15 years of age, took to the business in gingelly seeds and agriculture. Maintained a cart and a pair of bullocks for trading in gingelly. Kept a Chekku for making gingelly oil. Lived on the proceeds of the oil and some paddy cultivation. Married at 30 years of age, Theivani, who died without issue. Remarried after 5 years, Amminipillai. Has one son, Vadivelu, a youth of 26 years of age. Vythilingam was healthy and able-bodied at 70 years of age when I interviewed him.

## The Adimai and the Kudimai Groups

**J**AFFNA social system is founded on traditional social values well marked by a technique of inter-relationship which has held it together over long ages. Inter-dependence is the keynote of Jaffna social system, an inter-dependence based on rights and privileges between the higher and lower strata of society. In its functional aspects, in the services of the functional units, as the Koviari, the Nalavar, the Pallar and the Parayar, the system finds some parallel in the Social System of the Kandyan feudalism, the system broadly denoted by the term *Rajakarya*, services to the State and Society. A heritage of the social system of the Tamils of South India, the Jaffna Social System, has had an ancestry going back to the past ages. Held together by bonds of mutual services and privileges, it made for a balanced social well-being in which every unit of society, the high and the low were partners, in the interests of the society as a whole, a system which, to the lower social orders afforded a sense of social security. That it fulfilled the needs of a traditional society of the time oriented to agricultural economics, is the long and short of it.

The grading of social status among the groups below the Vellalar is rather more distinctly marked in the Jaffna system than in the Sinhalese Social System.

A two-fold ancestral division of groups below the Vellalar, was into Adimai and Kudimai. The Adimai comprised the castes attached to the Vellalar families, the Koviari, the Nalavar, and the Pallar. The Kudimai composed of the artisan castes, the Goldsmith, the Blacksmith, the Brazier, and the service groups, the Ambattans (barber), Vannan (the washerman) and the Parayar. The distinction was that whereas the Adimai groups, were in the nature of agrestic slaves, bought and sold with the land, this did not apply to the Kudimai castes who served the society as a whole and not any particular Vellalar family.

Of the three Adimai castes, the Nalavar and the Pallar were classed as Untouchables. Their status and ranking differ today in the different villages, as do their customs of behaviour. Man everywhere is awakening to a sense of human equality, and humanity, whether in Jaffna or down South, is marching forward.

### The Kudimakkal

Synonymous with the term Adimai is the term Kudimakkal, literally the sons of the soil. Cut off for long ages from South India, Jaffna has cherished and maintained in its social life, the fundamentals of a traditional social order which in its home lands of Tamilnad has largely ceased to be a social determinant, with the Vellalar at the top and a number of dependent functional units attached to the Vellalar landlord. The *Tesawalamai Code* of customary laws, codified for the first time in 1707 by Claasz Issacs at the instance of the Dutch Governor Simons, names the Kudimakkals of Jaffna as the Koviari, Chiandos, the Pallar and the Nalavar. From what we see of the functioning of the Kudimakkal system in Jaffna of the Dutch days, we may rightly conclude that it has been fundamental to Jaffna society all through the past and mediaeval days. *Tolkappiyam* speaks of the Parayar, the Panar, the Kadambar and the Tudiayar as the



our Kudimakkals. This would lead us to presume that the system was not of a uniform pattern but varied with the varying epoch.

In the Report of the Select Committee on Hindu Temporalities, issued by the Ceylon Government as Sessional Paper, V, 1951, we have the most recent enunciation of the caste in Jaffna, in its relation to the Kudimakkals: "The ancient Tamil Society knew no caste system of the type of the Varnashrama classification of the Smritis of the Aryans. Scholars are of the opinion that the caste system even among the Aryans, is a later development. *Tolkappiyam*, the oldest extant Tamil Grammar, has grouped the Tamils according to the characteristics of the areas in which they live and not according to their occupations. Untouchability as a social or religious institution was unknown among the ancient Tamils."

"The country was divided geographically into five divisions or Thinais: 1. *Kurinchi* (High land), 2. *Mullai* (Jungle), 3. *Marutham* (Low land), 4. *Neithal* (Coast) and 5. *Palai* (Uncultivable Desert land). The people who lived in these areas differ in their habits, customs, occupations, etc. and were called by the names assigned to them according to the nature of the land which they inhabited or the occupation followed."

"It is the Velanmanthar or the Vellalas who were the most numerous section of the Tamil population and occupied pre-eminent position in the society and were held in the highest esteem. It is amongst them that were found Anthanar (Priest), Chieftains, Arasar (Rulers) and Vanigar (Traders) according to their attainments. There was no caste system as practised by the Aryans, but the Tamil system was analogous to the relation of Vassal and Lord in the feudal times in Europe and the classes lived under the protection of his family, "in dependent freedom," performed personal and domestic services and were called Kudimakkal or Kudimaihal. The chief was entitled to the service of the feudatory whenever required and the latter to the share of the produce of the land cultivated, to perquisites at weddings, funerals, etc. These classes were the fisherman,

barber, potter, gold or silversmith, brazier, tailor, etc. It is noteworthy that the castes mentioned by Sambandhar<sup>1</sup> in his *Devarams*, correspond to the Tamil classification."

As a reflection of the views of representative leaders of Jaffna society, this is authoritative testimony of present day social life.

The principle herein briefly enunciated, of the traditional Kudimakkals concept, is more acceptable than the later equation of the Kudimakkals as slaves in the Western sense. Not all the functional or services classes of Jaffna come within the category of the Kudimakkals. As already stated, the *Tesavalamai* gives the Koviar, the Chiandos, the Pallar and the Nalavar as the Kudimakkals of Jaffna. The *Tesavalamai* seems to contradict itself in regard to the Chiandos, with these qualifying words: "They were but few in number and such of this caste as were in slavery were not registered in the Tombos as Chiandos but under the denomination of the Gowias, so that the remaining part of them are free and perform Government service in the same manner as the Bellalas and perform their ordinary *Utiyam* or Government service during one day every month." A people of independent means, there is nothing of the Kudimakkal concept in the Chandar. The Kudimakkal ideology of Jaffna seems to be something of its own. It has relation more to economic status than to the social. A typical example is the Parayar. Despite the heritage of their low social position, they are economically self-sufficient, engaged largely in weaving in their handlooms in their own humble dwellings and in other handicrafts. They are not one of the Kudimakkals. The three typical Kudimakkals of Jaffna are the Koviar, the Nalavar and the Pallar. The Koviar mostly attached to the Vallalar and working for the Vellala landlord, has been and is a Kudimakkal group. Lower are the Nalavar and the Pallar, featured in the Dutch Tombos as "slaves from their origin and remain so till the present time, unless any of their masters out of compassion happen to eman-

<sup>1</sup> The castes referred to by Sambandhar are Vethiyar, Marayar, Anthanar, Vellalar, Ayar, Kuravar, Vedar, Parathar, and Kadasiyar (manual workers in the field): Sengalvaraya Pillai, V. S. *Devara Olineri Kaddurai*, page 81.



cipate them, which very seldom takes place." Each of these groups will be dealt with separately as we proceed.

The Kudimakkal system may best be regarded as a stage in the growth of the Tamil Society, under conditions prevailing in the ancient and mediaeval society and we may concede that it contributed to the stability of social life, just as much as the feudal social structure of the Kandyan kingdom. A vital difference between the Jaffna social system and the Kandyan feudal dispensation, is that in the latter, every feudal family has its allotment of land for services to society and State, whereas in Jaffna, the Kudimakkal tenant has only rights of cultivation without any ownership of the land.

Traditional institutions are slowly but steadily giving place in the social life of peoples, and the Kudimakkals organisation shows signs of breaking up in the life of Jaffna. The case for traditions *vis a vis* modernisation, cannot be better summed up than in these words of Nehru: "A nation draws its inspiration from the past traditions like a tree drawing its sap by roots. But a tree cannot live on sap only. It will wither away if it does not get fresh light and air. Similarly a nation cannot progress if it does not keep its brain open and become receptive. In the present world of scientific and technological advancement, countries and peoples have to strike a balance between tradition and scientific progress."

Among the sociological problems awaiting study, is an enquiry into the incidence of the system in the present day Jaffna, problems both of cultural continuity as of cultural change — the extent to which the Kudimakkals concept obtains in Jaffna and the rate and pace of changes that are under way under modernisation forces. Varying as these changes are from place to place, and group to group, this is a study that has to be carried out in the context of the ecological and cultural setting of the different villages.

Two of the obvious dynamic factors of social change, are the free education by the State, making for educational advancement on the one hand and economical independence on the other, adding up to a rising sense of awareness of social equality. We have also to reckon on changes brought into being by the State and society, impelled by the sense of humanity, immanent in us, of justice to the under-dog.

## The Kudimakkals

### 1. The Koviari

THE Koviari enjoy a social status higher than the Nalavar. The comparatively higher position is implicit in the observations of the *Tesavalamani* that "it would be a matter of great difficulty to find out that they were slaves from their own origin, though the greatest part of them are slaves at present." In the social life of the Vellalar, the Koviari has a vital role. At Vellala marriages, he acts as the mediator. Both the bridegroom's and the bride's party repose confidence in the Koviari intermediary. Preliminary talks are carried on and the terms of the dowry considered and settled through him. In the marriage procession, he holds the canopy over the bridegroom. As the bridegroom arrives at the bride's house, a Koviari woman performs the simple but essential ritual of *Alathi*, waving a tray of lighted wicks before the bridegroom. This dispels the evil eye and everything evil. Koviari women prepare the *Poothakalam*, for the ceremonial rice-feeding of the couple and a Koviari woman attends on them at the ceremonial feeding.

In Vellala society when a girl attains age, a Koviari woman serves as her companion and helpmate through the period of her seclusion and the whole duration of the puberty ceremonies.



Rasanayagam, no doubt, had these and other customs in mind when he summed up the social standing of the Koviars in the words "that their original status was equal to that of the Vellalar, can be inferred from certain customs which are still in vogue in Jaffna." (Rasanayagam: p. 883). Of the two tests of caste reciprocity, the higher castes have commensality with the Koviars, stopping short of connubium or inter-marriage.

The Koviars take a leading part at funerals of the Vellalar. They bathe the body and carry it to the cremation grounds. The principal mourner who is to lit the funeral pyre, walks under a canopy held by the Koviars. They head the funeral procession, carrying billhooks and mamoty, symbolic of agriculture in the life of the Vellalar. At a Vellalar funeral on the eighth day of the funeral ceremonies, the Vannan, the Ambattan and the Parayar receive cash presents, the *Kudimakkal Kasu* and sit for meals together. The Koviars and the Nalavar do not join in the feast. Nalavar do not eat at the house of the dead until after the 31st day ceremony.

However much the Kudimakkal concept may be receding today, there is no doubt that both the Nalavar and Koviars were and mostly are today the functional service classes of Tamil Society. This must set at rest speculation of their origin.

The close inter-dependence in habits and customs of the Vellalar and Koviars has intrigued many. Michael Banks<sup>1</sup> refers to this "curious status relationship," this "ritual equality" and makes his own observations. "Koviars and Vellalar have a curious status relationship. Although Vellalar are generally acknowledged as the superior caste, and certainly are so in secular terms, since formerly they owned the Koviars as chattel slaves, yet Koviars are recognised by all as the ritual equals of Vellalar. Vellalar will eat from Koviars' cooking; Koviars may be employed as Vellalar's servants, and always cook at Vellalar weddings. Formerly Vellalar often took Koviars

women as concubines; many of the children of such unions are today accepted as Vellalar, while others remain Koviars. Vellalar attend Koviars' weddings as guests and eat there. At Vellalar funerals Koviars carry the bier to the burning-ground, and at Koviars' funerals the Vellalar who has been served by the dead Koviars, must touch the bier of the Koviars before the procession may start for the burying-ground. This illustrates very well the distinction between the ritual equality and the secular inferiority of Koviars. By touching the bier Vellalar assert or admit their ritual equality with Koviars; by not carrying it they assert their secular superiority.

"The ritual equality is today 'explained' by an origin myth which alleges that Koviars are the descendants of captured Sinhalese Goigamas who were enslaved by Vellalar. Such a story implies that this contrast between the sacred and the secular rank of Koviars already existed at a time when the Koviars were slaves to the Vellalar; the only other slave castes are all Untouchables. Today, Koviars rank immediately after Vellalar if one places Brahmans above Vellalar, or immediately after Brahmans if Brahmans are placed below Vellalar."

The explanation with which Banks ends his remarks of "an origin myth" which alleges that Koviars are the descendants of captured Sinhalese" follows the views first expressed by Rasanayagam.<sup>1</sup> I have already discussed this point rather fully in my study of the Koviars. (*Tamil Culture*, Vol. I, 1953, pp. 139 - 150). The substance of these discussions, I reproduce further on in the present chapter, for facility of reference. The data collected and presented in these passages, go to sustain the conclusion that the Koviars are a group absolutely unconnected with the Sinhalese Goigama, whether 'captured' nor not.

This, to my mind, is an aspect of the problem that goes into the very origins of the Functional or Service groups—the growth of functional service units in social systems, a social phenomenon which awaits an analytical study. The rise of service groups did not follow the same course in all societies. It varied with

<sup>1</sup> Banks, Michael: Caste in Jaffna: The sacred-secular split in Vellalar-Koviar Ranking: *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North-west Pakistan*, Editor E. R. Leach: Cambridge Papers in Social Anthropology, Cambridge, 1960, p. 66.

<sup>1</sup> Rasanayagam: *Ancient Jaffna*, 1926.



the social needs and the particular environment in the history of the society. A number of such groups, we are led to conclude from a general study, began in a simple process of division of interests purely vocational or voluntary devised to meet particular social needs. This in course of time crystallised into separate little units within the framework of that society. Customs of endogamy and commensality developed in their wake. What was once purely voluntary became with the passage of time, obligatory with the unwritten injunction which operated against inter-dining and inter-marrying within the parental society. This process may well be seen as having had a hand in the formation of some at least of the functional communities in South India. A typical example is Kerala. The Koviars may easily have had their origin in such a beginning, branching off from the main Vellalar stem. The "curious status relationship" and "ritual equality" in the words of Michael Banks may rightly be traced to this early origin of the Koviars from the main stem of the Vellalar, origins reflected today in a complexity of inter-related customs and social behaviour between the Vellalar and the Koviars.

Let us now consider in some detail, Rasanayagam's theory of the origin of the Koviars. Turning historical incidents to suit his theory, Rasanayagam<sup>1</sup> pronounces his *obiter dictum* on the Koviars in these words: "After the massacre of the Christians, Sankili's insane fury longed for more victims and he fell upon the Buddhists of Jaffna who were all Sinhalese. He expelled them beyond the limits of the country and destroyed their places of worship. Most of them betook themselves to the Vanni and the Kandyan kingdom and those who were unable to do so became the slaves to the Tamil chieftains and are now known as Kovia, a caste peculiar to Jaffna. The term is no doubt a corruption of the Sinhalese word Goviya or Goiya and that their original status was equal to that of the Vellalaras can be inferred from certain customs which are still in vogue in Jaffna." If Koviars as a group emerged only from the time that they became enslaved to the Tamil chiefs, following Sankili's campaigns, they could not have been both slaves of the Vellalar

and at the same time co-ordinate with them in status. If as Rasanayagam admits, their original status was equal to that of the Vellalar, it would have been no less so in the later days judging from what it is today and from their present social functions and services. These customs obviously go back to early ages and go deep into the social structure of the Tamils. It little avails to fit the name, to speculative derivations. According to Rasanayagam there were no Koviars as such before Sankili's times, (early sixteenth century) but only Sinhalese Goigama, who as a group are distinct from Tamil Vellalar.

Others too have indulged in fanciful derivations at the expense of the Koviars. Thus the author of *Yalpana Vaipava Malai* theorises that "the name is a corruption of the word Kōvilar, i.e., slaves of the Kovils, for these people had been originally servants of the temples, but afterwards through poverty, sold themselves as slaves to temples. When the temples were destroyed by the Parangis, the temple managers sold the Koviars to private purchasers as they had no occasion for their services. Sometime after this a number of poor but good caste people were brought from Vadathesam and sold here for slaves and they have acquired the name Vadasiraik Koviya. As the slave trade increased gradually, the Government have taken it into their own hands in order to increase their revenue." If they were already servants of the temple, it is scarcely credible they would have sold themselves as slaves to the very temples which they served.

Speculations apart, let us examine the philological derivation of the word Kovia a little closely. Goigama and Kovia are both traceable to the same root — "go" in Sanskrit, or "ko" in Tamil. "Go" or "Ko" means cow, cattle, and by extension has come to mean cultivation, intimately related as it is to cattle. Gopalar or Kovalar means herdsmen. A synonymous term for herdsmen is Kovintar. Gopiko is a farmer. Koviars may just as well be derived from the root "ko" as Goigama from "go". Neither is a corruption of the other.

Speculative derivations are a smoke screen to cloud the issues. That Koviars were the original herdsmen and served as such in the economy of the Tamils, is the most sensible view

<sup>1</sup> Rasanayagam: *Ancient Jaffna*, p. 892



that we can take of the group in the context of the Tamil social system of the early days when each group severally fulfilled its function to the community. That both have the same cattle brand mark today — the standing brass lamp, a mammoty and the *arukal vatturai* or the six-spoked wheel, goes to show that the Vellalar and the Koviars are associated units, two limbs of the same body. The same washerman serves the Koviars, Vellalars, Vanniar and Chettiars. The guardian god of the Koviars is Virapattira, whose Vahanam is the dog, and a dog vahanam is the offering to the deity. To the herdsmen that the Koviars are the dog is an appropriate symbol.

Besides the play on the word Koviars, that it is a corruption of the Sinhalese word Goviya or Goiya. Rasanayagam<sup>1</sup> speaks of what he considers as "the peculiar dress of Kovia women who wear the inner end of their cloth over the shoulder in a manner quite strange to the genuine Tamils." The reference here to "the genuine Tamils" is hard to understand. Vellalar women too may occasionally be seen draped in the same manner as in Vadamarachi division, the end part of the sari wrapped over the breast, tying a corner of the cloth either on the necklet or knotting a key or coins in the corner of the sari and throwing the end over the shoulder. No far-reaching conclusions can be drawn on a single trait, which may very possibly be an instance of cultural diffusion, even assuming it to be a Sinhalese influence. Considering that it has a wider vogue among the poorer classes even of the higher castes, it is more likely to have been a local development than an extraneous trait. Speaking on "the women's fashion of dressing their cloth across their breasts," does not Rasanayagam express the opinion that it is a custom introduced by the Malabar immigrants? Rasanayagam will be equally justified therefore to call them Malayalees, as to call them Sinhalese. It is obvious no conclusion can be drawn turning round this trait.

The present condition of the Koviars presents a variable picture. Education is exercising its own levelling influence, advancing them socially and economically as in Valigamam.

<sup>1</sup> Rasanayagam, C. : *Ancient Jaffna*, 1926, page 384.

The Koviars and the Nalavar as a rule held land on lease from the Vellalar paying them the prescribed lease-money (*tharaivaram*). In a few villages the Koviars, now own lands of their own, as in Valigamam East, West and North, where they enjoy a comparatively independent standing and do not serve the Vellalar. Elsewhere as in Tenmarachy, and Vadamarachi and in the islands, the Koviars remain in their position of subordination to the Vellalar discharging their customary functions. In the progressive villages referred to above they have raised themselves by education. Among them are today a number of men in the service of the State and society in varying positions of responsibility.

A typical village of the Koviars, is Kaitadi, a village of crowded huts, in which live some 600 families. They freely inter-marry with members of the community in other villages. Holding land on lease from the Vellalar they cultivate paddy, tobacco and a variety of rotation crops. The average monthly income of a family is round about Rs. 40/-. Two-thirds' share of the produce go to the owner and one-third to the cultivator. They give of their services to the Vellalar in agriculture as in domestic work, in return for customary gratification in kind in the share of paddy.

A Koviars house as in Kaitadi is in two parts, the living house and a separate shed for a kitchen. The main entrance doorway is too low to enter standing. Built of low mud walls and roofed over with palmyra leaves, the interior is all one apartment, not partitioned off into rooms. In the dry climate of Jaffna this gives a certain sense of coolness within, though lack of ventilation is not conducive to the health of residents. They are busy during the tobacco season. The competition in tobacco is rather keen, and gives them but poor returns.

Thamban, Pachian, Nagan, Thaman, Pasupathi are some of the typical names of the men. Ponni, Valli, Kathiri, Naga-moorthi, Thellechi, Sithamparathi are some of the names of the women in this village.

Saivite deities in general are worshipped here—Pillayar, Kali and Aiyandar. Marriage customs of the Koviars bear a close



resemblance to the customs of Vellalar. The bride's brother acts as the bestman, the Mapilai Tholan. Accompanied by relations and the Kudimakkals, the Barber and the Dhoby, he goes to the bridegroom's house. The barber and the dhoby are the same as those who serve the Vellalar. The barber shaves the bridegroom and the dhoby spreads a white cloth on which the bridegroom sits facing the East. The Mapilai Tholan sprinkles milk with the *aruku* grass, over his head, and the bridegroom is led to the well and has his bath. Dressed in best, set off with a turban over his head, all proceed to the bride's house in procession accompanied by musicians. The bridegroom is duly conducted to the decorated pandal. The party takes with them the Varnasi, as the bridal equipment is collectively termed, consisting of the *kurai* cloth, the tali, sweet preparation, vegetables, coconuts and betel leaves.

Duly dressed, the bride is conducted to the pandal. The Brahmin priest lights the sacred fire, the homam and the ceremony is conducted to the chanting of sacred verses. To the resounding beat of the drum and the mangelavadyam, the bridegroom ties the nuptial cord, the golden tali round the bride's neck. Screened off by a cloth, the bride and bridegroom have a ceremonial feeding of plantains and milk. All are now entertained to a feast, of rice and curry. The couple is fed with a specially prepared meal, the Poothakalam. All rest awhile and go in procession to the bridegroom's house. On the 4th day the couple go to the temple and proceed to the bride's house.

**Funeral Ceremonies :** The eldest son does all the ceremonies. The corpse is left in the pandal on a specially constructed "Padai." The dhoby and the barber come and do the customary services. The Saiva-Guru performs purification ceremony called "Sava-Kiruthiam" on the corpse and some chanted water, and scents are sprinkled over the body and bathed for the last time. The Parayar do the drum beating. The body is bathed under a small three-legged pandal of new cloth and sticks. People sing "Thevarams" devotional songs and put rice and money into the mouth of the corpse, (*vaiikarsi*). Accompanied by drumming, Kovias carry the 'Padai' to the crematorium. The Pallar cut the firewood and carry them to the crematorium and make a heap and the body is placed over the firewood and cremated.

## 2. The Nalavar

In the allegoric marks branded on the cattle of Jaffna, we have a pictorial index to caste in Jaffna. In these cryptic symbols stamped on the animal are revealed social origins and functions otherwise obscure. The marks illustrated are the cattle brands of the Nalavar of Jaffna — the bow and arrow, on the hind quarters and the bugle on the forepart. The Mukkuvar have the mark of the chank; the Karaya, the boat; the Potter, the pot; the Pallar, the plough; the Parayar, the drum; the Dhoby, the cloth bundle and the Barber, the pair of scissors. The Vellalar and the Koviars have the same cattle brand marks, a standing brass lamp, a mammotty (spade) and Arukal Vathurai, the six-spoked chakra (wheel). These symbols stand out as the very badge of the groups.

The Bow and the Arrow — *Ampum Villum*, and the Bugle of the Nalavar, are meaningful, as reminiscences of a martial group, the bowmen in the army of the Tamil chiefs. These symbols tell their own tale. The bugle is the *virutu kuzhal* or *virulu kalam*, the sounding of which calls the troops to battle or announces victory in the battlefield. A speculative derivation of the name Nalavar, is the story that they once showed the white feather in the face of an advancing enemy and retreated. This earned for them the scarcely complimentary name Naluvina-var, the men who withdrew. Bow and arrow and the bowmen have been a feature of the armies of medieval days of all lands, vanishing under the changing conditions of later days. It is thus easily credible that in the normal course of events, the bowmen of the Tamil army would have lost their place in the rank and file of the army, without engrafting the story of a withdrawal to account for the name. That they took to the coconut and the palmyrah for a living, failing their martial role, may also be understood, displacing the Shanar, the original climbers of the palms as they still are in South India. The Nalavar have ever since been the toddy drawers of Jaffna. This has occasioned another story spun round the "peculiar" mode of climbing trees, though it is hard to see wherein lies the peculiarity. As you watch the Nalavar going up the palm, it does not strike you as anything different from the rest of Ceylon.



A third interpretation is that of "shuffling" talkers, from Naluwal or evasive talking, implying that the words of a Nalavar are shuffling or evasive. Another line of thought credits them as the original Malavar, meaning soldiers.

These many versions are an index to the interest the people have evoked. Amidst these varied versions, the tradition that the Nalavar were the traditional bowmen of the Tamil army gains in credence, sustained by the objective symbolisms which the cattle bear, branded on their haunches, symbolisms eloquent of their past functions, standing out conspicuously as the very badge of the tribe. As fighting men, they were reputed to be the Nambis who came to Ceylon with the early Tamil kings and in the retinue of the Vanniyars from South India who swarmed into Ceylon from about 100 A.D. The tradition finds mention in the *Yalpana Vaipava Malai* in these words :

"Karaip-piddi-vanniyan resided temporarily at Kantharodai then called Odaikkurichchi. He had sixty Nambis in his pay who served him as his swordsmen. Having violated the chastity of a daughter of one of these Nambis, he fell by the hand of the girl's enraged father who took him by surprise while he was engaged in prayer. His Vannichchi not knowing what to do with herself ran out into an open plain and there stabbed herself to death. The murder of the Vanniyan was avenged by the hand of the law, but his wealth was transferred to the Royal treasury. The remaining Nambis were sent to Shanarakuppam, a neighbouring village. Having no means of livelihood these hired themselves out to the Shanar and were trained by them in their hereditary occupation, namely, that of climbing the palmyrah palm. From the circumstance of the Nambis having thus degraded themselves they came to be called Naluvur, from Naluvukirathu, "to fall off," now corrupted into Nalavar and these Nalavar have ever since taken to climbing as their caste occupation."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Britto, C. : 1879, *Yalpana Vaipava Molai* (English translation), p. 34.

The story of early Jaffna has been a favourite topic of versifiers and composers of an age noted for its singers and poets. Many of these early compositions have been lost. Some have survived and are treasured as the very epic of social groups in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. One of these early compositions is the *Vaiya Padal*, already referred to which embodies the traditions of the early colonisation movements. The following is a translation of a few of the relevant verses : <sup>1</sup>

59. Meekaman voyaged over the rising waves to Lanka,  
In the ship were the beautiful royal ladies,  
Nallathevan, high ranking Sobagiri, Sukrivan, Ankusan,  
Sinkathi Mapanan, Thatparayan arasan, Selvakodiyon  
Thevan.
60. Thillai muvayiravar, Chetti Vani, Thisaikondar,  
People of Kudalur, Mullainattar, Paravar,  
The original Mukiyar, Parayar, Vilaivanar, Muvar,  
Kollar,  
Mata Maravar, Navitar, Komatti, Koviya, Tachchar,  
Kannar,  
Eighteen castes of kudies and numbers of Tatar-  
sangamer.
61. Kuchiliyar, Akampadiyar, Kothirathar, Kovalarkal,  
Kuyavar,  
Kopalaranor, Dancers, people of Naga Nainativu and of  
Manmunai tivu abounding in fish, people of Varuna-  
kula descent,  
Malayaiathar, Siliar of Achchamai, and Arya Vankisa  
Maraiyar.
62. Malavar, Oddiyar, Tottiyar women,  
Sword-girt Vanniya, Muvar Vanar, powerful bowmen,  
Flutists and cymbal players, drummers, players on  
vanka,

<sup>1</sup> Raghavan, M. D. : *Sociology of Jaffna, the Nalavar and the Koviar*.  
Tamil Culture, April, 1953, pp 139 - 150.



And other reputed instruments, with splendour and  
pageantry,  
Resounding the seven seas, the ladies arrived.

The dynamism of the spirit of colonisation and the assorted character of the social factors embarking on a career of new life in a new land, cannot be more graphically conveyed than in these words of the poet. The specific reference to Koviars is abundant evidence of their having been a constituent unit among the colonists from South India. The allusion to the omnipotent Villavar or the bow-men, testifies to the high place they filled in the Tamil social structure, at a stage in their life when the name Nalavar of later days had not evolved. Among the interesting groups are those termed the Mullainattar, signifying peoples inhabiting Mullai tracts as defined in the *Chudamani Nikandu*. The physiographical classification of the Nikandu, groups lands into Mullai, Kurunchi, Neithal, Marutham, and Palai, a classification which I have had occasion to refer to already. The Northern Peninsula was largely Mullai land, more so in the early days. The constituent humanity of this type of soil, as given in Chapter II, "*Makkal peyarthokudi*"—"Peyarppirivu," are enumerated under thirteen names:

முல்லைவர் பொதுவரண்டர் முந்து கோவிந்தரேயான்  
வல்லவர்குடவர் பாலர் மதித்தகோவலர் கோபாலர்  
சொல்லியவமுதராயர் தொறுவரே யிடையரென்ப  
முல்லையின் மாக்கள்பேர் தாமுந்நான்கு மொன்றுமாமே.

முல்லைநில மக்கள்பெயர்—முல்லைவர், பொதுவர், அண்டர்,  
கோவிந்தர், ஆன்வல்லவர், குடவர், பாலர், கோவலர், கோபாலர்,  
அமுதர், ஆயர், தொறுவர், இடையர்.

Taken individually all the thirteen names are more or less synonymous, signifying the group of shepherds and herdsmen. Among the names are Kovalar, Kopalan, and Idaiyar. The term Kovlar would in time have lent itself to be turned into Kovilar, falling into the error of fabricating an association with kovils or temples. The truth is, the root "Ko" meaning the cow, has given rise to several group names, with the function of cattle-rearing as the common cultural factor. Another instance of a tribal name derived from Ko, is the Kov tribe of the Nilgiris

in the vicinity of Kotagiri of whom Philo Iruthayanath gives us a short illustrated account in a recent issue of the *Hindu Weekly*. "The Kovs collectively belong to the Ko-Kulam, the dynasty of Ko, the divine cow, Kamadhenu" — Their God is Ayanar, a favourite God of Jaffna. In fine therefore, a functional approach to the subject leaves the Koviars in no doubt as the herdsmen of the Tamils, the people tending the cattle, a function which is not altogether absent today, when the strictly functional structure of society is changing fast. In the village of Punnalai, as elsewhere, people who prepare and sell curds in the market are the Koviars.

These discussions should not blind us to an understanding of the economics of the groups, which varies from village to village. So far as the Nalavar are concerned, the economics of their life largely turns on tapping for toddy. The Tree Tax system which obtains in Jaffna from 1937, abolishing taverns, has been the silver lining in the bleak lives of these people, giving them a certain measure of economic relief. The tapper sells the toddy direct from the tree to the consumer without passing through the toddy renters and tavern keepers, who elsewhere fatten on the labours of the tapper. Each man is licensed to tap twenty trees, and on the proceeds of each he makes a margin of profit. The opposition this has evoked reflects the conservative reaction, raising the cry of increased and widespread drunkenness, an allegation which is not borne out by facts or by observations on the spot. The condition is certainly better than what prevails under the obnoxious system of public taverns.

On this and other related topics, I had the benefit of an evening's discussion with the late Sri Somasundara Pulavar. It is his considered opinion that the Nalavar are more obviously the fighting men in the army of the Tamil princes, in whose retinue they came from South India.

More than any other single factor, what differentiated Jaffna Tamil Society, was the institution of the Kudimakkal, an exposition of which I have already given, a system which held sway over the lives of the peoples regulating the inter-relation of the higher and lower groups functioning in a stratified social



structure. Of the incidence of this system, prior to the *Tesawalamai* code of 1706,<sup>1</sup> nothing much is positively known. The Portuguese and the Dutch were both interested in fostering a system which suited their own needs and pressed into the service of the State every able-bodied man, extracting labour largely from the reputedly lower classes who functioned under the powerful land-owning Vellalar. Generally speaking, the functional classes have for decades been under the influence of forces which quicken a re-orientation of social values. The Nalavar are no longer dependent solely on toddy tapping. Employment in casual labour and in other directions are stepping up the economics of their life. Theirs is a free life promoting a growing sense of social independence, a free status more and more out of tune with the Kudimakkal concept. And yet the past is still with the present animating their daily lives. He does his duty by himself and by the society. Nalavar women were the midwives of Jaffna (*Marutuvichi*), in the past when there were no licensed midwives. Even today she has her role as the midwife in villages not served by licensed midwives, staying in the house attending on the mother and child. On the eleventh day she performs the ceremony of expelling the *Kothipei*. Placing the child in a winnow, the woman sings its praises, after which the soiled stuff in the room, is collected in the winnow and taken out with the foodstuffs, a young coconut and a lighted torch, and left in a gap in the hedge. This safeguards the mother and child against evil influences.

The gods of a people often reveal something of their character. In their cults, the Nalavar have fostered a mode of worship peculiarly their own. A Nalavan performs the Puja. Offerings to the gods are not food and drink, but wooden clubs about 2½ feet long, the *gata*. That it is *prima facie* a warrior cult, seems obvious, reminiscent very probably of the cult of the spirits of the ancestors or of departed heroes.

The Nalavar have their own washerman, the Turumbar (a word possibly derived from the Malayalam word *tirumbuka*, to wash), washermen for certain other lower groups also. A short study of the Turumbar is separately featured.

<sup>1</sup> Muttukrishna, Henry F. : 1862, A New Edition of the *Tesawalamai*, Sect. VIII, p. XXVI.

### 3. The Pallar

The place of the Pallar in the Kudimakkal system of Jaffna has already been alluded to. They are among the lowest in the rung of the social ladder, next only to the Parayar and the Turumbar. The *Yalpana Vaipata Malai* has the following account of the coming of the Pallar :

“A great commotion having arisen in Southern India, various races of its inhabitants left their homes and sought peace and comfort in foreign countries. Many pira-mana families, both of the Vishnu and Saiva Samayams, came from Uththara-Kosa-mangkai and settled in Kara-thivu. Also many Pallar left their homes in Cholanadu, in the hope of finding employment in the fields belonging to the Vellalar in Yalpanam. They came in such large number that most of them met with disappointment. Some returned to Cholanadu, but others remained behind and took to climbing the palmyrah palm. The Shanar, whose occupation was climbing legitimately and who had lost much of their living when the Nambis (Nalavar) took to it, were now almost completely deprived of it, and they took to new occupations. They either hired themselves as domestic servants to the white-man or found profitable employment in making oil and in fishing with the net. The Nalavar and the Pallar now felt in their turn that they too were too numerous for the newly acquired industry, notwithstanding that they had elbowed the Shanar out of it; and many of them were obliged to sell themselves as slaves to the Vellalar and other high castes.”

Kaitadi is a village both of the Koviari and the Pallar. Agricultural serfs that they are of the Vellalar, they do the customary service besides doing their own cultivation, as the Koviari do, on lands, held on lease from the Vellalar. They do some toddy tapping too and general labour. Of sturdier build of body, they are a dark-skinned racial strain distinct from the light-skinned Koviari and Nalavar.

Their marriage ceremonies are simple. No Brahmin priest makes his appearance. A figure of the Pillayar is fashioned out of a lump of cowdung, and before this symbol of the god, the ceremonies are gone through conducted by an elder with

an array of auspicious objects — the *arruku* grass, the pot full of water (*niraikudam*), coconut, betel leaves, and the camphor duly lit. The bride is dressed in the *Koorai* brought by the bridegroom and the *tali* is tied at the right time. The guests assembled sprinkle *arruku* grass and rice on the couple, the simple ceremonial of blessing. They have their own dhoby, the Turumbar, the lowest of all the social elements of Jaffna.

Kathiresan Kottan of Kaitadi is typical of the class. Married his cross cousin Vellachi and has six children, three sons and three daughters, who assist him in his agricultural work.

Funeral ceremonies are the same as those of the Koviars. An elder conducts the ceremonies to the chanting of *Devaram*. The dhoby, the Turumbar, does his part in the ceremonial. Their cattle are branded with the mark of the yoke,  $\overline{\text{TT}}$ , symbolic of their place as farm labourers. Their dhoby is the Turumbar who washes for the Pallar and the Parayar. They have no barber, but serve themselves.

Menses pollution is observed. Turumbar women come and remove the soiled cloth and give them the *Matlu*, the ceremonial purificatory change of cloth.

Alone of the Jaffna tribes, an extension of the Pallar has been observed in the Sinhalese provinces down south, particularly in the district of Kurunegala, where Paul Pieris<sup>1</sup> discovered about 30 families of Pallaru at Bamunesa and Kinkiniyawa. There are others at Itenwatta in Walagampattu. They are sometimes known as Karmanteyao and Kula Hewayo. A portion of the canal from Maligoda to Bolgoda near Panadura, is still named Pallaru Kepu-ela. Paul Pieris continues, "when Vidya Bandara was imprisoned by the Portuguese in 1552, his wife, Samudra Devi, sent for his hereditary Pallarus to make a tunnel for his escape from prison."

Early historians too have had something to say of the Pallar. Thus Valentine speaks of Pallaroe as robbers who live in caves and forests. De Queyroz (P. 139) speaks of them as

ferce and despised caste of Pallaroz of Guelagama (*Galgam-muwa*). "These are a people accustomed to tunnel the earth in accordance with the mode of life they inherited and they lived in caves and dens like wild beasts whom they imitated in their deeds." How much of a reliance can be placed on this lurid picture, we are unable to say.

The resemblance the name bears to the Pulayar of Kerala, has given rise to its own speculations. Barbosa (1574) refers to the Pular, evidently the Pulayar of today, "who do not come face to face with any of the Hindu caste, but speak loudly from a respectable distance." This observation of Barbosa is very true and lingered until some decades ago. As a low caste group, the Pulayar of Kerala nevertheless are far apart and different from the Tamil Pallar whether of South India or of Ceylon.

Now to take a glance at the Pallar in the Tamilnad of South India. The Madras Census Report which Thurston<sup>1</sup> quotes tells us that the Pallar are "a class of agricultural labourers found chiefly in Tanjore, Trichinopoly, Madura and Tinnevely. They are also fairly numerous in parts of Salem and Coimbatore, but in the remaining Tamil districts they are found only in very small numbers." The derivation of the name centres round the word Pallam, a pit, "as they were standing on low ground when the castes were originally formed." Another suggestion is that the name is connected with wet cultivation at which they were experts. What finds no corroboration at all in South India is the heritage attributed to them of digging tunnels and caves, and of even living in underground shelters, as the historians of Ceylon have told us, as alluded to above.

In the Madura District Manual they are described as a very numerous but a most abject and despised caste, little if indeed at all, superior to the Parayar. They are usually slaves in almost every sense of the word, earning by the ceaseless sweat of their brow, a bare handful of grain, to stay the pangs of hunger, and a rag with which to partly cover their nakedness. They are to be found in almost every village, toiling and moiling

<sup>1</sup> Pieris, Paul: Ceylon, The Portuguese Era I, Ch. VI, p. 403.

<sup>1</sup> Thurston, E.: Castes and Tribes of S. India, Vol. V, pp. 472-486.

for the benefit of the Vellalar and with the Parayer doing patiently nearly all the hard and dirty work that has to be done. Personal contact with them is avoided by all respectable men. Their huts form a small detached hamlet, the Pallacheri, removed from a considerable distance from the houses of the respectable inhabitants. Thurston concludes: "it seems to be tolerably certain that in ancient times they were the slaves of the Vellalar and regarded by them merely as chattels and that they were brought by the Vellalar into the Pandya Mandala." The Coimbatore District Manual states that "the Pallan has at all times been a serf, labouring in the low wet lands (pallam) for his masters, the Brahmins and Goundans. The Pallan is of shortish, stout blackman, sturdy and not even clean in person or habit; very industrious in his favourite wet lands." The latter physical description finds a true reflection in the Pallar of Jaffna today.

Thurston, when he examined the Pallar at Coimbatore observed that they were employed in a variety of occupations — cultivation, gardening, labour, blacksmith, railway porter, tax collector, office peon, and a few even maniyagarans. It is clear from these accounts that in South India, the Pallar has been slowly changing from his former condition as a serf attached to the soil, as he largely is in Jaffna today.

In the larger regional distribution of South India, the Pallars are organized in a number of sub-divisions.

The caste organisation differs in the different districts. In Madura, the headman of the Pallar is called Kodumban, at Coimbatore, the headman bears the name Pattakaran. In Trichinopoly each village has three or more headmen, with a Nattu Muppan over them.

Finally, Thurston gives us a quotation from Oppert<sup>1</sup> in these words: "At a Pallar wedding, before the wedding is actually performed, the bridegroom suddenly leaves his home and starts for some distant place, as if he had suddenly abandoned his intention of marrying, in spite of the preparations that had

been made for the wedding. His intended father-in-law intercepts the youngman on his way and persuades him to return promising to give his daughter to him as wife. To this the bridegroom consents." This custom, according to Thurston, was not evident at the Pallar villages he visited. Nevertheless, what Oppert says has a true ring about it. It gives us a revealing insight into the tradition that the Pallar are said to have originated from a Brahmin woman and a Sudra father, a tradition that Thurston alludes to. The custom referred to, of the bridegroom indulging in a ceremonial tramp on the morning of the wedding day, and of his being accosted on the way by the father of the bride-elect, and persuading him to return, and accompany him to the bridal house, is one of the symbolic ceremonials of a marriage in South Indian Brahmin society. This custom in the ceremonials of a Brahmin wedding, is one I had occasion to allude to in another connection.<sup>1</sup>

1 "Original Inhabitants of Bharatavarsha or India."

1 A Sinhalese Wedding, in Ch. 8: "Ceylon — a Pictorial Survey of the Peoples and Arts," M. D. Gunasena & Co. Ltd., Colombo, 1962, pp 44-45.

#### 4. The Parayar

The name Paraya is derived from 'Parai,' a drum. The Parayan was the original drummer in the pre-Vedic and Vedic Society. With the formulation of the *chatur varna*, the Paraya came to be relegated to a place outside the orthodox caste system. Of the place of the Parayar in the social system of the early ages, we have an interesting insight in these words of Guru Nataraja of South India: "Actually this stratum of society one day represented the top-most in India before the invading hordes who entered into the fertile Gangetic and other plains of India and added newer and newer strata above them, as it were, submerging this group which represented perhaps the oldest of the proto-Aryan civilisation, not far removed from the time of Indus Valley civilisations now revealed in the Mohenjo-daro and Harappa excavations."

"Great names like that of Saint Tiruvalluvar, author of the *Tirukkural* perhaps the wisest book of maxims ever written, about the beginning of the Christian era in South India, were associated with the same stratum. They represented an economically and politically defeated people who retained traditionally the best in the history of India. What corresponded to the dominant section that overcovered this ancient and precious stratum, was that of the 'Brahmins,' which consisted of tribes who claimed Vedic orthodoxy which was to be traced to the Aryan invaders. The earlier stratum, however, though 'depressed' were superior by true spiritual heritage, although due to domination and defeat, they seemed to lack outer social refinements."

"The Aryanised group who dominated these ancient peoples, sometimes by better refinement, sometimes by shrewdness, as reflected in the stories, such as that of Nala and Damayanti, of Harischandra, or even in the story of the Pandavas, were really inferior to them when true spiritual values were put in the balance. The Adi-Dravidas were thus custodians of proto-Aryan traditions of a more ancient stratum, but were despised and derided although they conserved in their culture the highest of Indian spiritual values. The 'Brahmin' was thus the rival of the 'Paraya' and to this day this distinction and the dialectical

challenges and responses involved between these two sections have vitiated the social, economic and political life of India and continues to present problems that are not soluble except by some sort of root and branch reform."

In this context we may recall the observations of Swami Vivekananda that "in ancient India castes were not really hereditary but based on qualifications. Hence if one acquired higher qualities what was there to prevent one from rising to a higher status?" The basis for this line of thought is traced to the words of the *Gita* :

*Caturvarnyam maya srishtam.  
Guna-karma-vibhagasah.*

"The four castes are created by me according to qualifications and activities." Swamiji himself mentions some examples — those of "Vasishta, an illegitimate son; Vyasa, the son of a fisherwoman; Narada, the son of a maid servant with uncertain parentage, and many others of like nature attaining Rishihood or becoming revered saints and sages."

Whichever way we look at it, it becomes obvious that names such as Tiruvalluvar and Nandanar of South India are illustrative of the highest of Indian cultural and spiritual values. All religions hold up the doctrine of the equality of man and Hinduism yields to no other religion in its insistence on the principle of oneness of mankind. In spite of this declaration of spiritual equality, distinctions evolved in the course of ages in the social life of the people. These crystallised in what has come to be termed, the *Vyavaharika*, the every day business of living and *Paramarthika*, the ultimate or the idealistic values of life. Thus developed in course of ages, subtleties of differences and distinctions, which have multiplied over the years. The intrinsic worth of the Paraya asserted itself, as we have seen, in the remote past and shows revival in the Indian continent of the present. In terminological sequence, the term Harijan is the latest to evolve. Earlier names were the Panchama, meaning the fifth caste, and the Adi-Dravida, besides the general term Depressed Classes, which still prevails as a general classificatory term.



## 5. The Turumbar

The ambivalence of social attitude strikes the Westerner as something queer. A typical reference to this feeling are these words of Harry Williams,<sup>1</sup> an English planter of Ceylon: "Paradoxically and the whole hazy edifice is paradoxical — the Vellalas admit the Pariah as their children and agree to their common origin. That is about all they do admit and their actions bear no relation to their words, for the Pariahs remain as untouchable as ever."

Neither in their way of life nor in their occupation is there anything degrading today. India has long given up the name Pariah, replaced by the name Harijan. It is time Ceylon also gives up the name Pariah and adopts the name Harijan. In the Dutch Tombos they are classed as weavers, and weaving is still one of their main pursuits. I had the pleasure of seeing them in their village in Chiviateru. After their morning bath and worship at the adjoining Nachiamman Bhuvanaswari Amman kovil of theirs, they were soon busy at their handlooms, some completing the cloth still in the looms. Yet another caste of weavers, are the Kaikular, who weave even finer cloth. The current name for the group is Sengundar, replacing the old name Kaikular.

The counterpart of the Jaffna Parayar is the group of the same name round about Kalmunai in the Eastern Province. One of their main villages there is Saintamarudu, a village of farmers. Here as in Jaffna the people are clean in their habits of life as in the environmental sanitation of their village.

In Saintamarudu, at least of Kalmunai, the residents call themselves as the Valluvar Kulam, a term, I have heard in Madras too.

Besides the Adimai groups, Jaffna has a caste of Washermen, the Turumbar, the Dhoby, who serves the Pallar and the Parayar. The word Turumbar is obviously derived from Tirumbuka, the Malayalam word for washing. The original name may well have been Tirumbar, the man who washes.

"Traditionally, a Turumbar was not supposed to travel abroad by day and had to drag a palmyrah branch behind him at night. According to some, the purpose of this was to make a noise indicating his whereabouts; others say that he had to mark where he had walked so that his footprints could be avoided by high caste people the next day. To an appreciable extent, Turumbars still only flit about at twilight and many Vellalas are not even aware of their existence. Nevertheless, today they do have contacts with the touchable castes. They have a formidable reputation as *seveni* men, sorcerers who kill and injure others for a fee."<sup>1</sup>

This account by Banks, generally agrees with the personal reminiscences of Mr. S. W. Rajaratnam, with whom I had the pleasure of an interesting interview. Says Mr. Rajaratnam: "Some fifty years ago or even perhaps later, the Turumbar never appeared in public in daytime. They did their washing in separate tanks (kulam). They are prohibited from washing in tanks assigned to the Vannan who serve the higher castes. One such Turumbar Kulam is in Ottumadam." On my enquiry how far the Turumbar maintain the old custom of not appearing in public in the daytime, he said, "now they would even go brushing you past." They have had a reputation as practitioners of black magic, scarcely evident today. As a group, the Turumbar are steadily decreasing in numbers, and may get extinct in time.

<sup>1</sup> Banks, Michael: *Caste in Jaffna*, 1960: An Unseeable Caste, pp. 65 - 66.

The meaning of the term "*Seveni* men," remained rather obscure until it was pointed out to me by a Jaffna scholar that the correct transliteration of the term would be "*Savanai* men," meaning, men who kill or cause physical injury by the practise of black magic — corresponding generally to the Suniyam or Huniyam of the black magic of the Sinhalese villages.

For a short account of sorcery in Jaffna, in the days of Tennent, see, *Ceylon*, Vol. II, pp. 544 - 546. This makes no mention of the Turumbar.

<sup>1</sup> Williams, Harry: *Ceylon—The Pearl of the East*, London, p. 239.

## Some Social Customs

A COMPLEX of customs which prevail in different societies in different ways, are the "Coming of Age" Customs. Despite differences, these have one thing in common, the importance attached to the Customs of Initiation (*Rite de passage*), in passing from adolescence to manhood or womanhood. Evil influences are one of the things to be safeguarded against, particularly at the Coming of Age of Girls. Customs in Vellala Society, relating to these initiation rites are an interesting institution, an index to the importance the society attaches to the turning point in a maiden's life.

When a Vellala girl attains puberty, she has the companionship of a Koviari woman who is deputed to attend on her, throughout the period of her seclusion. The girl remains secluded from contact with the rest of the household. The attendant Koviari woman keeps a handful of margosa and palmyrah leaves and a small knife, the "*Saththakam*" for ceremonial protection. Significance is attached to the day of the coming of age. It is the custom to consult a book of omens, the *Uruthu Sataka Palan*. The month, the day and the time are noted. If it happens to be a Monday, the girl will be eminently chaste. Tuesday is not favourable, as she is likely to be a widow early in her days of wedlock. If Wednesday, she will be wealthy. Thursday is

good, too, for she bids fair to be virtuous. Friday is not considered auspicious. Saturday and Sunday are also bad days as she runs the risk of being poor. The time, too, has its own meaning. Morning is best. After mid-day, not so good. If she happens to wear a white cloth it is lucky. Red cloth, unlucky. If the marks are first seen by the girl herself, it is considered to be unlucky. These customs seem to be a reflection of the customs among the Vellalas of South India.

The washerman, the Vannan, is summoned. In the Tenmaradchi division, it is the dhoby man himself, the Vannan, who does this service, who collects the soiled cloth and brings the ceremonial wear. This cloth, whether given by the Vannan, or the Vannathi, goes by the name of Vannamattu. This process of the removal of the soiled cloth and bringing the ceremonial wear, goes on for full thirty-one days. She cannot see any male, even her own close relations.

The cloth she wears reaches down to the feet. The toes are fitted with silver toe-rings.

On odd days, from the fifth day, she has a bath, helped by the Koviari woman and her machals (girl cousins). All jewellery are removed while bathing. On approaching the well, a few of the old cadjan leaves of the house are removed and she is seated on the leaves on the floor, holding in her hand three betel leaves, three arecanuts and a coin. On a tray are placed *Aruku* grass and milk in a vessel and a pot of water (kumbam). Camphor is lit and close relations place the *pal-aruku*, on the head of the girl and the bath is duly given. Initiated into society as she now is, she is conducted in procession with music. The girl walks on a pavada, a white cloth spread on the ground, the Koviari women holding a canopy over her head. Thus conducted, the girl is led to another room in the house. Bedecked in silk garments and ornamented with shining jewellery, she takes her ceremonial seat in a decorated pandal in the presence of assembled guests, male and female. Peeping over the railing may be seen her cousins (machals) interested to watch how their cousin is faring in the ceremony of the *Arathi*.

The girl sits facing the pot full of water (the Kumbam). The prescribed ceremonials are performed by her relations. The *Arathi* (Alathi) is the ceremonial of counteracting evil influences

which the girl is particularly open to at this stage of life. The ceremony of waving the *Arathi* is performed eleven times with different articles, such as flowers and fruits, curd and food, offerings of cakes and *pittu* and a coin. Aunts on the father's side and the mother's side, blessed with progeny, are the auspicious persons participating in this ceremony designed to avert evil and bring in positive good luck to the girl in the life ahead of her. Aunts are handpicked too with an eye to matrimony — aunts with marriageable and eligible sons well suited to the girl in wedlock.

Ritual and purity symbolises the ceremonial cloth that the Vannan or Vannathi brings during the period of puberty ceremonies, and during the normal monthly menses of a young married woman. As the bath is over, it is lucky for the wife to have *darshanam*, the first sight, of her husband. It is remarked that the woman may be sub-consciously influenced by what she casts eyes upon. If a lame man, the child may be born lame.

Fifteen days after the bath following the menses, is regarded favourable for conception. During these 15 days the young wife is enjoined to take oil bath. The fortnight of the waxing moon, is considered most auspicious and favourable for conception. The temples in past days used to observe all-night festivals during this period.

The observance of these favourable auspicious periods, is believed to have exercised as a sort of automatic control and a safeguard against too many children, thus acting as a natural birth control system without the use of artificial appliances or drastic methods.

Isolated from South India for long ages, Jaffna developed its own way of life. A rather small point, yet significant to the observer, is the secluded Jaffna house, screened off by a thick hedge of cadjan and palmyrah leaves interlaced and supported between posts, the whole reinforced at intervals by well-grown small-sized trees with a crown of foliage. This makes for a seclusion of family life characteristic of Jaffna society in general. Facing the house is the typical gateway, the *Sankada Padalai*,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Paul E. Pieris: A Padalai from Jaffna, J.R.A.S. (C.B.) XXVI, 1918, pp. 65 - 66.

well set in the cadjan wall. The technology of the gate is such that pushed open, it automatically closes by the action of the weigh attached.

In domestic architecture, a rare survival is the "four-in-one" type of house with a long verandah with an open central courtyard and rooms disposed on all sides of it, a design which recalls the plan of a Sinhalese *Walurva* and the ancestral *Nalupara* structure of a Malabar house. A simplified version of this, is the general plan of most Jaffna houses, with a long verandah supported on masonry or wooden pillars. At the end of the verandah is the well. Generally speaking, what we have in Jaffna is a synthesis of culture, with features of acculturation of the different racial strains that colonised Jaffna. It is not altogether a reproduction of South Indian Tamil habits of life.

The typical South Indian Tamil customs, is best seen in the high Vellala society, the descendants of the Vellala colonists who migrated from South India on the break-up of the Vijayanagar Empire. Though the same legal system, the *Tesawalamai*, holds all society together, the high class Vellalar have adopted in their marriage ceremonies, the sacramental marriage customs of the Brahmin society, with raising the *homam* the sacred fire and the chanting of Vedic mantrams, which are part of the marriage customs of the Tamils of South India, Brahmin or non-Brahmin. Nevertheless, under *Tesawalamai*, a priest is not essential, however much sacramental marriage ceremonies may have developed among the high class Vellalar, slowly spreading to the other Jaffna Hindu society, too.

In this connection, Tambiah's observations are pertinent: "Sometimes the *omam* ceremony is dropped and the priest only perform Pillayar ceremony and the *tali* is tied and the *kurai* given. The *tali* ceremony is considered important. Where the parties are too poor to afford a gold *tali* or even to obtain the services of a priest, then the relations along with the washerman and the barber, perform the wedding. A piece of cloth is given and the marriage is completed."

"The only marriageable relations in Jaffna are cross-cousins, children of a brother and sister. Marriage is prohibited between first cousins, children of two brothers or sisters. The prohibition extends to alliance between any relations except

cross-cousins. Thus a man cannot marry his sister's daughter, his niece, though among non-Brahmin Tamils of South India, such an alliance is not forbidden. Marriage between cross-cousins is not only customary, it is even obligatory. Though marriage between the children of two brothers and two sisters, is not illegal under the Marriage Registration Ordinance, the social taboo in Jaffna society continues to be strong."

In customs of dress the Vetti is as a rule worn round the waist as in Malabar, and not in the bifurcated mode of South Indian Tamils, drawing up the trailing end between the legs and secured at the back, though the latter mode may be seen among top class Vellalar society.

In the manner of the wearing of the hair, the Jaffna man has since the past few decades, adopted the South Indian Tamil mode of brushing up the hair in a knot behind the head, the *kudumai*. Simon Casie Chitty<sup>2</sup> of the Colonial days observes: "There is no uniformity with the Tamils in the manner they dispose of the hair. The men for the greater part shave off the whole of the hair, leaving only a small tuft called *kudumai* on the crown of the head. The women always wear their hair long which being anointed with coconut or gingelly oil is either combed or tied up in a knot called *Condai* behind the head or allowed to hang on one side."

The custom of the Munkudumi, the knot on the crown, or slung at the left temple, finds corroboration from a variety of sources. Rasanayagam<sup>3</sup> speaks of it, as having prevailed in Jaffna of the past generation.

1 Tambiah, H. W.: "The Laws and Customs of the Tamils of Ceylon," 1951, p. 18.

Tambiah, H. W.: "The Laws and Customs of the Tamils of Jaffna" 1952.

Raghavan, M. D.: "The Malabar Inhabitants of Jaffna," -- In 'Paul Pieris' Felicitation Volume,' Colombo, 1956.

2 Simon Casie Chitty: "The Castes, Customs, Manners and Literature of the Tamils," reprinted, Colombo, 1934, p. 69.

3 Rasanayagam, C.: "Ancient Jaffna," 1920, p. 232.

## The Tesawalamai Code of Customary Law

THE land round about Jaffna owes its distinctive life and culture to its geographical situation and its physical features. Situated as it is, at the apex of the Island, it has received the full force of the impacts of population movements from the Indian mainland which it bestrides, coming under the dynamism of the currents and cross-currents of migrations between the mainland and the Island. Of the nature and character of the migrations themselves in the distant past, we have little direct or documentary knowledge. We can nevertheless fall back upon what may be called the anthropological method -- drawing conclusions and inferences based on such cultural links and data as may be revealed to the earnest enquirer. Among such evidences of the past, the *Tesawalamai* or the Code of the Customary Laws of Jaffna, stands conspicuous.

The codification of the customary laws of Jaffna, we owe to the genius of the Dutch who when they arrived in Ceylon found Tamils in Jaffna whose customs and religion were more



or less similar to the Hindus of the Malabar Coast of India, and designated them "the Malabar inhabitants of the Province of Jaffna." With commendable awareness, Governor Simons in 1706, directed the Dissawa of Jaffna, Clasz Isaaksz, to enquire into the laws and customs of the Tamils of Malabar inhabitants of Jaffna and to collect them and put them into an authoritative shape. In 1707, Isaaksz submitted a Code to the Governor, who caused it to be translated into Tamil from the original Dutch. The Tamil translation was submitted to a committee of twelve "sensible Mudaliyars" of the province of Jaffna, who revised and certified that the "composition perfectly agrees with the usual customs prevailing at this place." These customs as revised by the Mudaliyars were promulgated by the Dutch Governor of Ceylon and were given the force of law, and copies were sent to the various Courts of Justice in Jaffna for their guidance. After the Dutch settlements in Ceylon were ceded to the British Crown, it was declared by Regulation No. 13 of 1806, that "this Code of Customs, commonly known as the *Tesawalamai*, should be considered to be in full force, and that all questions between the Malabar inhabitants of the Province of Jaffna" or in which a Malabar inhabitant was a defendant, should be decided according to that Code of Customs. In 1814, Chief Justice Sir Alexander Johnstone caused the Code to be translated into English and this translation is the Code of *Tesawalamai* now in force in Jaffna. "The history of this collection of customs shows that the customs were those of a particular people and in a particular place. The customs applied only to the Province of Jaffna, and only to the Malabar inhabitants of that place. They are in their origin both personal and local."

In the observation that "when the Dutch arrived in Ceylon, they found Tamils in Jaffna whose customs and religion were more or less similar to the Hindus of the Malabar Coast of India," we have the key to the problem.

### The *Tesawalamai* and the Malabar Marumakattayam Law

The customary law of the usages of Malabar, is the Marumakattayam Law — a code of laws admirably suited to the genius of the people. That the essence of this law finds its reflection in

the *Tesawalamai* of Jaffna is a factor of great cultural interest. Sir Henry Mayne, the great exponent of Hindu Law, has spoken of the "remarkable similarity of the Malabar Marumakattayam Law to the usages of the north of Ceylon as stated in the *Tesawalamai*." The subject has been pursued by scholars of Jaffna who as the sons of the soil with a rich background of personal knowledge of *Tesawalamai* in practice, have given us a clearer idea of the common factors between Marumakattayam or the matrilineal law of Malabar and *Tesawalamai* of Jaffna than foreign legal luminaries have done. Among the more notable of the common elements as revealed to us in recent writings may be pointed out, first the "fundamental difference between ancestral property — the 'tarwad' property of the Malabar Law and the muthusam of *Tesawalamai* — and acquired property, a feature of both systems. An essential constituent of both is the devolution of property to the females of a family from generation to generation, the basis of the 'sidhanam' or the dowry in *Tesawalamai*, which stands revealed as an adaptation of the matrilineal succession of Marumakattayam Law of Malabar, in its specific application to the succession of property in a 'tavazhi' tarwad. The Karanavan in a Malabar matrilineal family system bestowing his self-acquired property to his children, gives rise to a number of 'tavazhis' — a term which may be derived from the two words: 'tai' a Tamil and not a Malayalam word meaning mother, and 'vazhi' way or manner of descent. The 'tavazhi' is a unit of its own, with all the incidence of a tarwad on a miniature scale. A large tarwad becoming too unwieldy may also end in its being split up into a number of tavazhis. It is noteworthy that in the settlement of property to the children of a Karanavan, particular solicitude is evinced for the daughters in preference to the sons. 'Chidanam' or dowry in *Tesawalamai*, as a development of the matrilineal principle of a 'tavazhi' in Malabar Law, is abundantly manifest. In the event of a 'tavazhi' becoming extinct for failure of heirs, the property devolving on the next of kin of matrilineal 'tavazhi' has its counterpart in *Tesawalamai* "that females inherit the property of females, and that a dowried sister succeeds to another dowried sister." The Law of Adoption in *Tesawalamai*, now obsolete, the law of 'Otty' mortgage and the Law of Pre-emption,

peculiar to *Tesawalamai*, are other factors adopted from the Marumakattayam Law of Malabar, as Tambiah points out.

In observations on *Tesawalamai*, that "it is agreeable to the people and especially it conserves the rights of women, they could have separate property, a portion of the acquired property, and their husbands cannot dispose of their property," we have other reflections of the main aspects of Marumakattayam Law. *Tesawalamai* is "both a personal and a local law. It is personal in that it applies to certain persons only in Jaffna, and local in that it applies to Jaffna only." These two traits of *Tesawalamai* distinguish it from such laws as the Roman-Dutch Law. The only code of law that finds not only the closest parallel to it but has as its motivating principle, the status and rights of women, is the Malabar Marumakattayam Law. *Tesawalamai*, it is obvious, gives us a foothold, from which to carry forward further enquiries in the cultural field.

### Cultural Links

An aspect of Jaffna sociology, are place names of Jaffna villages — notably Tirunelveli, Nagercoil, and Kovalam — the two latter recalling names of places in Travancore. Nagercoil by the sea is a revelation, enshrining the Naga Cult, as the name Nagercoil, the temple of the Naga, denotes. The shrine there in jungle setting recalls typical Nagathar groves of rural Kerala. The sight at my first visit, of a snake gliding over the high wall and disappearing into the wood-works completed the picture of a very abode of snake, that the temple is. The Brahmin priest of the shrine, and the villagers whom curiosity gathers round you, answer to your enquiries of the traditions of the place. As one tells the story, another sings a song, the Kappal Pattu, presenting a vivid picture. The Kappal Tiruvila annually staged at this shrine celebrates the protection of the Naga God who saved the villagers from being enslaved by the Portuguese, who combined commercial enterprise with slave trade, capturing villagers, luring them to their ships. The festival re-affirms faith in the protective powers of the Nagatambiran. The sea front of Nagercoil is a vast stretch of sand, which may well be safeguarding underneath its thick mantle, relics of an ancient past. The

bare sands are strewn with potsherds. The place was obviously much more of a hive of activity than it is now, a quiet village of peasants and toddy tappers. It is part of the traditions of this village that the first settlers came from across the seas, from Nagercoil of South Travancore.

In place names reminiscent of Kerala, Nagercoil does not stand alone. Further to the north is the little village of Kovalam in Karaitivu, a pretty village by the sea, the waves beating gently over the shallow coral reefs. The only ugly thing about the place is the modern lighthouse towering its lofty head. A healthy sea side resort, it attracts to its quiet and bracing shores, frayed nerves yearning for a rest. In Kovalam we have yet another link with Kerala, indicating another wave of colonisation from the mainland — this time from Kovalam of South-west Travancore.

Taking leave of place names and traditions, a probe into the social habits of the people illumines the past. We get a few interesting glimpses. It is significant that the side knot of hair persisted in the Jaffna man, down to recent days. Rasanayagam writing in 1926, tells us "that the relic of the Malabar custom of wearing the side knot of hair continued in Jaffna till about 40 or 50 years ago" or even later, as I am reliably informed. A term that recalls the few who persisted in this custom is *Kanna Kuchchiyar*, as Rasanayagam gives it, with the remark that "it appears to have been a derisive term used for the Malabar immigrants in Jaffna who had their hair tied in a knot on the side of the head and who perhaps formed the majority of the population, by the other Tamil and Sinhalese inhabitants who had their knots on the back of the head." *Kanna* from Karna, is the temporal region of the head. *Kanna Kudumbiyar* is the more common term in Jaffna. *Kudumbi* or *Kudumai* is the word for the hair knot of men. The mode of wearing the knot on the crown of the head or more commonly on the right side, is in strong contrast to the Tamil mode of the back knot — the mode which prevails too among rural Sinhalese which most likely is due to Tamil influence. The side knot tells its own tale of unmistakable Malabar antecedents.



Another pointer is the *tōdu* of Malabar, the ear ornament which Jaffna ladies of a generation or two ago are known to have been wearing. A pair of this specimen is among the Tamil jewellery in the collection of the Colombo National Museum. The custom of distending the ear lobes and of wearing the *tōdu* is a distinctly Malabar trait. Its prevalence in Jaffna is a clear proof of Kerala contacts. This particular type of jewellery has been steadily going out of favour in Malabar though it is still in vogue among women of the old generation and of rural areas.

Another little thing is the old fashioned ear-ring of a man of Malabar. Male children also had their ears bored, and wore a small golden ear-ring, a pair of Kadukkan. This and the long head of hair knotted in a Kudumi, have in Malabar yielded to modernization. This sort of ear-ring, Pandi Kadukkan as it used to be known — possibly a Pandyan influence — may still be seen among the villagers round about Jaffna.

How far customs and usages of Malabar swayed all peoples of Jaffna including the settlers from across the Tamil areas of South India, is another aspect of the problem. Judging from the wide acceptance of *Tesawalamai* by the peoples of Jaffna, the inference may be drawn, as Tambiah does that "even those Tamils who had come from other parts of India, such as the Coromandel Coast adopted the Malabar customs." The persistence of the term Kanna Kuchchiyar or Kanna Kudumbiyar is to my mind a clear indication of the widespread prevalence of Malabar customs in the not too distant epoch. That the term smacks of derision, would only lend greater credence to the custom having been a widespread practice, abandoned in course of time with tendencies of modernization and with increasing Tamil influence. The practice dying hard, the dwindling numbers who still persisted in it, easily came in for a good deal of notice at the hands of the increasing numbers of those who abandoned the custom. That Malabar customs greatly regulated the social life of Jaffna is also borne out by an examination of marriage customs. The customary law of spouses governed by the *Tesawalamai* Code is regulated by the Rights and Inheritance Ordinance No. 1 of 1911 and No. 57 of 1947.

A Marumakattayam 'sambandham' of Malabar is a union socially recognised, and customary rites and ceremonies are of the essence of it. No priest officiates. Under *Tesawalamai* Code too, a priest is not essential, however much ceremonial marriage customs may have developed among the Vellalas of Jaffna on the lines of the Brahmanical customs of a sacramental marriage. Nevertheless Brahmanical rites are not indispensable. Tambiah's observations on this regard are pertinent: "Sometimes the 'Omam' ceremony is dropped and the priest only performs the Pillayar ceremony and a 'tali' is tied and kurai is given. The 'tali' ceremony is considered important. Where the parties are too poor to afford a gold necklace (tali) or even to obtain the services of a priest, then the relations, the washerman and the barber attend the wedding. A piece of cloth is given and the marriage is consummated. There is also evidence to show that in some Vellala families, a priest is never called and marriage ceremonies are performed by themselves."<sup>1</sup> The absence of any priest, marriage under customary rites socially recognised constituting a valid marriage, is typical of Malabar, where even tali tying was not an essential marriage ceremonial as all girls even as children would already have gone through the symbolic rite of talikattu kalyanam, the customary rite peculiar to Malabar. This ceremony has been steadily abandoned in Malabar for some decades now, tying of the tali being now largely an essential rite of marriage. In observing<sup>2</sup> that "in the law of persons many marriage ceremonies practised in Jaffna and Malabar are the same," Tambiah makes special reference to sambandham and talikattu kalyanam. The latter, fast disappearing even in Malabar, can scarcely be seen in Jaffna today. That they nevertheless are signposts of a culture that animated the lives of the people of Jaffna for ages, is abundantly clear. In Jaffna as in Malabar, the marriage ceremony is held at the bride's house and not at the bridegroom's, as at a South Indian Tamil society wedding and the bride is conducted to the bridegroom's house the same day.

1 Tambiah, H. W. : "The Laws and Customs of the Tamils of Jaffna," pp. 107-108.

2 Tambiah, H. W. : "The Laws and Customs of the Tamils of Jaffna," p. 18.



The only marriageable relations whether in Malabar or Jaffna are cross-cousins, children respectively of a brother and sister. Marriage is forbidden between first cousins — children of two brothers or two sisters. Under *Tesawalamai*, partners to marriage "should not be related by blood than brother's and sister's children." The prohibition is here implied "of marriage between ascendants and descendants and all persons related within the fourth degree, cross-cousins excepted."<sup>1</sup> Thus a man cannot marry his niece — his sister's daughter, though under customs obtaining among non-Brahmin Tamils elsewhere such an alliance is not prohibited. Marriage between the children of a brother and sister, is not only allowed, it is even considered obligatory. By custom uncle's daughter is the preferential mate. Safeguarding the family property, it is an alliance greatly favoured by society. Though under the Marriage Registration Ordinance, marriage between the children of two brothers or two sisters is now not illegal, the social taboo in Jaffna is still as strong as ever.

Matrimonial rights and inheritance in Jaffna follow Malabar law and custom. In Hindu Law, in the event of the wife dying intestate her property reverts to her father or surviving brothers. Under *Tesawalamai*, if the wife dies intestate, her property does not revert to her father, but devolves on her children or sister's children. The husband is empowered to bestow the property of his wife on his daughters as dowry — a reflection of the powers which the Karanavan enjoys in a Marumakattayam tarwad. In case the husband predeceases her, the widow exercises a similar function in regard to her share of the husband's property.

There is much that is common in the ways of life of the peoples of Jaffna and Malabar. The Jaffna mode of wearing the *vētti*, the lower garment in men, follows the Malabar and not the South Indian Tamil mode. Wrapping the cloth round the waist, the wearer stands holding the two ends in equal lengths in front of him. Pulling the right end to the left of the waist,

<sup>1</sup> *Tesawalamai* Code 2:4, and Tambiah, H. W.: "The Laws and Customs of the Tamils of Jaffna," p. 105.

he tucks it tight. The other end is drawn to the right and gathered from the waist to the ankles. The South Indian Tamil mode is different. The wearer, wrapping the garment round the waist, gathers a few folds to the left and tightens it at the waist. Of the free right end trailing down, a few handfuls are gathered and tucked at the middle in linear pleats extending down to the ankles. The free end hanging in front is now drawn between the legs and secured tight at the back. The whole attire thus presents a bifurcated appearance, the classical *kachcha* mode, a mode which does not prevail in Malabar (except among the Patter Brahmin or the East Coast Tamil Brahmin immigrant) or in Jaffna generally.

The dress of the woman of Jaffna is the sari worn all over South India. Among the lower social orders the upper border of the sari instead of being thrown over the shoulder, is draped tight over the breast, giving the aspect of a breast band — a distinctive trait of the woman of the lower classes. Obviously early social customs of Jaffna did not tolerate a bodice or jacket being worn by the low caste woman. Though today the social outlook is more liberal, working class women are as a rule hesitant to wear a separate upper garment. They still keep to the breast band. Though this does not find a counterpart in Malabar, yet the breast band of a separate piece of cloth prevailed to a limited extent among women of the conservative aristocratic class in Southern Kerala. This is called *Mula Katcha* — literally the breast band.

The correspondence in ways of life between Jaffna and Malabar extends to food habits. The pot of rice is set to boil with considerable water, so that when the rice is cooked soft, some water is still left in the pot, which does not run dry. Removing the pot of rice from the hearth, the water is carefully strained off to another pot by pressing a flat round disc of wood to the mouth of the pot. The South Indian Tamil mode is to boil the rice in just sufficient water to cook it, so that as the pot is removed from the hearth, no water is left in the pot. A fundamental difference in cooking methods, this has its bearing on food habits. The water strained off is taken as a drink at the close of the rice meal. The rice conjee as such, has its place in



the dietary of the rural folks and working classes in Malabar as a morning meal, though largely replaced today by tea or coffee, with *pittu* or hoppers.

Though conjee is not an article of dietary in Jaffna to the extent it has been in Malabar, working classes in Jaffna take a draft of rice conjee as an evening repast, ladled out of the pot of rice under preparation for the night meal. In the morning, they have a meal of cold rice with the left over curries, quite a sustaining food for the hardworking labourer.

Among other common habits is the use of the coconut in curries, the coconut being scraped and ground over the *ammi*, the grinding stone, the ground stuff being gathered and rounded in a ball of paste. The ground coconut freely enters into the composition of all curries, fish, meat or vegetable. Among the culinary savouries of Malabar, *pachadi* has a place of its own—an appetising curry of curds with pieces of the cucumber or the ash pumpkin cooked soft. A large portion of the ground coconut goes into the preparation of the *pachadi*. The custom largely prevails in Jaffna of the use of ground coconut paste in curries, though the practice grows, of using the pressed milk of the scraped coconut which saves labour. The *pachadi* has some considerable vogue in Jaffna, with the essential ingredient of the ground coconut. Use of ground coconut in curries is foreign to the South Indian Tamil. Its use in Jaffna is yet another common factor. With coconut goes the use of the coconut oil in curries in preference to the gingelly oil used by the Tamils elsewhere.

With correspondence in living conditions, may be traced a certain affinity in domestic architecture. In both the lands, the old country houses follow the Nalupura plan with a central courtyard open to the sky, with living rooms and verandahs disposed on all the four sides of the central courtyard.<sup>1</sup> Most such houses have either disappeared or are fast disappearing under modernisation tendencies. A typical Nalupura structure may yet be seen in the house of Kalai Pulaver K. Navaratnam

<sup>1</sup> This structure is also a feature of the old *valauwa* of the Sinhalese both of the Maritime as of the Central Provinces.

and at a few other houses of Vannarponnai with rooms and verandahs all round the central courtyard. Decidedly a structural link with Malabar, the house treasures at Mr. Navaratnam's house, many an object of Kerala art as the *kindi*, the spouted water vessel of domestic and ritual use all over Kerala, the double tiered hanging bronze lamp and a number of other objects typical of Kerala art.

The 'hedged-in' houses all over Jaffna and homesteads and compounds intersected by narrow lanes, are also among other Malabar features. So, too, is the gateway giving access to the house, a feature of Jaffna. The gateway may be simple as are most of the *padalai* of Jaffna. An elaborate *padalai* may occasionally be seen in the Jaffna countryside covered with a cadjan roof as the gateway of the house of Village Vidane of Chundukuli, typical of the *patipura* of the ancient households of Malabar.

Kerala connections are also unmistakable in the customs of taboo or the ceremonial pollution attaching to the physiological and functional stages of a woman's life—puberty, menstruation and childbirth. Observances of these customs of pollution and their ceremonial purification go deep in the life of the people. Jaffna customs of these observances largely follow Malabar traditions. The Vannathi (the washerwoman) in Jaffna and Malabar has a function very much the same to discharge in the removal of ceremonial pollution as in the menses taboo, the removal of which on the fourth day taking a ceremonial bath wearing a strip or piece of cloth called the *mattu* (a change), is as old an institution of Malabar as it was of Jaffna. Under modernisation influences, such customs everywhere are observed more in the breach than in the performance. Nevertheless, the Malayalam word *mattu* brings today memories of the old custom duly observed in Jaffna in the not too distant past by the high caste Vellala. The custom still lingers among the Nalavar, Pallar and the Parayar, served by their own washermen, the Turumbar. In this word Turumbar, lurks another distinctly Malabar link, derived from the Malayalam word for washing, *tirumbuka*.

The cultural field is too wide to be covered within the limits of this study. In the vocabulary of the spoken word in



the day to day life of the people, will be found many striking parallelisms. It is remarkable that several of the words and phrases are the same in Tamil as spoken in Jaffna as in Malayalam. The parallelism is so obvious that it forces itself on the attention of one who has something more than an intelligent interest in both the languages. I have tried to compile a list, which has grown too long to be appended to this study. The parallelism is one that deserves to be investigated by a student of linguistics.

### Meaning of the term "Malabar"

Other points now claim our attention. First of these, is the meaning of the term Malabar in the expression, Malabar Inhabitants of Jaffna. This has been a topic of considerable discussion and not a little disagreement, whether the law of *Tesawalamai* when first codified was restricted in its application only to the descendants of those inhabitants of Jaffna who came from Malabar geographically so-called—the coastal lands extending from Cape Comorin in the South to Gokarnam in the West—or to all Tamils of Jaffna irrespective of whether they came from Malabar or the Tamil lands of South India. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to use the term Malabar to mean all Tamils. The Dutch took up the tale and carried forward the use of the term Malabar as synonymous with Tamil. This lends weight to the view that the Dutch meant the code to be applied to all Tamils of Jaffna—both to those who came from Malabar, as to those who entered from the Coromandel Coast. Judicial decisions have supported this extended use of the term Malabar and the applicability of the *Tesawalamai* Code to all Tamils, upholding that the term "Malabar Inhabitants of the Province of Jaffna" means "Tamils of Ceylon who are inhabitants of a particular province," namely the Northern Province, despite the contentions of those who held the contrary view that it applied only to people who came from Malabar proper and to their descendants. That the Dutch used the term Malabar proper and to their descendants, is clear from the preface to the *Tesawalamai* Code, written by Clasz Isaaksz where reference is made to the Code as "A description of the established customs, usages and institutions according to which

civil cases are decided among the Malabar or Tamil inhabitants of the Province of Jaffna on the Island of Ceylon." This, no doubt, is the basis of the judicial decisions which upheld that the term means "Tamils of Ceylon who are inhabitants of a particular province" namely the Northern Province. The term as equated with Tamil also appears in the appendix to Van G. Leeuwen's commentaries of the collections, spoken of as a "collection of customs, usages, institutions according to which civil cases were decided among the Malabar or Tamil inhabitants." In its application to Tamils in general, it was held that the *Tesawalamai* Code applied equally to the Mukkuvar inhabiting Jaffna coast, despite the fact that their brethren of the Eastern Province have their own customary usages, which again are closely allied to the Malabar Marumakattayam Law.

That such an extension of the term Malabar to mean all Tamils would today appear to be unscientific and incorrect, considering the obvious differences in customs and habits, does not affect the problem. It is in a very special sense that the word Malabar occurs in the expression; and in the context of this special sense, the extension of the word to mean all Tamils of Jaffna, is abundantly clear. The two meanings of the term Malabar have possibly acted and reacted on each other, Malabar meaning the people of Malabar, the geographical extent properly so called and Malabar meaning the Tamil, the special implications of which coming to a head in the expression "Malabar Inhabitants of Jaffna."

The usage of the word Malabar to mean Tamil *en masse*, finds its greatest currency at the hands of the historians of Ceylon, who revel in the use of the term. To the English, this has been a heritage from the Portuguese and the Dutch. It is essentially a usage of the Ceylon historian, for scholars of South Indian history do not, as a rule, indulge in this use of the term Malabar to mean Tamil. Bishop Caldwell in tracing to the Portuguese the use of the word Malabar to mean the Tamil language and the Tamil people, remarks: <sup>1</sup> "The Portuguese sailing from Malabar on voyages of exploration... made their acquaintance with various places on the eastern or Coromandel Coast... and finding the language spoken by the fishing and

<sup>1</sup> Caldwell: "Comparative Grammar of Dravidian Languages," p. 11.



sea-faring classes on the eastern coast similar to that spoken on the western, they came to the conclusion that it was identical with it, and called it in consequence by the same name, *vis.*, Malabar. A circumstance which naturally confirmed the Portuguese in their notion of the identity of the people and language of the Coromandel Coast with those of Malabar was that when they arrived at Cael, in Tirunelveli, on the Coromandel Coast... they found the King of Quilon (one of the most important places on the Malabar Coast) residing there."

Malabar as a geographical term seems also to have been in general use "from the time of the Portuguese discovery of the Cape route," to denote the land known as Malayalam in the language of the land. Tennent voicing the sense of misapplication of the word Malabar to mean the Tamil language and the people, observes, "the term 'Malabar' is used throughout the following pages in the comprehensive sense in which it is applied in the Sinhalese chronicles to the continental invaders of Ceylon; but it must be observed that the adventurers in these expeditions, who are styled in the *Mahawamsa* 'Damilos,' or Tamils, came not only from the South Western tract of the Deccan known in modern geography as 'Malabar' but also from all parts of the Peninsula, as far north as Cuttack and Orissa."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tennent, Emerson: "Ceylon," Vol. 1, 1859, p. 358. Footnote 1 and p. 394.

Tennent however is scarcely right in alluding to the continental invaders of Ceylon who came from Malabar. He is oblivious of the fact that the Chera Kingdom as such had ceased to be a force in South Indian history long before the time of chieftaincies and principalities, much of whose time was spent in safeguarding their own borders from the incursions of their neighbours. The chiefs had each his own devoted band of followers who championed his cause and fought his battles. It was the martial age of Kerala and the country teemed with men trained in the arts of warfare. There was a life dedicated to the profession of arms. Intent on adventure, they turned their gaze on their powerful neighbours, the Chola and Pandyan Kingdoms and they were soon absorbed in the rank and file of the armies of these powerful potentates in their wars against each other and their expeditions against Ceylon. Except for their share as mercenaries in the employ of Tamil Kings, there has been no "Malabar" invader of Ceylon, or invasions from the land of Malabar. Apart from the sea route, the outlet by land was way down South where the foothills of Southern Travancore formed no barrier to their progress eastward and this obviously was the route taken by the mercenaries of Kerala in their service with the Tamil Kings.

In Alakeswara or Alagakonar of Giri Vansa we have an outstanding figure of an adventurer prince of Southern Kerala who served Ceylon in her time of need. Raigam Korale still rings with the story of his deeds.

## Jaffna Colonisations

At this stage we may pause and try to discover the links in the colonisation of Jaffna. We are here not on so sure a ground as the cultural field we have traversed. Two main stages of colonisations have been advanced — an earlier and a later one — the earlier assigned to the time of the blind flutist, Vira Raghavan Yalpana Nayanar, and the later following the assumption of the rule of Arya Chakkravarti. Such precision can scarcely be imported into what in the nature of things must have been a rather fluid phenomenon of migrations extending over a long series of years, than of limiting them into two definite epochs in the history of Jaffna as writers have been presenting the matter. The story of every land is writ large in the character of these early wanderings of peoples, preparing the world's stage for the part man was to play under diverse scenes and climes. And North Ceylon is no exception. There is no doubt that the two cultural factors which permeated the land were Kerala and Tamil — ethnic and cultural, from the contiguous areas of Kerala and Tamil countries. Southern Kerala bordering Tamil areas, has in its own right been an area of cultural synthesis of Kerala and Tamil factors. This synthesis of peoples and culture finds its counterpart in Jaffna. The term Malabar was comprehensive of both the concepts in its early connotation of this intriguing word, which has caused so much of discussion and not a little of controversy. While on the subject of migrations, let us not contemplate further on this word, of which we have already said a lot, and of which we have a lot more to say, before we finish with it. So far as the migrations are concerned, writers have speculated on their character. Historians of every land have set their mind to single out its developmental story and to peg it down to one or two of the more dynamic epochs in the story of the land. This tendency very possibly accounts for the colonisation movements to Jaffna being assigned, the first to the blind flutist Yalpana Nayanar and the second to Arya Chakkravarti. Without discounting a fairly continuous infiltration of elements all through Jaffna's story, we may certainly accept the phenomenon of two major colonisations corresponding to the two main historical epochs of Jaffna. To the earliest of the settlers must necessarily have fallen the task of



developing the land and raising food crops over barren waste. Theirs was a pioneering effort, continued by subsequent settlers. The colonists, it is reasonable to imagine, were of all sorts. Large scale migrations generally followed on country-wide evacuations in the wake of social disturbances or political unrest.

### Tamilakam

Correlating these early immigrations to the history of Kerala and the political status of the time, we can conclude that these colonists came from what then was the Chera Kingdom, the Chera Mandalam, which "embraced Malayalam or Keralam and extended along the western coast from Comorin to Chandragiri. Its most northerly place was Palni, the most easterly Trichenkodu, the most westerly, Calicut and on the South, the sea. The Cherans claimed descent from Fire."<sup>1</sup>

Chera Kingdom viewed as part of Tamilakam clears up the mist that covered the obscurity of the meaning of Malabar. The concepts of Tamil and Kerala, different as it is today, would seem to have been one in these early days — a concept best denoted by the socio-historical term Malabar, ingeniously invented by the early Europeans, a term which in the early days denoted a cultural unit, the integration of which has disappeared in the course of ages. Tamilakam was the name which comprehended all the three mighty kingdoms, Chera, Chola, and Pandya. Tamilakam in the language of the land, may be said to correspond to what was meant to be conveyed by the term Malabar of the European traders and historians. This entire geographical division comprised thirteen Nads or provinces including Pandinad roughly answering to the present district of Madura, with the capital city of the same name, the seat of the Pandyan Majesty. The Western seaboard and the hinterland beyond formed the Chera Kingdom, considerably more in extent than the present unit of Kerala including part of modern Coimbatore and Salem districts, the traditional Kongunad, within which was situated the capital of the Cheras, Vanji or Vanji Karuvur. The Western

littoral answering to the modern district of Malabar and the States of Travancore and Cochin, the present Kerala State, was the Kadal Malai Nadu, the region between the sea and the mountains, subsequently known as Malayalam — literally the land between the mountain and the sea. Of the Kingdoms of Tamilakam, the Chera attained to the height of its magnificence during the Sangam epoch of the Tamil Classics, from 5th century B.C. to the 4th century A.D. Cheran Senguttuvan (A.D. 140 - 192) was the most powerful king of the dynasty. The Kingdom of the Cheras lacked the integration and the vitality which the Chola and Pandyan kingdoms possessed with the result that disintegrating forces soon encompassed its downfall. This must have taken place after the 5th century A.D., and the Chera kingdom as such ceased to be a force in South Indian history. We know little of the state of the country during the latter days when the kingdom broke up into a number of chieftaincies and principalities, between whom there was unending strife for supremacy over each other. The unsettled condition of the country had its repercussions throughout the length and breadth of the land, resulting in evacuations of the peaceful peasantry who betook themselves to lands overseas. Within easy access of Lanka nothing more natural for the seafaring peoples of Kerala than to cross the narrow seas which still connects more than it separates.

Kerala is the classical name of the country, which in the language of the land is Malayalam, the land between mala or the mountains and alam or the sea. The land beyond the mountains was *terra incognita*, unknown and out of bounds, access landward being barred by the unbroken and high ranges of the Western Ghats. If traditions narrated in the Keralolpatti or legends of the beginnings of Kerala, have any meaning, it is that the sea was the gateway into Kerala through which entered the early colonists.

The axe of Parasurama is symbolic of the pioneering efforts of the first arrivals, coming over the crest of the waves, the country being opened up from the sea coast inland. That the later immigrants into the Kerala littoral blazed the trail is what we learn from the folk songs of the country singing of the far

<sup>1</sup> Casie Chitty: "Tamil Plutarch," pp 118 - 119.

Britto: "Yalpana Vaipava Malai," Appendix to p. LIII.



off days when other people from across the sea, entered Kerala. The sea route was equally the channel of outlet for the overflow of peoples from Kerala and the easiest means of communication out of the land. The sea was the great gateway of Kerala, both in and out. A term synonymous with Tamilakam is Tamilvaram appearing in *Silappadikaram*,<sup>1</sup> the great Tamil classic as in the stanza :—

“ *Nediyon Kunramum todiyol pauvamum  
Tamil varam parutta tanpunalnada* ”

The cool country of the Tamils bounded by Vishnu's hill  
And the hanged lady's sea.

“Tamilakam” or the land of the Tamils, extending from sea to sea and North and South from the Tirupati Hills to Cape Comorin, finds mention in passages in other early Tamil works, as in *Tolkappiyam*. The word clearly signifies the people and their country. Srinivasa Iyengar<sup>2</sup> sums this up in the passage : “The Chera and Kerala country called also the Malai Nadu and Malai-Mandalam in Tamil and Malayalam works, was known to the early Greeks as Dimurika or Tamilakam or Kerobothros, or the Chera Country, to the mediaeval nations as Malabar, or the region of Mountains.”

1 Dikshitar : “The *Silappadikaram*,” 1939, pp. 29 - 32, 43 and 346.

2 P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar : “Tamil Studies,” p. 341

It is not to our present purpose to discuss here the wider problem of the implications of the word Tamil in relation to the word Dravida. Opinions differ. Caldwell considers that “the words Tamil and Dravida though they seem to differ a good deal, are identical in origin.” Accepting his opinion, Tamil is best derived from Dravida than Dravida from Tamil. Subjecting the term to a detailed study as K. M. George does, Dravida is explained as a transformation from Tamil. The name whether Dravida or Tamil primarily means the people, and secondarily the country which the people occupied. The assumption is wrong that Tamil or Dravida was primarily the name of a language. This is borne out by the fact that “in the Sangam works no poet uses Tamil as the name of the language.” George, K. M. : “The term Tamil and Dravida,” *The Madras Christian College Magazine*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, November, 1946.

## The Term “Tamil”

The language of Tamilakam was Tamil, a term which was freely applied at this distant epoch to both the individual language of that name, as also generally to mean the large group of Dravidian languages including Malayalam. It was an age of linguistic fluidity. In the terms Malanattu Tamil for Malayalam, Karinattu Tamil for Kannada, and Tulunattu Tamil for Tulu, and Sen Tamil for pure Tamil, we have examples of the wide significance of the word Tamil. By Tamil was meant the Dravidian language — any language of the group, as contrasted to Sanskrit. Niranam poet Rama Panickar introduces his work in the words, “Tamilayi Kontariyik Kunnen,” meaning “I am saying in Tamil.” This does not mean that he is writing in Sen Tamil. He is translating Vyasa's Brahmanda puranam from Sanskrit into Malayalam, a Dravidian tongue. Another striking example is *Lila tilakam*, the oldest Malayalam grammar, written in Sanskrit style. In speaking of the Mani pravam style of poetry (a synthesis of Malayalam and Sanskrit), the author has the remark, “Tamil mani Samskrita pavilam” (Tamil gem and Sanskrit coral). The author does not mean by the word Tamil any language other than Malayalam. The present connotation of the word Tamil is limited to Sen Tamil only. For several centuries, during which the Dravidian languages were developing, Tamil was used in a very wide sense and in various shades of meaning. The word Tamil, it is obvious, was largely used in old Malayalam works to signify the Malayalam language. We have a number of examples as, *Amaram Tamil Kuttu*, *Nampiyan marute Tamil*, etc. It is clear that Tamil in the days of Tamilakam meant all the languages of the Dravidian family; and Tamil to the European traders and scholars was the Malabar language. Fabricius (18th century) describes his Tamil-English Dictionary, as “Dictionary of Malabar and English, wherein the words and phrases of Tamulian language, commonly called by Europeans, the Malabar language, are explained in English.” (K. M. George, 1946).



## Welfare Problems

**I**NHERENT in traditional societies in general are a complex of problems that come up to the surface, the more the lower social orders contrast their lot in life with the life of the groups higher up in the social scale. Traditional ways of life and patterns of social behaviour, become increasingly hard to bear. True of tribes in general, it is but rarely that they come out to the open and ventilate their grievances. In my experience, complaints of social difficulties have found occasional vent at the visits of the Backward Communities Welfare Board to the villages of the Rodiyas and of the settlement of the Veddas in the outskirts of their ancestral jungle habitats. This stage of unrestrained representation of social problems, has not been reached in Jaffna to any marked extent. Nevertheless they find occasional expression, an index to their social and economic status. The two groups who have not hesitated to speak out their minds at my visits, are the Paraiyar and the Nalavar.

Traditional social usages and customs of behaviour, are being increasingly recognized as out of tune with the present concept of oneness of mankind and social justice. A recent

expression of this feeling are these words of C. S. Navaratnam:<sup>1</sup> "A great blot has been handed down to us by our forefathers, in the social evil of untouchability. Empires may change in a day but social customs take some time to adjust themselves. Any society that denies spiritual and social justice to a large section of its people cannot endure. No society is static, it must either go forward or backward. Customs and conventions must change with the progress of society. Wrong has no prescriptive right to exist merely because it has stood for long. Thanks to some of our enterprising leaders, some of our big temples were opened to the depressed classes in 1956."

In a more philosophical vein, nonetheless realistic, the American philosopher, Ralph Waldo Emerson opens our eyes on the exclusionist in religion in these words: "The exclusive in social life does not see that he excludes himself from enjoyment in the attempt to appropriate it. The exclusionist in religion does not see that he shuts the door of heaven on himself in striving to shut out others. Treat man as pawns and ninepins and you shall suffer as well as they. If you leave out their heaven, you shall lose your own. The selfish man suffers more from his selfishness than he from whom that selfishness withholds some important things."

Religion is a strong bond of union among the different groups of Jaffna. The desire to be spiritually one with the higher social orders, animates the lower groups — to enjoy freedom of religious worship alongside of those higher up in the social scale.

This brings us to problems of Welfare Planning. Different countries have met the challenge in different ways. Over two decades ago the Ceylon Government took a big step forward in the regeneration of the backward groups, the Rodiyas, the Kinnarayas and the Veddas by the institution of the Backward Communities Development Board, a landmark in the social policy of the Ceylon Government. An extension of the scope

1 Navaratnam, C. S.: "A Short History of Hinduism in Ceylon," Jaffna, 1964, p. 174.



of the Board to the North has been long overdue. Such an extension is obviously the right thing to do, a helping hand to Jaffna's lower social strata to find their level.

Of sporadic efforts at social uplift in Jaffna there have been a few, mainly under the auspices of the All Ceylon Gandhi Sevak Sangh, and the All Ceylon Minority Tamils' Association. At one of the meetings of the former, it was urged that a commission should be appointed to enquire into the conditions of the Harijans. Incidentally the term Harijan used by the Gandhi Sevak Sangh is not a term that prevails in the social life of Jaffna.

How far a commission as suggested can help to meet the situation is problematic. In general the welfare of the backward classes is tied up with freedom of religious worship on the one hand and the acute land problem on the other. Official agencies can do but little so far as freedom of religious worship is concerned. The land problem is one that calls for vital co-operation of the land-owning upper class. So far as the spiritual angle is concerned, one of the favourable factors is the cleanliness of the lower orders. This was particularly evident in the life of the so-called Paraiyar, with nothing of the dirty ways generally associated with the name. It was a sight to see the men after their morning bath and wearing the sacred ash (*Vibhūti*), working at their looms. They have been weavers from mediaeval days and were registered as such in the Dutch tombos. There is nothing Paraya in the Jaffna man of the name. Fortunately the name has as good as disappeared in India, replaced by the name Harijan introduced by Gandhi. It is time that the term is altogether replaced by the term Harijan in Jaffna and Batticaloa, where too the Parayar are a clean lot as in Saintamarudu in the vicinity of Kalmunai.

Satisfactory housing schemes are among the prime needs of Jaffna, with sufficient space around for a kitchen garden. In this particular direction, Jaffna could take a lesson from the L.D.O. allotments in the Southern provinces of Ceylon for the benefit of the lower social orders. That these have scarcely the ordinary amenities of life, is obvious from a look at the crowded and hedged in huts in certain of the villages of the Koviars and the Nalavar.

Of the social systems of Jaffna, as of traditional societies in general, it is axiomatic that social welfare is well maintained by the 'mores' or the moral standards of the group, each social unit adjusting itself to the environment. With changes in environment, these mores adjust themselves to the changes, nevertheless maintaining the harmony of social well being. In course of time, enlightened public opinion accommodates itself to the tempo of welfare spreading over the lower orders.

Let us for a moment turn to Swami Vivekananda.<sup>1</sup> Here are the views of the Swamiji in brief on the origin of society and the uplift of Hindu Society: "Two attempts have been made in the world to found social life, the one was upon Religion and the other upon Social Necessity; the one founded upon Spirituality; the other upon Materialism; the one upon Transcendentalism, the other upon Realism. The one looks beyond the horizon of the little material world and is bold enough to begin life there even apart from the other; the latter content to stand on things of the world and expect to find a firm footing there."

"A perfect society, like the perfect man, is one in which there is perfect synthesis between spiritualism and materialism, the former controlling the latter."

The Swamiji continues, "Love, Renunciation, Unselfishness — three great manifestations of spirituality — from these alone can any society rise and stand. Neither physical prowess, nor economic superiority, nor political dexterity, can form such a basis. The society stands for self-sacrifice, pure and simple, as befitting its spiritual nature." These observations of the Swamiji on society have their general application to human societies in India as in Ceylon.

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1 Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume. Editor R. C. Majumdar, Calcutta, 1963: *Sociological Views of Swamiji*, p. 354, *et seq.*



## The Muslim

**I**N the word "Moor" we have a term so peculiar to the Ceylon Muslim that most historians of Ceylon begin their account with an explanation of the term. Says Tennent, Vol. II, p. 605 : "Moor is a generic term by which it was customary at one time in Europe to describe a Mohamedan, from whatsoever country he came... The practice probably originated from the Spaniards having given that name to the followers of the Prophet, who after traversing Morocco, overran the peninsula in the 7th and 8th centuries. The epithet was borrowed by the Portuguese who after their discovery of the passage by the Cape of Good Hope bestowed it indiscriminately upon the Arabs and their descendants, who in the 16th century, they found established as traders in every port on the Asian and African coasts, and whom they had good reason to regard as their most formidable competitors in the commerce of the East." Thus Moor is a term which the Ceylon Muslim owes to their rivals the Portuguese. There is, therefore, significance in the school of thought which favours the traditional name Muslim, a name that finds expression at the annual Conferences of the All-Ceylon Young Men's Muslim Association of Colombo, though the term Moor finds wide social acceptance<sup>1</sup> and State recognition.

<sup>1</sup> See, "Moorish Culture": Moors Islamic Cultural Home, Dematagoda, Colombo, 1949.

Popular among the Sinhalese folks, are terms Marakala Minissu and Marakalayo, signifying their roles as traders in their own right and as transporters of merchandise from foreign lands in sea-going craft; *marakalam* meaning a boat, from *Maram*, in Tamil for timber.

Among writers of colonial days, Sir Alexander Johnstone refers to "the tradition<sup>2</sup> that the Muslims of Ceylon are the descendants of that portion of the Arabs of the house of Hashim who were driven from Arabia in the early part of the eighth century by the tyranny of the Caliph Abdul Malik ben Merwan. The division of them which came to Ceylon formed eight considerable settlements, one each at Trincomalee, Jaffna, Mantotte, Mannar, Kudiramalai, Puttalam, Colombo, Barbareen and Point de Galle." It is significant that these several places, have large concentrations of the Ceylon Muslim today.

That the Arabs who found their way to Ceylon, "came in large number mainly from the shores of the Persian Gulf, in the 8th century, is more precise of their embarkation from the shores of the Persian Gulf. In support of the idea of their arrival from the region around the Persian Gulf, it is pointed out that the Ceylon Moors are Shafi-ites, whereas the Moroccan Arabs are in the main Malik-ites."<sup>2</sup>

Of relations of the Ceylon Muslims with the Caliph of Bagdad, we have data left by Sir Alexander Johnstone himself : "In 1806, while collecting the various usages and customs of Muhammadan inhabitants of Ceylon, I directed my enquiries particularly to those customs and usages which could throw light on the history of their early settlements and former commercial prosperity on that island, and their intimate connection and constant communication with the Caliphs of Bagdad, during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and I was referred by all Mohammadan priests, merchants and mariners to a Cufic ins-

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in my book : "India in Ceylon History, Society and Culture," New Delhi, 1963, pp. 18, 19.

<sup>2</sup> "Some Notes on the Muslims of Ceylon," All-Ceylon Y.M.M.A. Conference, 1958.



cription, as the oldest record in the island which alluded to the intercourse that had subsisted between the Caliphs of Bagdad and the Mohammadans of Ceylon."

Referring to the tradition prevailing in Ceylon on this inscription Johnstone expounds that "the Caliph of Bagdad in the beginning of the tenth century, hearing that the Mohammadans, then established as traders at Colombo, were ignorant of the real tenets of their religion sent a learned priest from Bagdad to Colombo, with instructions to explain to them the nature of their religion and erecting a mosque at Colombo, so as to ensure their strict observance of the spirit of Mohammadan worship. This learned priest erected "a very extensive mosque at Colombo." After his death, some learned persons from Bagdad, engraved an inscription on his tomb.

So far, in brief, for the story of their early history in Ceylon. The mosque here alluded to, is obviously the principal Mosque in Third Cross Street, Colombo, a fine specimen of Arab architecture.

The pilgrimage of the Arab traveller Ibn Batuta, to Ceylon in the fourteenth century, marks an important stage in the chronicle of the Ceylon Muslim, incidentally giving us valuable insight into the status of the Arya Chakravarties of Jaffna. Landing at a sea port referred to as "Battala," which may be the modern Puttalam, Ibn Batuta was duly conducted to the presence of the Arya Chakravarti. In the account of his travels, Ibn Batuta speaks of an Arab ruler with 500 horsemen at Beruwala, a Muslim settlement to this day, on the South West coast. His observations of earlier arrivals of Arab pilgrims to Adam's Peak, are illuminating. (Andreas Nell: "*Coming of the Moors to Ceylon*," 1949.)

In his graphic account, Ibn Batuta speaks of the sheikhs and saints, who had performed this pilgrimage in earlier years. Prominent mention is made of Sheikh Abdul Abd Allah, Ibn Khafif, the first Muhammadan who made this pilgrimage. In his foot steps came more sheikhs who settled on the Island. Specifically named, is the mosque of the Sheikh Othman of Shiraz "which both the Emperor and people of Ceylon visit

and for which they have great veneration." The sites where the saints lived and died are now holy places of pilgrimage. One such is to be found by the side of the seat of the God of the Hindus and Sinhalese alike, the jungle shrine of Kataragama. On my first visit to Kataragama, this struck me as very significant. Later it dawned on me that the co-existence of the shrine of Kadiria (Kataragama) and of Muslim saints, is a mystic association in a number of places in South India too. Though I tried to get an explanation of this phenomenon, I could not get it fully clarified.

To continue our account of the Muslim in their Ceylon home. Once well settled on the soil of Ceylon, the Moors have ever been an asset of value to the Island. As distributors of food-stuffs and wearing apparel over the remote parts of Ceylon, they did great public service in the ages when means of communication had not developed, and transport of goods was the most vital problem. The Moors were equal to the task, introducing and perfecting the transport of goods by means of pack bulls — a system which has ever since come to be known as "*tavalam*." A number of *tavalam* bulls going in groups, formed a *caravan*, traversing distant tracts. (S. Shanmuganathan: *Ceylon and the Moors*, 1949).

In the Statecraft of the Kandyan Kingdom, they were attached to the Madige, the Bullock Transport Department (Ralph Peiris, 1956).

A business line which they have largely perfected as their very own from historic times, is the development of the Gem industry, the processes of cutting, polishing and marketing of gems both within Ceylon and lands overseas. Outstanding names of the past few decades, are those of O. L. M. Macan Markar and Abdul Gaffoor, well known for establishing trade centres of the gem industry in foreign lands.

Traditional practitioners that they are of the Unani system of medicine, the Hakims have long had a reputation for this system of medicine, which they popularised in Ceylon. Alutgama on the South West has long had a reputation as a centre of the Unani system of medicine, traditions which still endure here.



All over Ceylon, they pursue a variety of occupations, as traders, shop-keepers, and deep-sea fishermen. With benefits of higher education, they find service in Government offices and in skilled professions.

In the political sphere, they stood fast by the Sinhalese kings, counteracting the strategy of the Portuguese. Sensing the danger to their business pursuits, the Moors from the first resisted their entry into Ceylon. Though the Kandyan royalty at a weak moment, yielded to the persuasions of the Portuguese, the Moors were alert to denounce them to the Kandyan kings at every opportunity.

A strong Muslim habitat in Kandy is the progressive suburban station of Akurana, reputed to have been granted to them by the King of Kandy in recognition of their services against the Portuguese.

The Dutch more commercially minded than the Portuguese, were bitter against the Moor, featured by Rykloff van Goens in his Memoirs of 1675 as "a detested race, the offspring of Malabar outcastes converted to Islam by the Mohammadans of Bassore and Mocha and whose appearance in the Ceylon seas was first as pirates and then as pedlars" (Valentine: Ch. XV, p. 146). "Every expedient was adopted to crush them; their trade was discouraged and they were forbidden to hold lands in the country" (Valentine: Ch. XV, p. 146, Ch. XII, p. 148, and Ch. XIII, p. 166). Valentine continues, "all these devices of tyranny were unsuccessful; the endurance and enterprise of the Moors were not to be exhausted and at length, the Dutch were compelled to admit that every effort 'to extirpate these weeds' had only tended to increase their numbers and energy" (Valentine: Ch. XVI, p. 490).

Sporadically from 8th century A.D., and continuously from 1000 A.D., the Muhammadans became a strong element in India, and a political force from the days of the Sultanate of Delhi, replaced from 1526, by the Mughal Empire. With the rise and growth of the Bhamini Kingdom in the South, in the 14th century, the Muslim power gained ascendancy in South India, leading to the fall of the mighty Vijayanagar empire in the

sixteenth century. Progressively gaining in strength, the Muslims, as the Hindus had done earlier, found their way open to Ceylon, and South Indian Muslims soon became an important element in Ceylon, fraternising with their co-religionists long settled in the Island.

The connection of the Ceylon Muslim with the Indian Muslim element from South India, finds emphasis in the writings of contemporary authors; and later writers: De Queyroz, the Portuguese historian, "*Conquista De Ceylao*": "*Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*" and Virchow (J.R.A.S., C.B. Vol. IX, No. 32, 1886), and other writers of modern times. In the linguistic field, Tamil became the common language of daily life, both of the Ceylon Muslim, as of their Indian counterpart.

In the Malays, we have another well-knit Muslim constituent, strong in the Southern Province, particularly in the district of Hambantota, and a minority of consequence in the Western Province. Of the beginnings of the Malays in Ceylon, something has already been told. Their fighting qualities found early recognition and they were soon recruited in the Ceylon Army by the European powers in Ceylon.

A strong minority, next only to the Tamil, the Muslims are well represented in practically all the provinces of Ceylon. The latest Census figures give the Ceylon Muslim as numbering 662,000 against the Indian Muslims, numbering 27,000. The largest concentration of the Ceylon Muslim is in Batticaloa district of the Eastern Province, with considerable strength in the City of Colombo, and Galle, well distributed in Jaffna, Trincomalee, Puttalam, Beruwala, and in Kurunegala, Kalutara, Gampola, Matale and Negombo districts.

That the Muslims have been a population factor in Jaffna in the days of the Dutch, we learn from the Memoirs of the Dutch Governors. The first Muslim settlement in the Jaffna peninsula were at Mirusuvil and Usan.<sup>1</sup> The Island of Mannar had an Arab settlement from very early times. At Mannar to this day, one can discern the racial characters of the Arab, comparatively unmixed with other racial strains. The Muslims

<sup>1</sup> Ramanathan, P.: *Ethnology of the Moors of Ceylon*, J.R.A.S. (C.B.) Vol. X, 1888, pp. 224-262.



of Mannar were the allies of the Arya Chakravarties, in the attempts of the latter, to re-capture the Island of Mannar from the Portuguese.

A sly reference to the Muslims, we have in the Sinhalese poem, *Kokila Sandesa*<sup>1</sup> in eulogy of the conquest of Jaffna by prince Sapumal Kumaraya. The Muslims are here termed Jonas (spelt in the poem, as Junes)<sup>2</sup> :—

“ From thence you go to Veligam (Veligama) with its market,  
In street where the Viscoula (Chetties) sell precious stones,  
And some chattering women of the sect of Junes,  
Teaching parrots, how to talk.”

The European historians of the Colonial days have left impressive accounts of the Ceylon Muslims. In particular, Pridham's observations are highly complimentary : “Next to the European, they are the finest race of men in the Island, have a soldier-like gait, talk and well-formed, with handsome and intelligent countenances.” “Their noble flowing beards give the aged a dignified appearance. Their dress is neat and becoming, their robes of fine white calico, drawn tight at the waist, round which they have a belt of worked calico; on their heads they wear a small cap. While the higher classes are merchants and capitalists, the lower are very industrious. All are sociable and social. The integrity of their religion and culture, have made them self-reliant and Christian missionaries leave them alone.” (Pridham : *Ceylon and Its Dependancies*, 1849).

To conclude with a short account of their strong individuality, the most marked of their cultural traits. Of all the social groups of Ceylon, they have stood firm by their own faith and strongly resisted any subversion of their traditions and religion. (Rev. James Selkirk : *Mohammedans of Kandy*, 1844).

1 Navaratnam, C. S. : Tamils and Ceylon, pp. 150-161 and p. 181, 1958.

2 Translation by Joinville, C. H. J., VI. 3, Nos. 3 and 4,

Their disciplined life is best reflected in the institution of the month of Ramzan, a month of dedication to the fundamental concepts and values of their faith, a dedication which comes to a head on the last day of the month, a day of blessedness and rejoicing, of joy and happiness, a day of fulfilment, after a long period of strict spiritual discipline and physical abstinence and fasting, investing the day with a position supreme and unique among all the other religious festivals of the Muslim. The holy Ramzan stands as a symbol of the social system of the Muslim, a system founded on equality and fraternity, all standing alike, rich or poor, without distinctions of rank and file, a brotherhood enjoined on the Muslims by the Prophet, in these words, of the Prophet's Farewell Message : “Ye people, listen to my words, and understand the same. Know that all Muslims are brothers unto one another. Ye are one brotherhood. Nothing that belongs to another, is lawful unto his brother, unless freely given out of goodwill.”

The Field of Religion

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## The Field of Religion

CEYLON offers a wide field of study to the student of religion. The simplest definition of religion, that "all socially recognized communion with the supernatural, is religion," finds apt illustration in the religions of Ceylon.

Reminiscent of the Ramayana legends, is the cult of god Vibhishana, centered traditionally in Kelaniya, side by side with the sacred Buddhist dagoba of Kelaniya. Among others are a number of gods in a loosely accepted Buddhist pantheon, as Vishnu, Saman, etc. Foremost among the popular folk cults of today, are the cults of god Kataragama, and of goddess Pattini. Both are living links between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Kataragama is the traditional war God of Ceylon. Pattini cult is a Sinhalese variant of the legend of Kovalan and Kannaki, the Kannaki Amman of the Tamils, the cult introduced into Ceylon by King Gajabahu, on his return from South India after the inauguration of the first Pattini Kovil by Cheran Sengottuvan, in the second century A.D.

Herein, I give a short account of the living religious systems of the Tamils of Ceylon.

## 1. HINDUISM

The spiritual faith that sustains Hindu Jaffna is the Saiva Siddhanta School of religious system, "the most elaborate, influential and undoubtedly the most intrinsically valuable of all religion: of India," in the words of G. U. Pope. The ancient temples of Ceylon testify to the antiquity of Saivism in Ceylon. Speaking of the sacred shrines of Ceylon, Paul Pieris,<sup>1</sup> the illustrious scholar and historian, has left us a graphic picture of the Hindu Temples at the cardinal points of Ceylon: "Long before the arrival of Vijaya (543 B.C.) there were in Lanka, five recognised Iswarams of Siva, which claimed and received the adoration of all India. These were Tiruketeeswaram near Mahatittha; Munneswaram dominating Salavatta and the Pearl Fishery; Tondeswaram near Mantota; Tirukoneswaram opposite the great bay of Koddigar and Nakuleswaram near Kankasanturai. Their situation close to these ports cannot be the result of accident or caprice and was probably determined by the concourse of a wealthy mercantile population whose religious wants called for attention."

Except for Munneswaram at Chilaw on the West and Koneswaram at Trincomalee in the East, the rest are all in Jaffna peninsula. Trincomalee for long ages formed part of the kingdom of Jaffna. While these testify to the antiquity of Saivism in Ceylon, Jaffna as the region of the greatest concentration of the Tamils from early ages, accounts for the largest number of the Saivite shrines of Ceylon. The independent political status that Jaffna enjoyed with a line of kings continuously from early ages to the seventeenth century, was among the forces that made for social security reflected in the all round cultural advancement of Jaffna.

### Tiruketheeswaram

Among the most reputed of the ancient temples of Jaffna, Tiruketheeswaram claims our first attention. Tiruketheeswaram is the monumental shrine of the village of Mantota of North Ceylon known to the Buddhist chronicles as Mahatittha, sung by the

1 Pieris, Paul E.: "Nagadipa and Buddhist Remains in Jaffna," J.R.A.S. (C.B.), Vol. XXVI, No. 70, pp. 17 - 18.



Saivite saints, Tirugnanasambandhar and Sunderamurti of the seventh and ninth century A.D. respectively. Legends speak of the temple having been built by Mayan, father of Mandodhari, wife of Ravana. Sri Rama, on his way back to Ayodhya from Lanka, is reputed to have worshipped Siva at Tiruketheeswaram. Legends speak too of Arjuna visiting the temple in the course of his pilgrimage to the South, where he met Alli Arasani, who ruled over the region in the vicinity of Mantota. Reputed in historical annals, as Rajarajeswara Mahadevan Kovil, the name recalls the patronage to the temple by Rajendra Chola II.<sup>1</sup>

An idea of the splendour and prosperity of the place has been pictured in these words:<sup>2</sup> "Waves of the sea adjoining the temple reached the skies and its roar vied with the festival drums and all other sounds of the thickly populated countryside. The harbour was a safe refuge for many ships from various countries which crowded into it. The city of Mantota was rich with gold, pearls and precious stones. In groves of coconut, mango, arecanut and plantain, the density of trees was so great monkeys sported from branch to branch and flocks of peacocks danced in their cool shade. The scent from the flowers of the well-laid gardens oppressed the air, and the hum of swarms of bees which kept on flitting from flower to flower, shrub to shrub, competed with the strains of music from the halls of citizens."

"The temple enjoyed the patronage of the Pandyan and Chola dynasties of kings and flourished down to the sixteenth century, since when it suffered decline from natural causes and the politics of the times. The Portuguese ravaged the coast and sacked the temple, and nothing remained of the shrine except a few fragments of sculptured figures, broken tiles and pieces of pottery."

Efforts to restore the temple date back to 1872. A new era opened in the chronicle of the temple with the founding of the Tiruketheeswaram Temple Restoration Society at a public meeting held in Colombo on October 19, 1948. A planned programme of development steadily materialised and has been steadily under implementation.

<sup>1</sup> S. I. I., Vol. IV, No. 1414.

<sup>2</sup> Vaithianathan, Sir Kanthiah: "Tiruketheeswaram Papers," 1957.

## Koneswar Kovil of Trincomalee

Another Siva shrine of equal antiquity, which has been subjected to the ravages of time and the changing political situation, is the Koneswar Kovil of Tirukonamalai (Trincomalee). The earliest mention of the shrine is in the hymns of Tirugnanasambandar, who sings of "Konamamalai and of the peerless God, who dwelleth on Konamamalai, to the sound of roaring ocean, and rows of Kalal and the anklets, and half of whose body is shared by the Maid of the Mountains, and who rides the sacred bull." This is the earliest authenticated mention of the Koneswar temple. A cut in the rock, the "Ravana Kalvettu," recalls that Ravana worshipped at the shrine.

Inscriptions of Jatavarman Vira Pandya of the thirteenth century at the archway of Fort Frederick (through which one today enters the sacred precincts), with the Pandyan insignia of the double fish, are eloquent of Pandyan connections. Codrington and Rasanayagam have read these Tamil inscriptions translated in these terms: "O, King, the Parangis (the Portuguese) shall in time break down the holy edifice, built by Kulakkodan, and it will not be rebuilt, nor will future kings think of doing so."

The legend of Kulakkodan is the theme of a composition, partly in prose and partly in poetry, the "Koneswar Kalvettu" by Kavirayar, featured in the "*Yalpana Vaipava Malai*," under the name of "Kavirasa Varothayan." It relates that "Rama Deva, the son of Manunithi-Kanda-Cholan of the solar race visited Tirukonamalai, and after him, his son, Kulakkodan, came and repaired the temple and its towers, built the terraced halls and made the sin-dispelling well. For the continuance of the service of Isvara he brought 57 families from Karai and Marungkar in Chola. These he did on Monday, the 10th of Idapan in the year of Kaliyuga 512."

Kulakkodan may be one of the princes of the early Cholas sung of in early Tamil literature. Kulakkodan's prophecy has come true almost to the letter. The Portuguese occupied Trincomalee in 1622, an event chronicled by the historian, Sir Emerson Tennent, in these words: "In the earlier portion of their career in Ceylon the Portuguese showed the utmost indifference to the



possession of Trincomalee; but after the appearance of the Dutch on the coast and the conclusion of an alliance between them and the Emperor of Kandy, Constantine de Sa in 1622, alarmed at the possibility of these dangerous rivals forming establishments in the Island, took possession of the two ports of Batticaloa and Trincomalee and ruthlessly demolished the "Temple of a Thousand Columns" in order to employ its material in fortifying the heights on which it stood. Some of the idols were rescued from this desecration and conveyed to the Pagoda of Tampalakamam; but fragments of carved stonework and slabs bearing inscriptions in ancient character are still to be discovered in the walls of the Fort and on the platform for the guns."

Tennent continues: "The scene of this sacrilege is still held in the profoundest veneration by the Hindus. Once each year, a procession, attended by crowds of devotees who bring offerings of fruits and flowers, repairs at sunset to a spot where the rock projects above the ocean. A series of ceremonies is performed including the mysterious breaking of a coconut against the cliff; and the officiating Brahmin concludes his invocation by elevating a brazen censer above his head filled with inflammable materials, the light of which, as it burns, is reflected far over the sea."

A fragment of an inscribed door jamb and a stone image each of Vishnu and Mahalakshmi were discovered in the course of digging inside the fort by the British Army Service Corps in 1944. Parnavitana, the Ceylon Archaeological Commissioner, tells us in his administration report for 1946, that the preserved portion of the record contains the first two lines of a Sanskrit verse in the *Sragdhara* metre and the beginnings of the third line. It states that in the year Saka 1145 (Sambhu-Pushpa) when the sun was in the house of Aries, on the day of the constellation, Hasta, and at a time when the *Mesha lagna* was in the ascendant, a prince named Codaganga came to Ceylon and had had something to do at Gokarna. The details of the date point to Friday, April 14, 1223 A.D. The Codaganga of this inscription cannot be identified with any prince of that name known to us from other historical records of Ceylon or of India. The name suggests that he was a scion of the eastern Ganga dynasty of

Kalinga. The Gokarna figuring in the inscription must be the ancient name of Trincomalee.

The destruction of the temple was so overwhelming that images hurriedly hidden or submerged under the debris or consigned to the sea continue to be revealed from time to time. Among such are the three images discovered on July 3, 1950, Siva as Chandrasekhara, Siva a Somaskanda and Parvati. These, with the four figures discovered earlier, including images of Ganesha and Parvati seated, make a total of seven sacred objects.

Parts of sculptured columns and structural remains in the bed of the sea have been revealed and photographed by the under-sea explorers, Clarke and Mike Wilson, in the past few years. The latest to be rescued from the bed of the sea by these explorers is a stone *lingam*.

Public interest has been aroused from the time of the discovery of the sacred bronzes in July, 1950, and a new Koneswar Kovil has been steadily rising and nearing completion in the past one decade on the holy hill, the Swami Rock, to whose sacred precincts flock today devotees, much as the shrine attracted pilgrims from far and near, from the days of the Pallavas. In the vicinity, some twenty-five miles to the north, have been discovered remains of an ancient Buddhist monastery, the Grikandi Cetiya, on a hill known to the Tamils as Kandaswami Malai, the hill of Skanda. Here in a rock cave has been revealed a series of Pallava inscriptions, in the Pallava *grantha* script of about the seventh century, as revealed to us by Parnavitana.

These and other inscriptions reveal the Pallava influence in the development of the Sinhalese alphabet during the sixth and seventh centuries. This and other evidence point to definite Pallava connections with Ceylon, and the port of Trincomalee could well have been a wayside port in the maritime expansion of the Pallavas over the eastern waters. The architectural features of the remains of the ancient structure, reveal a style of architecture definitely Pallava. The Pallavas have been obviously among the earliest of the South Indian royal dynasties to bestow attention on the holy shrine of Tirukonamalai, continued by the successive dynasties of the Chola and the Pandya.



## Munneswaram

The ancient Hindu shrines of Ceylon date so far back that it is hard to conclude which of these is the earliest in point of time. All have obviously arisen in response to the spiritual urge of the early Tamils of Lanka. Among these is the shrine of Munneswaram, a mile from the town of Chilaw on the western seaboard. The ancient temple enhances the charm of the place. During the two weeks' annual festival, this place is transformed from a quiet rural resort to a beehive of humanity.

Each temple has its own legend. Munneswaram, the Vadi-vambika Sametha Munna Natheswarar temple, to call it by its full name, has its distinctive legends. Harmonising with its hoary antiquity is the legend that Brahma worshipped at the temple in the Krita Yuga, Rama in the Treta Yuga and Vyasa in the Dwapara Yuga. Rasanayagam, author of "*Ancient Jaffna*," believes that Munneswaram is the earliest of the "iswarams," or abodes of God Siva in Lanka. It is believed that Sri Rama in his sojourn in Lanka spotted the shrine with its high tower, and lowered his chariot, and then He and His companions bathed in the river flowing by, and installed a Siva linga at the shrine. Munneswaram shared the same fate as the other old temples at the hands of the Portuguese. In later years, kings of Ceylon, including Kirti Sri Raja Singha of Kandy (1747 - 1782) restored the temple very much to its present condition.

## Kataragama

Now for a brief mention of the great temple of south Ceylon, the shrine to God Katragama, as it is known today, the abode of God Skanda or Kadirā. The temple has given its name to the region around, Katragama, (Kadiragama) the village of God Kadirā. Situated in a dense jungle, the temple has in historic times been cleared of the wilderness around to make the temple convenient of access to the numerous pilgrims, Buddhists and Hindus, who daily go there all through the year. Nestling in the superb natural setting, with the jungle around, by the gently flowing Menik Ganga, the temple is truly the great national devala of all Ceylon. In all causes, personal or national vows are made to the Great God of Katragama, the War God,

who appeared before Prince Duttugemunu (101 - 77 B.C.) in his dream, and gave him divine aid and guidance for the liberation of the island, as the "*Mahavamsa*" narrates.

Though more difficult of access than the rest of the shrines of Ceylon, as a good deal of the journey has to be covered by bus or car or on foot, the faith in the God of Katragama is so strong that the shrine is the most visited and most popular of the devalayas of the island.

The "*Mahavamsa*" speaks of the nobles of Kataragama, who were present at the festival of the great Bodhi-tree, the reception to the sacred Bo-tree sapling brought by Sangamitta, the daughter of Asoka, in the third century B.C. It is regarded probable that Vijaya (543 B.C.), the founder of the Sinhalese monarchy, either founded the shrine of Kataragama or largely extended and renovated an existing temple to the God, and worshipped at the shrine soliciting divine aid in his efforts to overcome the "Yakkas" (as the indigenous inhabitants were termed), and established himself as the overlord of Lanka.

The last of the Saivite deities of Ceylon, the God of the villagers and jungle folk is God Aiyanar, represented in remote shrines by his "vahana" of the elephant or the horse. Aiyanar is the main deity of the large region known as the Vanni, a name that reflects early colonists from South India, the Vanniyars. Vanni today is the wide territory of north Ceylon between the Jaffna Peninsula and the North Central Province.

## Vibhishana Devalaya, Kelaniya

Reminiscent of the "Ramayana" is the Vibhishana Devalaya of Kelani, adjacent to the ancient Buddhist dagoba. The temple had its days of splendour in the past, particularly noted for its sacred dance, an institution of the Middle Ages, the art which in its technique was a true reflection of the art of Bharata Natya by the devadasis of South Indian temples.

## Saman Devalaya, Ratnapura

Of the Hindu temples that have survived today the most prominent is the Maha Saman Devalaya of Ratnapura, the city of gems, the chief town of the province of Sabaragamuwa, about



fifty miles distant from Colombo. The annual festival here is among the picturesque events of the year, celebrated with the splendour of the "perahera" processions.

God Saman is the guardian deity of Sri Pada, Samanta Kuta (Adam's Peak), sacred to the Buddhists. God Saman, in popular thought, is Lakshmana, the brother of Sri Rama. Here too the sacred dance by dancing girls was an active institution, reflections of which can be traced today in the families established on land held in service tenure to perform dances at important festival occasions and the annual celebrations.

#### Vishnu Devalaya

Of the temples to God Vishnu are the Maha Vishnu Devalaya of Kandy and the more ancient temple at Dondra, the Devi Nuwara of the Middle Ages, the city of gods, the southern-most point of Ceylon. This particular devalaya dates from about the seventh century A.D.

A new structural temple, the Divya Raja Bhavana, has come up within the past few years at the site of the ancient shrine destroyed by the Portuguese.

#### Cult of the Goddess Pattini

This quick survey of the shrines of the Gods of Ceylon, I may conclude with a brief mention of the "cult of Goddess Pattini," the Kannaki of South Indian legends. King Gajabahu of Ceylon (174 - 196 A.D.), who happened to be in South India at the time of the inauguration of the cult of the Goddess by King Ceran Senguttuvan, brought over with him to Ceylon the sacred insignia, the anklets of Goddess Pattini and the texts used in her worship and introduced the cult in Ceylon. The cult of the Goddess found a receptive soil in Ceylon and developed into several distinctive forms. At Navagamuwa, a village about twenty-five miles on the Colombo-Ratnapura road, is the chief shrine of the Goddess, whose temples are widespread in Ceylon. One of the devalayas of Kandy is consecrated to the Goddess, who has her allotted place in the scheme of the famous Kandy Esala Perahera, in celebration of the Temple of the Tooth, in association with the Maha Vishnu, Kataragama, Natha (Sakra) and Pattini devalayas of Kandy.

#### Kandaswami Kovil, Jaffna

In point of antiquity as for the complex of the legends, historical, spiritual and romantic, Kandaswami Kovil at Mavittapuram, Jaffna, is perhaps unique. The legend has already been told, of the Princess Marutapiravikavalli coming to the sacred springs of Keerimalai to rid herself of the horse face with which she was born. Cured of her disfigurement, romance takes a hand in her affairs. Here she meets Ugrasimhan, the prince from Kalinga, and the inevitable ensued. Both together built the Mavittapuram Kandaswami Kovil in grateful acknowledgement of the divine aid. Tradition has it that at her request her father the Chola King sent a Brahmin priest from Chidambaram with sacred images. Adjacent to the sacred springs of Keerimalai, the ancient temple stands today to remind us of the princess and her life story. The last day of the annual festival at Mavittapuram Kandaswami temple synchronises with the Adi Amavasi Day (July - August). The sacred insignia of God Skanda is conducted in procession to Keerimalai for the water-cutting ceremony.

Keerimalai takes its name from Nakula Muni, the sage, whose abode has been the cave inside which the Muni lived his life of penance. From Nakula, Sanskrit for Tamil Keeri, the place got its present name Keerimalai. It is said that the Muni got so shrunk by age and austerities that he was likened to a mongoose, Nakula or Keeri.

The name of the sage, Nakula gives us too, the name Naguleswara, otherwise known as Tirutambaleswaram. The *Yalpana Vaipava Malai* reckons Naguleswaram among the temples of Keerimalai founded by Vijaya. Traditions which form part of Skanda Puranam esteem Naguleswaram among the sacred places of pilgrimage, a testimony to its high antiquity. Folk traditions tell us that King Bhuvanekabahu VI (Sembahap Perumal), the builder of the Nallur Kandaswami temple, bathed in the sacred waters of Keerimalai and worshipped at the temple of Naguleswaram.

In the context of Keerimalai, we may take a passing glance at a site reputed by the name of Sambeswaran, west of Keerimalai, also known as Sambuturai, meaning the place where



arrived from South India an image of Sambu, an epithet for Siva, "he who grants boons." This port finds mention in Sinhalese chronicles as Jambukola, where landed the sacred Bo-tree Sapling brought by Sangamitta. There is also the tradition that here was received a stone image of Parvati, reminiscent of which is its alternate name, Matha-Kal, literally stone-mother, simplified into Mathagal.

Of the temples of later historical times, the most significant is the Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil. Founded in 1450, by Sembahap Perumal, conqueror of Jaffna, who reigned as the King of Jaffna under the name of Bhuvanekabahu VI, the temple was destroyed by the Portuguese on their occupation of Jaffna in 1620. With the more propitious times of the Dutch times, the temple was rebuilt at its present site in 1793. Today, it is the most popular of the Jaffna temples. Yet another Nallur shrine is the Kailaya Nathar Parameshwarar Kovil also destroyed by the Portuguese and rebuilt later.

In the village of Nagercoil by the sea is the Nagatambiran Kovil, a temple dedicated to Siva, with a Sivalingam under the canopy of a five-hooded Naga. This and the legend of the miraculous protection afforded by the Naga God to the villagers in early Portuguese campaigns, an episode already narrated in the story of this seaside village, has earned for it the name of Naga Tambiran Kovil.<sup>1</sup> At Chavakacheri is the Variappar temple, sung in *Dakshina Kailasa Manmiam*, the temple destroyed by the Portuguese and later rebuilt. At Chulipuram is the Kovil of Kannai Kothi Kakkai Pillayar, "the Pillayar who caused the crow to peck the eyes." The legend is that the Portuguese officer who directed the demolition of the temple, was badly attacked by crows and lost his eyes.

At Nirveli is the Arsakesari Pillayar Kovil built by Arasakesari. Karunakara Tondaman, the general of Kulatanga Chola, built the temple known after him by the name of Karunakara Pillayar temple at Inuvil. Associated with Pararaja Sekhara VI, is the Vaikunta Natha Pillayar temple.

<sup>1</sup> For a full account of the legends of the temple and of its annual festival, see, Raghavan, M. D. : "*Spotia Zeylanica*," Vol. 27, Part I, Colombo Museum, 1953.

Of the temples to God Vishnu we have just a few. Well known are the Vishnu temples of Punnalai, Vallipuram and the Perumal Kovil at Vannarponnai. Of temples to Goddesses, we have the Veera Kali Amman Kovil at Nallur, the temple at which the Jaffna King Sankili made a vow in ratification of the agreement with Vidiya Bandara, the refugee Sinhalese prince, to fight the Portuguese.

Finally, we have the Nagapooshani Amman Kovil in the Island of Nagadipa, alternatively known as Nainativu, one of the string of islands on the North West seaboard of Jaffna. Among its legendary names are Mani Pallavam and Manithivu, names reminiscent of its connections with the story of Manimekala. The seat of one of the Naga kingdoms of proto-historic times, as narrated in the Sinhalese chronicle, the *Mahavamsa*, and in Tamil legends, Nagadipa is sacred to both the Buddhists and Hindus alike. Almost the only big shrine in Ceylon dedicated to the Naga, the Nagapooshani Amman Kovil draws crowds of worshippers and sight-seers during its annual ten-day festival in June to July. Held in great veneration by the Buddhists is the Buddha Vihara here, visited by hundreds of Buddhist pilgrims during the holy Vesak season.

The most obvious derivation of the name Nagadipa, is the one that relates it to the domains of the early Nagas and Naga Kings, authentic evidence of which we get from the Sinhalese chronicle of the *Mahavamsa*. Nevertheless the *Rasavahini*, a thirteenth century Pali work, highlights a story interwoven with a pilgrimage by sixty Buddhist monks to the sacred Buddhist dagoba in the island, the dagoba reputed to be built on the spot where was planted a Rajayatana tree (*Buchananlia latifolia*) brought over by God Samiddhi Sumana from India when he accompanied the Buddha on his second visit to Lanka. The monks, as was their want, walked about the village to beg their morning food. Naga, a poor woman on her way to fetch water, saw the monks and with all reverence enquired of them, whether they have had their food, and they replied : "This is still forenoon." At these words, Naga, so as to assure them of her good faith, left her water pot on the ground and rushed to her master and got an advance of sixty Kahapanams. At each

of the sixty houses of the village, she gathered food worth a Kahapanam each. With the food thus collected, she rushed back to the monks awaiting her. The monks impressed at her devotion invoked blessings on her. The tidings soon reached the king who sent for her and made a gift of the island to the kind-hearted woman, and thenceforth the island came to be known as Nagadeepa, the land of the woman, Naga. This sounds a fascinating story, nevertheless, not convincing, against the more reasonable and more credible derivation from the Naga as *Mahavamsa* has it.

Dedicated to Nagapooshani Amman, the guardian Goddess of Nagadeepa, influences all Jaffna. The childless pay homage to the Goddess. A cobra straying into a house, is trapped unhurt in an earthen pot and taken to the temple and left there after due propitiation. The faith of the folk is reflected in the names of the off-spring, Nagapooshani, Nagammal, Nageswari, Nagalingam, Nagarathnam.

Common to all castes today is God Vairavar. An aspect of God Siva; Vairavar is represented by the Trisula, the Trident, a symbol of Siva. The Trisula planted on the ground receives the adoration of all. Once propitiated with animal sacrifices, these animal sacrifices have been abandoned. As the God of Wisdom or Learning, we have the Gnana Vairavar by which name the God is propitiated at schools, as at the Jaffna Hindu College Campus.

Besides these High Gods of the Hindu Pantheon, a host of deities are worshipped by the lower castes, who are generally denied freedom of worship of Gods of caste Hindus. Different deities are worshipped at the different villages. The cult of Sri Krishna once prevailed among the Koviars and still survives. As the God of the Cowherds, the Gopalar, Krishna cult of the Koviars is meaningful. The Koviars have generally access to the temples of caste Hindus.

The Kammalar, the artisan caste, worship the Goddess Kali. The Parayar have a number of deities such as Valliappan and Karuppan. The Pandarams have the Muttumari Amman and Kathavarayar. The Nalavar have Kooddathar, as at the

Nalavar village of Pattikadavu. The Pallars have the cult of the Annamar represented by bronze images with long ear lobes. The Karaiyer worship Veerabhadrar. The Vannar (dhoby) have the Peria Thambiran, the great god, who is none but Siva.

It has been freely remarked that with freedom of worship at the temples of the High Gods denied to the low castes, they are practically compelled by force of circumstances to resort to the cult of the spirits for essential spiritual sustenance which all men need. With increased freedom of worship at Hindu temples, these folk cults may altogether disappear in the course of a few years. Meanwhile, the ceremonial cults of these spirits, open up an interesting field of study at the various villages of Jaffna.

In the context of the complexity of gods and cults, well may we recall these lines of the poet :

*So many gods, so many creeds  
So many paths that wind and wind  
While just the art of being kind  
Is all this sad world needs.*

### Religious and Social Festivals

Thai Pongal, the festival of the month of Thai, inaugurates the season of Jaffna religious and social festivals. The first of a series of four festivals of South India — the Bhogi Pandigai, Pongal, Mattu Pongal and Kannu Pongal, the last two called after the cows and calves in Jaffna it is a two-fold festival, the Thai Pongal and the Paddi Pongal. The latter corresponds to the Mattu Pongal of South India.

Thai Pongal in Jaffna is essentially a harvest festival. The newly-harvested paddy is brought home and on the day of the festival, Pongal or rice porridge cooked in coconut milk and jaggery, is offered to the Sun-God. The household is up before sun rise and everything is made ready to cook the pongal in a new pot decorated with a design of the rising sun. The pot of rice with the flavouring and sweetening ingredients, is set to boil. The sight is rather exhilarating, of the children and the young crowded round the pot watching the boiling mass. As the sun peeps over the eastern horizon, the Pongal is ready

cooked and children ring out in excited tones, 'Pongalō Pongal.' The pot is now taken out of the fire, and its contents emptied over a large plantain leaf, spread on the floor. The Pongal is first ceremoniously offered to the Sun-God with a coconut split into two halves. After this, every one has a good feed of the tasty Pongal. A season of gaiety and friendliness as of spirituality, vows are made or fulfilled at the temples.

Another national day of all round rejoicings, is the Hindu New Year Day. The day is the same as the Sinhalese or the Malayalam New Year. The correspondence is one that extends to customs of observance. A forecast is made of the prognostics of the year. All those spiritually inclined resort to the nearest temples for worship. Returning home every one sits for the first meal of the day, a meal of Milk-rice (*Kiribath* of the Sinhalese) special to the New Year. Home made cakes as *Kolukattai* and fruits come last in the menu. Presents in money are made by the master of the house to all, the custom of *Kaivishasam*. For the cultivator, it is the day of first ploughing, the *Arpudu*, and to all a day of rejoicing, for friendly calls and social visits.

The first of the month of Adi (July-August) is the *Adi Pirappu*, the Birth of *Adi*. The songs sung on the day recall to memory the author of the songs, *Sri Soma Sundara Pulavar*. A patriarchal personality, as I happened to see him at his quiet rural residence some three decades ago, he strongly reminded me of *Rabindranath Tagore* with his luxuriant white beard.

The *Amavasi* Day of the month, the *Adi Amavasi*, is the day of offerings to the spirits of the deceased. The ceremonies are conducted by the seaside at *Keerimalai* in the sacred precincts of the *Mavittapuram Temple*.

Sacred to the initiation of the children into letters, is the *Vidyarambha*, the *Saraswati Puja* Day in September to October.

## 2. CHRISTIANITY

As a religion introduced by the Europeans, Christianity is correlated to the several European eras of the history of Jaffna, the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British. Roman Catholicism

and Protestantism are the legacy respectively of the Portuguese and Dutch epochs, Protestantism of the Dutch times being known by the distinctive name of the Dutch Reformed Church.

Incidental to the political events of the Portuguese and the Dutch eras, we have already had an insight into the introduction and progress of Christianity in Jaffna. The Portuguese getting the first tenancy of Jaffna, built their religion on the solid foundations of the people's faith, a foundation which withstood all attempts at subversion by the Dutch.

Catholicism in Jaffna began, as we have seen, with the conversion of the peoples of the island of Mannar, synchronous with the spread of Roman Catholicism on the Coromandel Coast of South India under the evangelisation zeal of *St. Francis Xavier* in 1542. The subsequent progress of Catholicism in Jaffna is fully revealed in the short survey of the history of Roman Catholicism in Ceylon by the *Rev. Fr. David*, Principal, *St. Patrick's College, Jaffna*, appended.

The policy as pursued by the Dutch served the dual role of propagating their religion, as of counteracting the hold of Roman Catholicism over the peoples, calculated to strengthen their political hold over the new land. To this end, was designed the drastic *Batavian Code* of 1642. Nevertheless its implementation over Jaffna was watered down by several factors among which was the disharmony and conflicts between the clergy on the one hand, and the political expediency of the State on the other, a policy which discountenanced any large measure of authority or independence by the clergy. The result was that the methods pursued by the Dutch largely failed, whether in the direction of spreading the new faith or of counteracting the influence of Roman Catholicism already established in the land.

The clergy wisely viewed the schools as essential instruments in the spreading of the new faith. Over the management of the schools and the control of the staff and other matters of details, differences arose between the Church and the State. How ultimately these differences took a serious turn and how the more efficient and experienced of the ministers, including



Baldaeus himself, altogether left the service of the Company, need not deter us in the present context. This had its reaction on the clergy who, steadily degenerated, a degeneration voiced in these words of the Governor General in Council regarding the life of the ministers, "who live in great style, keeping beautiful palanquins and horses, a suite of 16 or 20 soldiers and who did not hesitate to pose as lords in the villages." In the last analysis, as Tennent<sup>1</sup> sums up, the records of the Dutch Government and the contemporary historians, leave us in no room to doubt that the Dutch policy failed to bear fruit and that the converts were merely Christians in name.

So far as Baldaeus is concerned, he discovered the wisdom of the integration of education with religious propagation, which he accomplished with such great effect that it paid rich dividends in the British colonial era that followed the Dutch. The Church and the schools formed a well-knit unit. Baldaeus realised the wisdom of catching them young and begin with the children. The account<sup>2</sup> he gives of the spread of Christianity through schools is illuminating. At Mallagam (Mallakam) there were 400 school boys. Myliddy has "a very respectable school comprising 750 children far advanced in knowledge." The school at Atchuveli "consists of 4 to 500 scholars." At Uduvil (Oudewil) "the pupils amount to 600, pretty well advanced in learning." "Two hours walk from the Fort is situated the church, Battecotte . . . The peoples are very eager to hear God's words and number 2,000. The pupils here vary from 8 to 900."

Battecotte indeed made history in Jaffna education as in conversion under the aegis of the American missionaries who followed the Dutch in the British colonial days. Founded by the American missionaries in 1823, Battecotte seminary loomed the largest both in relation to propagation of Christianity as in higher education. In the course of his *History of the Jaffna College*, J. V. Chelliah (1922), narrates that "the Battecotte Seminary founded by the American missionaries is the second

centre of Western education founded by the American missionaries, the first being the one at Serampore in Calcutta. Among the contributors are mentioned Rev. Dr. Carey and Marshman, the founders of Serampore College with a contribution of Rs. 200, and Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Rs. 25. Rev. H. R. Hosington, who translated the three leading Tamil treatises on Saiva Siddhanta philosophy, Sivagnana Bodha, Sivapragasam and Tattwa Kattalai, was one of the principals of the Seminary." Tennent is the earliest authority to give us a deep insight into the working of the Battecotte Seminary: "The examination which took place in our presence was on History, Mathematics, Philosophy, Optics, Astronomy and Algebra. The knowledge exhibited by the pupils was astonishing and it is no exaggeration to say that in the extent of the course of the instruction, and in the success of the system of communicating it the Collegiate Institution of Battecotte is entitled to rank with many an European University."

Tennent indeed reveals to us one of the sensitive methods of their propaganda: "Both at Battecotte and Oodooville, it is a part of the system to apply the annual contribution of some friend of the Mission, if it amounted to a stipulated sum to the exclusive education of one individual who on admission assumes in addition to his own name, that of the distant benefactor to whom he is indebted for his presentation. Thus at Oodooville, the Tamil girls each bear the Christian and surname of an American lady, and at Battecotte, one of the native students was presented by a name somewhat familiar to mine, as Mr. William Tennent." The practice no doubt largely prevailed in later years, as an echo of which are these words of Grenier: "The Missionaries at Battecotte Seminary in the hope I dare say of making converts gave the names of some of their own famous persons to students. The combination sounded very ludicrous in some cases, but nobody suffered or was aggrieved." Far from suffering or being aggrieved, we may take it, this was accepted with evident relish.

The problem had been handled with all the thoroughness that the situation demanded. The one man who more than another did most to counteract the evils of missionary domination and usher in a new era in the life of Jaffna was Sri la Sri

<sup>1</sup> Tennent, E.: *Christianity in Ceylon*, London, 1850, p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> Baldaeus, Philip: *A True and Exact Description of the Great Island of Ceylon*, 167. C. H. J., Vol. VIII, 1-4 pp. 318 - 326.



Arumuga Navalar,<sup>1</sup> preceded by a select few who set the stage and paved the way to the dynamism that Navalar brought to bear on the problems. For more than thirty years he campaigned vigorously and unceasingly towards establishing a system of education in harmony with the traditional and cultural background of the child. The movement which he set afoot spread all through Jaffna and beyond and reached its summit following his demise in 1879. More than to any other person in the social and religious life of Jaffna, the country owes a deep debt of gratitude to Sri la Sri Arumuga Navalar for restoring Jaffna to the glories of its heritage as the stronghold of Saivism.

Missionary propaganda stirred up strong feelings as an example of which are these words of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan in the course of a debate in the Legislative Council in 1884: "Hindu boys who for want of their own English schools resort to the Missionary schools, have learnt to make mental reservations and are getting skilled in the art of dodging. The holy ashes put on at home during worship, are carefully rubbed off as they approach the Christian school and they affect the methods of Christian boys while at school. I know of many cases in which even baptized boys and teachers, when they cease to be connected with such schools, appear in their true colours with broad stripes of consecrated ashes and rosaries to the great merriment of the people and the deep chagrin of the missionaries. The love of the missionaries for proselytes is as boundless as the love of Jaffanese boys to obtain some knowledge of English at any cost." These strong words of Ramanathan were an expression of the reaction of the nation against the evils of missionary propaganda.

### 3. A SHORT SURVEY OF ROMAN CATHOLICISM IN CEYLON

It would be a wrong reading of history to associate the advent of Christianity too closely with the bombardment of Ceylonese towns by the Portuguese conquistadores. A Persian cross has been found in the ancient ruins of the old capital of

<sup>1</sup> Sivapathasunderam, S.: Arumuga Navalar, 1950.

Ceylon, Anuradhapura, in strata that would date it to the sixth century A.D. St. Thomas, the Apostle, evangelised South India and died a martyr very near Madras, since known as the St. Thomas Mount. The Syrian Christians of South West India claim to have kept the faith from the third century if not from the Thomian times. And it stands to reason that if Islam could have spread to Malaya, Ceylon and China within six centuries of Muhammad's Hijra from Mecca to Medinat-al-Nabi, the main stem of Christianity, Catholicism would have justified its name by sending its missionaries to spread the faith to Ceylon as early as the sixth century A.D. Unfortunately the Ceylonese and European chronicles, have bypassed and ignored these early achievements.

The Crusades in the strict sense, were over with the last invasion of the Arab lands by Louis IX of France in the 13th century, but in the broad sense, they continued, even after the Protestant revolt of the 16th century. It was in a crusading spirit that Pope St. Pius V, sent a Catholic fleet under Dom John of Austria to crush the overweening pride of the Turkish naval commanders in the historic battle of Lepanto in October, 1571. Francisco Pizarro led his crusaders, shouting religious slogans along with the war cry of "Castillay Talascale" (Castile and Talascale) against the fierce Aztec overlords of Mexico, in the same century. At about the same time the blood brothers of these Castilians, the Portuguese, sprung from the same Celt-iberian stock, were launching their own crusades against the rulers of Nallur and Kotte, of Sitawaka and Kanda-uda-pasrata. Franciscans and Dominicans, Jesuits and others followed in their wake, ever since John III became king of Portugal in 1521, but it was in 1543 that the first serious attempt at conversion began with the arrival at Kotte of six Franciscan friars. From that stage Catholicism spread rapidly among the inhabitants of the Maritime provinces. It is doubtful whether the great apostle of the East, St. Francis Xavier, visited Mannar during his ten years' (1543 - 1552) missionary tours of South East Asia and the Far East; but he sent a Jesuit priest of the same name, to kindle the flame of the Faith in the North of Ceylon. King Chekarasa Sekaran of Jaffna, more commonly known by the name of Sankili, has the dubious prestige of becoming the local Nero by



his massacre of 600 Catholic converts at Thoddaveli, five miles North West of Mannar<sup>1</sup> alluded to earlier. The Portuguese avenged this between 1585 and 1605, according to A. B. de Sousa, De Queyroz and others. In the next half century the Maritime Provinces, including the North and East, had become at least in name predominantly Catholic.

When the Dutch in 1656 - 58, took over the Maritime Provinces of Ceylon, they considered the native Catholics here as the secret allies of their Portuguese rivals, whom they had taken such trouble to drive out of Ceylon. Hence political antagonism was added to that religious hatred that Calvinists had just exhibited to the Catholics in the European Thirty Years' War (1618 - 1648). The Catholic churches, which studded the coastal districts, especially in the Jaffna Peninsula, were immediately transformed into centres of Protestant worship. According to Baldaeus, these churches were located at such places as Chankanai and Tellipalai. During British times, many of these churches were abandoned including the two just mentioned, as the Calvinist congregations reverted to Hinduism. Now they are historical monuments. Catholicism too might have become a historical memory, if not for the indefatigable and strenuous labours of the Oratarian secular priests from Goa, Joseph Vaze, Gonsalves and their ilk. These zealous missionaries fixed their headquarters in Kandy, which remained independent of the Dutch and thence toured, and kept the integrity of the faith in the Maritime Provinces.

<sup>1</sup> Fr. Antoninus : "The Martyrs of Mannar."

## The Jaffna Peasant and Methods of Cultivation

**M**ORE than in the rest of Ceylon perhaps, the Jaffna peasant indeed earns his bread by the sweat of his brow. In his efforts to make the arid land respond to his unremitting toil, he has devised ways and methods of his own which he has perfected over the ages.

How the soil of Jaffna responds to the toil of the peasant will be evident on a tour of the villages. Among the sights that greet you are the extensive plantations of plantains. Jaffna plantains flood the Colombo market. Its extensive market gardens of vegetables yield a variety of vegetables. Flower gardens too do well when properly handled. My first view of the rose gardens of Jaffna airport is indeed a rosy memory.

All this and more gives the lie to the overdrawn picture of aridity of Jaffna that writers indulge in. Its sandy sub-soil over a coral lime stone foundation conserves every drop of rain that falls, giving it the quality of an amphibious storage of water. As elsewhere in Ceylon, paddy-fields are intersected into con-



venient plots each separated by a raised bund. Of the two seasons, the North-East Monsoon is more pronounced in the Northern Peninsula than the South-West Monsoon. With little or no irrigation by tanks, all water for irrigating the fields or plantations is from wells dug all over Jaffna. Water is drawn by the mechanical device of water-lift, fitted with a capacious leather or palmyrah bucket, the well sweep, let down into the well and drawn by hand. In large plantations, the water is drawn by a pair of bullocks running down an inclined plane. The man who works it sits on the two ropes, one fitted to the top of the well sweep, the *toppai*, and the other to the loose end. As the bucket reaches the uppermost part of the well, the rope which keeps the tail-end of the receptacle folded up, is released and the water is directed into a channel along which it flows into the plots of plantations. Tennent's<sup>1</sup> summing up of the field cultivation of Jaffna rings a true picture, as realistic today as when he wrote:

"The articles raised are of infinite variety. Every field is carefully fenced with pailing formed of the end ribs of the palmyrah leaf or rows of prickly plants, aloe, cactus, euphorbia and others; and each is divided into small beds, each containing a different crop; but the most frequent and valuable crops are the ingredients for the preparation of curry such as onions and chillies, which are exported to all parts of the East and carried in large quantities into the interior. Along with these are turmeric, ginger, pumpkins, brinjals, gourds, melons, yams, sweet potatoes, keera (or country cabbage), arrowroot and gram. In these carefully tended little farms, weeds are nowhere to be seen; the walls between the different beds are straight and accurately clean; and from the profusion of water with which they are supplied, there is a freshness and cool verdure over these beautiful fields which singularly contrast with the arid and sun-scorched plains that surround them."

Rotation of crops has to a considerable extent been practised in Jaffna peninsula.<sup>2</sup> In the South-West Monsoon season when

<sup>1</sup> Tennent, E.: Ceylon: Vol. II, p. 538.

<sup>2</sup> Paul, W. R. C.: Paddy Cultivation, Colombo 1945.

water is inadequate for paddy, rotation crops are raised of tobacco, chillies, greengram, gingelly, vegetables and the sun-hemp, cultivated by water raised from wells. The rotation of crops vary in different regions. In the Veligamam division, paddy is followed by tobacco, vegetables and kurakkan (ragi). In the Vadamarachy division, paddy is followed by melons. In the Islands' division of Jaffna district, paddy followed by onions, is favoured.

Methods of sowing vary with the place. Dry-land sowing is the method in Jaffna, where rainfall is not adequate for puddling the soil. About two to three bushels of seed are used per acre. The seed is sown broadcast on dry seed-bed prior to the rains, without germination and covered by a layer of soil by the mamoty. The seed remains dormant until the rainfall. Lying exposed, a certain extent of loss is inevitable, expressed in the Tamil verse:

Remember well,

*Of every four,*

*One's for the crab*

*One's for the bird*

*One to die, and*

*One to grow.*

To counter the loss of exposure, seeds are best sown, drilled at an uniform depth by the use of the seed-driller. It is a process but seldom worked, as it is slow and expensive.

The unit of cultivable area in the North is the lecham, twenty-four lechams approximating to one acre.

The paddy fly (Vandu) and the paddy stem-borer (Nel Payer Poochi) are the major pests of paddy.

The Kālapokam with its 129,000 acres under cultivation yields a bumper harvest. The Sirupokam yields but little. The relative humidity and the average temperature compare favourably with the other Dry Zone regions. Its 40 inches of rainfall matches well with the 40-30 of the North Central Province.



April in Jaffna takes us nearer to the early monsoon showers. This brings some relief to the hot spell of the preceding months. The paddy has just been harvested and the fields present a smile of green, with plants coming up of gingelly, green gram, the sun-hemp and onion seedlings. The Jaffna farmer gets busy ploughing the fields working for the next paddy season. The plantain industry suffers in the wake of unforeseen cyclones and floods as happened in 1952 and 1957. Rehabilitation measures stabilises the industry in quick time and the Co-operative Plantain Society copes with large demands of the Marketing Department of the Ceylon Government and the needs of all Ceylon.

At the onset of the rains, the toddy season is at its highest, and with visitors coming from down South, prices rise. Owners of coconut trees indeed find it more paying to lease the trees for tapping, than to let the palm yield fruit. This raises the price of the coconut in the market.

Jaffna mangoes are popular in the Colombo market. This perhaps accounts for the name of the luscious variety of Jaffna mangoes, the "Kolumban." Early rains damage mango production. Unseasonal rains damage the quality of the tobacco leaf and the tobacco harvest suffers. Early rains, beneficial to the coconut and palmyrah, are not favourable to the tobacco crop.

The Share system of tenure — the Paramakuttu — prevails in Jaffna, corresponding to the Ande system of the Sinhalese. The fields are leased out for one or more seasons — generally on a half share basis. The harvest is divided at the threshing floor, after deductions for such items as seed paddy, buffaloes, etc. provided by the landowner. The uncertainty of tenure that this implies, is prejudicial to the productivity of the land and the actual cultivator gets only a half share of the crop, the other half goes to the sleeping partner, the landowner.

This short account of the Jaffna peasantry, I may close with a reference to the Weekly Fair, a colourful cross-section of the produce of the Jaffna fields — an assortment of vegetables and fruits, onions and chillies, turmeric and ginger, and other requirements of the householder — all well laid out and spread over

the grounds, with the Vendor sitting at ease, the head shielded from the scorching rays of the sun, by the four-cornered leaf cap she wears. The animated business in buying and selling that these fairs present, recall colourful scenes at the weekly fairs in the rest of Ceylon.<sup>1</sup>

THE industries and crafts of Jaffna reflect the traditional arts of the people and their cultural heritage influenced by the land in which they live, so different from the rest of the island. Adapted to the dry climate and the scanty rainfall, the cultivation of the tobacco, a money-spinner in Jaffna, is famed for its standard quality, tobacco-growing and the processes connected with it are next to paddy, among the more prominent of the rural economies. The annual exports are estimated at 1.8 million pounds, bringing in an annual revenue of Rs. 2 to 3 millions.

Both in the simple life of the village as in the sophisticated the humble palmyrah and its products, take a high place in the life of the Jaffna man, figuratively spoken of "as hardy as the indigenous palmyrah." Its timber has always been highly prized for its durability and many are its economic products — the refreshing toddy, and the jaggery made of it and a coarse variety of sugar candy of medicinal value, the Kollamman, a variety of a wide range of uses etc. At the weekly fair, a four-cornered leaf cap which shields the head from the sun well.

<sup>1</sup> Raghavan, M. D.: 'The Weekly Fair' in "Ceylon, a Pictorial Survey of the Peoples and Arts," M. D. Gunasena & Sons, Colombo, 1963.



## Industries and Handicrafts

THE industries and crafts of Jaffna reflect the traditional arts of the people and their cultural heritage influenced by the land in which they live, so different from the rest of the island. Adapted to the dry climate and the scanty rainfall, is the cultivation of the tobacco, a money-spinner in Jaffna. Valued for its standard quality, tobacco-growing and the processes connected with it, are next to paddy, among the more pronounced of the rural economics. The annual exports are estimated at 1.8 million pounds, bringing in an annual revenue of Rs. 2 to 3 millions.

Both in the simple life of the villager as in his economics, the humble palmyrah and its products, take a high place in the life of the Jaffna man, figuratively spoken of "as hardy as the indigenous palmyrah." Its timber has always been highly priced for its durability and many are its economic products — the refreshing toddy, and the jaggery made of it and a coarse variety of sugar candy, of medicinal value, the *Kallakaram*; mats and baskets of a wide range, fans, etc. At the weekly Jaffna fairs, women vendors protect their heads from the hot sun by wearing a four-cornered palmyrah leaf cap, which indeed suits them well.

A remarkable product is the large-sized palmyrah leaf-basket, attached to the well-sweep, for drawing water, the bucket woven so tight that no water escapes through it.

The name Parutti Turai, Cotton port, the old name of Point Pedro, projects a picture of flourishing cotton growing and of the weaving industry.

Among handicrafts and rural industries, weaving is one of the most leading and ancestral. Poetical compositions have likened the cloth manufactured in the early days of the Naga kings to the "sloughs of serpents," "woven wind" and to the "vapour of milk" — of such fine textile that the eye could not make out its warp and woof.

Jaffna owes a good deal to the Dutch for the stimulation of the weaving industry. Cotton continued to be cultivated on a large scale in Mannar, during the early days of the British. The Dutch drew up a scheme in consultation with experts for the development of the cotton industry, and weaving made much headway at Mannar and other centres. A colony of Andhra Weavers, the Chenia Chettis, was brought down by the Dutch from South India and established in Jaffna town. They are today among the leading weavers of Jaffna, producing textiles of superfine quality, weaving colourful and elegant sarees and blouse pieces, among the finest products I have seen.

Distinctive of Jaffna are the community called by the uncharitable name Pariahs, who are really weavers of very serviceable cloth in their hand-looms in their own humble cottages. A total of about 500 hand-looms are estimated in Jaffna today. The cloth is of good quality, both rough and fine.

Neither in their person nor in their pursuit of hand-loom weaving is there anything unclean generally associated with the name Pariah — a word which I may incidentally mention, is freely bantered about at drunken brawls in low Colombo society.

Companion to the weaving industry is the art of dyeing. Dye root, *Chaya Ver* has been among the products of Jaffna, and the root-diggers formed a sound unit of their own. Plants grow wild as they do in Mannar. According to Ananda



Coomaraswamy, "the old Kandyan flags were of Tamil workmanship, as dye painting seems never to have become a Sinhalese craft," (Coomaraswamy, Ananda: Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon, 1907).

The art in dyeing stimulated the art in block-printing, the art of hand-printing by specialised technical processes. Designs are printed on a variety of textiles and curtain cloths, sarees and *vetties*.

A seasonal industry all through Jaffna history, has been the Pearl Fishery — the pearl which has been a "dollar-earner" from ancient ages, the pearl which lured foreign traders, the Greeks, the Romans and the Arabs to Jaffna shores. The Dutch turned the pearl fishery to good account, selling by public auction, the right to conduct the operations, a method followed by their successors, the English.

A minor line is the industry in Chanks. In Dutch times, an active business was the sale of elephants from the jungles of the Wannu, and the business in horses from the stud farm maintained on the island of Deft (Neduntivu).

Jaffna goldsmiths have had a reputation for fine and delicate jewellery, and specialised in filigree technique, and the embossed type of decorative bangles. In the past their art was obviously at its highest as we may judge from the compliment, Tennent pays in the words: "The goldsmiths are ingenious and excellent workmen, and produce bangles, chains and rings whose execution is as fine as their designs are tasteful."

An industry started by the Government Industries Department, is the rearing of Silk Worms and the production of silk yarn. The industry has wide scope, though it does not seem to have witnessed much of an expansion.

A highly technical art is the indigenous art of metal casting.

The technique is the same as that in South India. South Indian artisans have been migrating over contiguous lands, and Ceylon has had a good share of the immigrant artisans from

India. The art of the sculpture in stone, was a stimulus to the art of metal casting with the specialised process, evolving the right alloy of different metals and right proportions. That the Tamil Sathāpatis of Jaffna and Batticaloa have had a long ancestry is revealed, in the large number of articles they turn out, sacred images and domestic and ornamental wares, finials for dagobas, lamps, trays and fruit vases, and standing brasslamps, of the Dipalakshmi motif, woman with the palms enclosed, forming an enclosure for the oil and the wick. (Tennent, Emerson: Ceylon, Vol. 2, 1859, p. 542).

Two unique examples of the bronze art of the Ceylonese are the large bronze of Goddess Tara standing almost life size, 5 feet 2 inches high, and the unique image of the Buddha from Badulla, cast hollow.

Iron smelting was yet another line, indications of which are the remains found, of iron smelting forges. Stories of the iron fort at Mantai, reported by travellers, lend colour to the industry in iron. Scissors were not unknown.

We may take a glance at the village industry of pottery. Potsherds found strewn about ancient sites, testify to the ancient art of pottery. Among the potters' villages of today, I may mention the village of Changanai, where pottery is very actively produced.

#### Bronzes of Hindu Gods

In recent years, data has been accumulating, of bronze figures of Gods in different parts of Ceylon. Ceylonese chronicles of images of Gods of Hinduism, go back to remote ages. The earliest obviously, is the tradition of the arrival in North Ceylon, of an image of Kankesan (God Muruga), sent by the Chola King to princess Marutapiravikavalli, for installation at the Mavittapuram temple erected as a thanks-offering in grateful remembrance, of the miraculous cure of her deformity, on bathing in the sacred springs of Keerimalai, an account of which has already been given. The port at which the image landed is perpetuated in the name it has since borne, Kankesanturai.



Of later historical age, are the large series of bronzes recovered from the sites of the Siva devalas of Polonnaruwa, one of the ancient capitals of Ceylon. Siva as Nataraja, Siva as Sandhya Vandana Murthi, Parvati, and a series of bronzes of Saivaite Saints, Manickavasagar, Tirugnana Sambandhar, Sundara Murthi and Chandikeswara, and Surya, are some of the more noteworthy in this series of Bronzes. Ananda Coomaraswamy has expressed his opinion that "some of the images of Saiva saints, especially Sundara Murthi and Manickavasagar, are superior to any South Indian examples, and that all these figures are in Dravidian style." These bronzes were recovered during excavations carried out by the Archaeological Commissioner in the years 1907 and 1908. All these are an exhibition at the Colombo National Museum.

After a long spell of over five decades, further explorations were carried out by the Archaeological Commissioner at the site of Siva Devala No. 5, in 1960. The excavations yielded a further series of images. Conspicuous are bronzes of Nataraja, Siva as Somaskanda Murthi, an image of Ganesa "of exceptional beauty," figures of Vishnu, Chandikeswara, Skanda, and an image of Karaikkal Ammaiyar, "the gem of the whole collection," in the words of Sir Kanthiah Vaithianathan.

The bronze and other objects of metallic art discovered in the excavations of 1960, were presented before a meeting of the Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch. Dr. S. Paramasivam who presided at the meeting, commented on their artistic value and expressed the opinion that "some of these bronzes have peculiar iconographic characteristics, certain Ceylonese traits, but in the main, all these images follow South Indian traditions and are representative of South Indian Art."

All these bronzes are historically co-related to the period of the occupation of Northern Ceylon by the Cholas, from 1017 to 1070 A.D.

A discovery of significance, was the find of three Saivite bronzes at the ancient site of Koneswar Temple at Trincomalee in the Eastern Province. Siva as Chandrasekhara, Siva as

Somaskanda, and Parvati are the three images discovered. Yet another Chola bronze, is the one in the Kailasanatha Temple at Colombo.

All these testify to the high skill attained by the Tamil artisans in the art of bronze casting. There are strong grounds to support the assumption that these bronzes, most of them, were cast in Ceylon, by Tamil *Stapathis*.

Craftsmen were a major unit among the hosts of colonists from South India to Ceylon. In the retinue of the Pandyan Princess sent by the Pandyan King to be the queen of Prince Vijaya, came craftsmen and a thousand families of the eighteen guilds sent to Ceylon, entrusted with a letter to Conqueror Vijaya (*Mahavamsa*, Ch. VII, 57-58). Later, the colonists that accompanied the Sacred Bo-sapling, included "persons from all the handicrafts" (*Mahavamsa*, XIX, 1-4). To these may be added, the artisan castes among the colonists, featured in the poem *Vaiya Padal* — the Kollar, Tachar, and Kannar from South India.

As a heritage, presumably, of these early colonists we find today in the different parts of Ceylon, families of workers in metallic industries. The more conspicuous of these in the Tamil provinces are in Jaffna, in the Eastern Province Vavuniya and Mutwal, a suburb of Colombo.



## FINE ARTS :

## The Dance and the Nadagam

**W**E live in an age of dances. Here in Ceylon, we have ball-room dancing on one side, and the Kandyan dance on the other. The one is a product of the Western civilization and the other a heritage of the traditional past. Whichever way we look at it, the dance is with us. Ball-room dancing, though it claims the largest attention in society today, was the last to come. All countries have their folk dances, and in fact all have to this day. Some of these are so important that they are classed as National Dances. The Scots have the High-land Fling, a dance which goes to the days of the Kelts. The folk dances of the English are things very much treasured, and shown at special folk dance festivals. All countries have had their National Dances, before men and women gravitated to the dance floor of the Ball-room.

The Puritans of mediaeval England banned the dancing of the dance hall. In decadent Rome, Cicero declaimed, "No sane man danced unless he were smitten with temporary madness," and Plato declared that persons guilty of unseemly

dancing should be banished from his ideal Commonwealth. One cannot make such charges against folk or country dances. It is therefore not surprising, that in the story of the dance, we have saints and dignitaries of the church laying down the law on dancing and have left authoritative books on the subject. Maharshi Bharata is the author of Natya Sastra, and the dance modes which he expounded is now the leading school of South Indian dances, the Bharata Natya. Bharata ordains that "the dancer should with the throat sing, with the feet express the tala, and with the hands convey the meaning, agile in steps, hands dexterous and eyes, expressive." A book of etiquette for dancers of a particular type of folk dance of France, was written by a monk. The truth is that dancing has been an accessory to religion in all lands. We today owe a great debt to religion for the growth of the art of dancing. In the right spirit of this heritage, may be interpreted the strong plea for the encouragement of folk arts like the Puppet Play and the Shadow Play at social and domestic events, voiced by the Agama, Silpa and Vyasa Bharata Sadas held in Madras under the holy auspices of the Kanchi Kama Koti Pitam from the 19th to 26th September, 1964.

Ritual dances date back to several centuries. "Whosoever knoweth the power of the dance, dwelleth in God," cried the Persian poet, Rumi. Let us acknowledge the great part religion has played in the development of the dance art. Here let me pay a tribute to the Devadasis consecrated to the temples of South India. Until recent times, dancing as an art solely rested with them. Whatever be their virtues or faults, they were true to the great heritage of the art, until society was sufficiently advanced and enlightened to take over the dance art from the devadasis who were the repositories of the South Indian dance art for ages. Demonology, or the cult of the spirits may not be very ennobling but there is no doubt of the great contribution spirit worship has made to the folk arts of the Sinhalese in the field of the dance. The dance was the *modus operandi* for spirit possession, and the dance of the Kapuva is rhythmic, keeping time to the sounding of the ritual drum, the irreplaceable udekki. The Devala dance art of the Middle Ages of Ceylon was evidently much the same as the South Indian devadasi art.



Accompanying Gods in procession, the dancing appealed more to the soul than to the senses. It was more spiritual and sacred than sensual though no sharp distinction could be drawn between the two aspects. The dancing followed the art and technique of Bharata Natya.

Of the place of dancing in the social life of the past ages, we have glimpses in the literature of the times.<sup>1</sup> Dancing delighted the common man as the higher society :

“ The tinkling of the delicate and artistic golden girdles  
Like unto the sound of the breakers on the sandy shore.”

Contemporary evidence of the sacred dance as an institution in the Hindu temples of Jaffna about 5 decades ago, came to hand in the course of an interview with Mr. S. W. Rajaratnam. Reminiscences of this well-informed and knowledgeable person, 87 years of age, covered several aspects of the social landscape of Jaffna which has passed out of view.

So far as the role of the devadasis in the religious life of the land is concerned, it was only to be expected that the art of Bharata Natyam should have reposed with them in Jaffna as it did in Tamilnad of South India.

The three principal temples of Jaffna, the Sivan Kovil of Vannarponnai, the Nallur Kandaswami temple, and the Mavittapuram temple each maintained its own personnel of dancing girls. Dedicated to the temple, they lived in the temple premises. The dancing was done in the temple precincts only and not outside it. At the temple festivals the devadasis headed the procession of the Gods all the days of the festival. The numerous other Hindu temples of Jaffna which did not maintain their own staff of devadasis, engaged professional dancing girls for the days of the festival. One of the more conspicuous of the dancers of the day, who almost monopolised dancing assignments at the other temples, still lives as Mr. Rajaratnam says.

<sup>1</sup> Rasanayagam, C. : Ancient Jaffna, p. 174.

This contemporary evidence of the sacred dance in Jaffna is valuable, as we have no literature in Jaffna narrating the art, as the *Sandesa Kavyas* of the Sinhalese. It is freely said that even in the past two decades, the dances by devadasis prevailed at a number of temples, as at the Muthumari Amman temple at Arali, and the Nallur and Mavittapuram temples, the two latter evidently survivals from earlier years. It is also reported that some of the smaller temples too engaged dancing girls at the temples. The dancing was commonly expressed by the term Chinna Mēlam — suggestive evidently of the soft drumming that accompanied the dances.

The Nadagam, the art of the drama, has been so much a feature of Tamil culture, that there has been a distinct category of the Tamil language, the Nadagattamil, as Casie Chitty tells us. Speaking of the Sinhalese Nadagamas, Sarathchandra<sup>1</sup> observes : “ The earliest Nadagamas, we may infer from the evidence of the texts themselves, as well as from the existence of prototypes in the Tamil language, were translated into Sinhalese from Tamil originals. The Tamil prototype of the *Sihakki Nadagama*, is the Roman Catholic play known as *Sihakkiar*, which is said to have been acted before Christian audiences in Jaffna some years ago. The Tamil origin of Ehalapola is Kandy Raja Nadagam which is still popular in the villages near Batticaloa. One cannot say to what extent Philippu Sinnho's works are a literal translation from the Tamil Nadagamas. His language shows a considerable amount of Tamil influence.”

Of the music of the Sinhalese Nadagamas, Sarathchandra makes these illuminating remarks : “ The Nadagama is a lyrical play consisting largely of verses and songs. The verses are in Tamil metres, and they are chanted without measured time. A large number of metres are used, the commonest among them being the Viriduwa (Tamil Viruttam).”

The Nadagam is not localised in the Jaffna Peninsula. Wherever Tamil culture is dominant, as in the Eastern Province and down the Western maritime regions, from Puttalam to

<sup>1</sup> Sarathchandra, E. R. : The Sinhalese Folk Play and the Stage, Colombo, 1953. pp. 89 and 90.

Tangalla, the Nadagama excelled as a social and socio-religious entertainment. The Nadagam arose out of the cultural influences of the original Tamil compositions. The Portuguese made capital of the indigenous dramatic element and used the stage to further the propagation of their faith. Baldaeus,<sup>1</sup> the Dutch minister and historian, testifies to the activity in these words: "Most of the churches here have certain scaffolds or theatres near them, especially that of Telipola (Telipalli) where the Jesuits used to represent certain histories of the Bible to the people on holidays."

Among the popular dramas staged by the Tamils were *Harischandra Nadagam*, *Vedi Arasan Nadagam* and *Gnana-sundari*, the last staged by the Mukkuvars of Kalpitiya on festival occasions. Popular in Jaffna of a generation ago was the *Terukkuttu*, literally the Street Play, traditionally staged in the open street corners and junctions. Even in the Madras City streets it used to be played, as it was my privilege to see it once in my part of Madras, a few years ago. Themes from Ramayana are dramatised at these street plays.

Sarathchandra in the course of his pioneer studies in the field of dramatics sums up the evolution of the Sinhalese Nadagama in these lines:

"The Sinhalese Nadagama is wholly derived from a variety of South Indian folk play known as *Terukkuttu* in the Tamilnad and as *Vithi Nataka* in Andhra. The *Terukkuttu* was in vogue at one time in Jaffna, but has now disappeared almost entirely from the North. It is now preserved in the Eastern Province and mainly in Batticaloa and the neighbouring villages. This *Nattukkuttu* is performed in a circular *manṭapa* having a conical roof. The floor is raised from the level of the ground by means of earth or sand. The audience sits on the bare ground outside the *manṭapa* round the greater part of its circumference. The remaining segment of the circle would be separated by a curtain which is held in place by two people, as each actor enters the *manṭapa* from behind. The actor remains standing behind this

curtain while he is being introduced to the audience by the Presenter, after which the curtain is removed and the actor enters into full view of the audience. All the actors adopt this mode of entry. They come in dancing as they are introduced and move in a circle inside the *manṭapa*. Sometimes they move round about half the circumference and dance up towards the audience from the rear. The Presenter stands with the singers and musicians playing drums and *kaitalam*, close to the entrance and often in the centre of the *manṭapa*.

"The only stock figures are the *Konangi* and *Kattiyakaram* or King's Herald. Costumes are of the kind known as *Vil Uduppu*, costumes of bulging skirts stitched round large bamboo rings and hung from the actor's waist, stockings for legs and jackets for the body. The themes of the plays are episodes in the Ramayana and Mahabharata and rarely from Ceylon history, as in the case of *Kandy Raja Natakam*. One can dimly recognize in the dancing, a reflection of the poses and even of elementary *mudras* of *Terukkuttu*. There are two varieties of *Nattukkuttu*, the ancient type known as the *Tenmodi* or Southern type and *Vadamodi* or Northern, which is more recent and akin to the modern dance. These two are distinguished by the styles of music employed."

Expounding further, Sarathchandra tells us: "Although the Sinhalese Nadagama is ultimately the descendant of the type of South Indian Folk Drama, it has not come to us directly from any of these sources. The immediate ancestor of our Nadagama is that form of the *Terukkuttu* which was performed in certain parts of Jaffna by the Roman Catholics, and which underwent certain modifications in their hands. Although the structure of these plays was the same as that of the *Tamil Kuttu*, the Roman Catholics employed European themes set in a background of Christian society, expressed Christian sentiments in the invocatory stanzas throughout the plays and introduced fresh stock characters.

"This was the manner in which the Roman Catholic play was performed round the village of *Atchuvelly* in Jaffna, about fifty years ago. The Tamil play migrated in time to the Sinhalese-speaking Roman Catholic areas. The Sinhalese people of

<sup>1</sup> Baldaeus: A True and Exact Description of Ceylon, Edition, Ceylon Historical Journal. Vol. VIII, No. 1-4, 1959, p. 320.



the Roman Catholic coastal villages, north of Colombo, are even to this day, bilingual, that is, they speak both Sinhalese and Tamil."

An echo of the ceremonial dances that were a feature of the Pearl Fishery operations of a few decades ago, is this account by Grenier, of the ritual propitiation of the Gods, which heralded the inception of the Pearl Fishery in the Gulf of Mannar, held in 1722,— "dances traditionally danced by maidens clad in light silken garments. Each balanced a pot of water on her head. The dancers waded out into the calm waters and strew white flowers they carried in their hands, invoking propitiation of the Gods and praying for the safety of the divers, favourable winds, calm weather, freedom from pestilence, good fortune for themselves and their men folk and above all an abundance of oysters and pearls.

"There was a clear pathway fifty yards wide, demarcated on either side by long lines of ropes gaily decked with yellowish green fronds of the coconut palm. Through the vast concourse of the people gathered there which beggared description in the diversity of its varied pattern, the dancers had moved down from the temple to what was considered a safe distance, so that lustful eyes could not rest too close on their lissome form.

"On their return they knelt down at the entrance to the temple before the priest who poured the contents of each pot on each of the maidens in the procession."

The Cosmic dance of Siva as Nataraja leads is the classic representation of the dance in spiritual mysticism. An inspiring theme for all time, the latest commentary is the contribution, "Siva Dancing in all the Worlds" by Aldous Huxley, herein reproduced, as of obvious appeal to Saivite Jaffna :

"Dancing in all the worlds at once. In all the worlds. And first of all in the world of matter. Look at the great round halo, fringed with the symbols of fire, within which the God is dancing.

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1 Grenier, G. O. : "Dancers at the Pearl Fishery held in 1722."

It stands for Nature, for the world of mass and energy. Within it Shiva Nataraja dances the dance of endless becoming and passing away. It's his lila, his cosmic play. Playing for the sake of playing, like a child.

"But this child is the Order of Things. His toys are galaxies, his playground is infinite space and between finger and finger every interval is a thousand million light years. Look at him there on the altar. The image is man-made, a little contraption of copper only four feet high. Shut your eyes and see him towering into the night, follow the boundless stretch of those arms and the wild hair infinitely flying.

"Nataraja at play among the stars and in the atoms. But also at play within every living thing, every sentient creature, every child and man and woman. Play for play's sake. But now the playground is conscious, the dance-floor is capable of suffering. To us, this play without purpose seems a kind of insult. What we would really like is a God who never destroys what he has created. Or if there must be pain and death, let them be meted out by a God of righteousness, who will punish the wicked and reward the good with everlasting happiness. But in fact the good get hurt, the innocent suffer. Then let there be a God who sympathizes and brings comfort.

"But Nataraja only dances. His play is a play impartially of death and of life, of all evils as well as of all good. In the uppermost of his right hands he holds the drum that summons being out of not-being. Rub-a-dub-dub the creation tatoo, the cosmic reveille. But now look at the uppermost of his left hands. It brandishes the fire by which all that has been created is forthwith destroyed. He dances this way — what happens ! Dances that way — and oh, the pain, the hideous fear, the desolation ! Then hop, skip and jump. Hop into perfect health. Skip into cancer and senility. Jump out of the fullness of life into nothingness, out of nothingness again into life.

"For Nataraja it's all play, and the play is an end in itself, everlastingly purposeless. He dances because he dances, and the dancing is his *mahā-sukha*, his infinite and eternal bliss. Eternal Bliss . . .

"For us there's no bliss, only the oscillation between happiness and terror and a sense of outrage at the thought that our pains are as integral of Nataraja's dance as our pleasures, our dying as our living ...

"Suffering and sickness, old age, decrepitude, death. I show you sorrow. But that wasn't the only thing the Buddha showed us. He also showed us the ending of sorrow.

"Open your eyes again and look at Nataraja up there on the altar. Look closely. In his upper right hand, as you've already seen, he holds the drum that calls the world into existence, and in his upper left hand he carries the destroying fire. Life and death, order and disintegration, impartiality. But now look at Shiva's other pair of hands.

"The lower right hand is raised and the palm is turned outwards. What does that gesture signify? It signifies "Don't be afraid; it's All Right." But how can anyone in his senses fail to be afraid? How can anyone pretend that evil and suffering are all right, when it's so obvious they are all wrong? Nataraja has the answer. Look now at his lower left hand. He's using it to point down at his feet. And what are his feet doing? Look closely and you'll see that the right foot is planted squarely on a horrible little subhuman creature — the demon, Muyalaka. A dwarf, but immensely powerful in his malignity, Muyalaka is the embodiment of ignorance, the manifestation of greedy, possessive selfhood. Stamp on him! break his back! And that's precisely what Nataraja is doing. Trampling the little monster down under his right foot.

"But notice that it isn't at this trampling right foot that he points his finger; it's at the left foot, that, as he dances, he's in the act of raising from the ground. And why does he point at it? Why? That lifted foot, that dancing defiance of the force of gravity — it's the symbol of release, of moksha, of liberation. Nataraja dances in all the worlds at once — in the world of physics and chemistry, in the world of ordinary, all-too-human experience, in the world of Finality, of Suchness, of Mind, of the Clear Light." (pp. 167 - 169, *Island*, London, 1962).

## Saraswathi Hall Concert

An entertaining programme of dances by Colombo Hindu College Teachers' Guild at the Saraswathi Hall, Colombo, was a delightful experience, in my short visit to Ceylon in 1965. I welcomed this opportunity of continuing my study of the dances, following, as it closely did, on a presentation at Jaffna of the Folk Arts. Among the latter, was a play featuring the stresses and strains in the daily life of the Mukkuvar fishermen. Other scenes included a lively recital of Muttumari Amman Kallatam, the ceremonial invocatory songs in the cult of Goddess Muttumari Amman, a cult that prevails in the Eastern Province too. Another item was a screen display of the colourful Masked dance plays of the Nalavar, including the rare Hanuman Attam.

To turn now to the Saraswathi Hall programme of dances. A glance at the programme was impressive for its extensive compass, ranging from Bharata Natyam to arts of the several States of India — the Garbha dance of Gujarat; the Radha-Krishna dance of Manipur; the Naga dance of Assam; the Ras dance of Maharashtra; the Kayi Kotti Kali of the maidens of Kerala; the Kuratti Attam, the play of the women of the Nomadic Kuraver, tribe of snake charmers, and a few other items.

The dances were so artistically rendered and so faithful to their cultural values, that the Saraswathi Hall production, may be regarded as an index to the high standard of the dance talent of the Ceylon Tamils.

The accompanying orchestra appeared to be on a scale, more pronounced than what is usual at a South Indian Bharata Natyam concert. *Nattuvangam* and vocal music were provided by three musicians, with accompaniments on Mridangam and Violin.

My quest of the dance in Ceylon, brought me in close contact with that high authority on the music and dance, Prof. P. Sambamoorthy. These contacts were rewarding. On a day in June, 1968, a letter came from him in these words: "Quite recently, Miss Anandavalli, a gifted dancer from Colombo



appeared on the Madras stage and gave a classical programme of dances. One of the items rendered, was an exposition of a *pallavi* with the rendering of *Anuloma*. This was done for the first time and the young artiste created a tremendous impression. The performance took place in the Rasika Ranjini Sabha Hall, Mylapore and Mr. T. L. Venkatarama Iyer, retired judge of the Supreme Court, who presided complimented the artiste on her brilliant performance."

### Bharata Natyam

The twin arts of Sangita and Natya are the brightest gems adorning the Crown of India's Culture. Dancing in India or Ceylon, is not merely a thing to be seen and enjoyed but a fine art worthy of reverential study and understanding. Bharata Natyam is based and developed on very sound principles. There is a rich literature on the subject. The illuminating references to dancing contained in the sacred and secular literature, help to trace the development of the art through the centuries.

Hundreds of compositions composed specifically for being danced to the concept of Madhura Bakti from the days of Bhagavatham, gave a fillip to the writing of several compositions on the theme of Nayaka — Nayaki bhava. The feelings and experiences of an ideal devotee yearning for God, have their parallels in the feelings and experiences of an ideal Nayaki desiring union with the Nayaka of her choice. The concept of spiritualized love, has inspired many composers from the days of Manickavachagar. The compositions of Andal, Jayadeva and Meera Bai, breathe the fragrance of spiritualised love. The Padam compositions of Kshetrappa, Sarangapani and Ghanam Krishna Iyer, picture to us prominently the various mental states of ideal lovers. In earlier times, dancing was always conceived of in its applied aspects. Sage Bharata envisaged only the dance drama wherein the dance was used as a powerful factor in the creation of rasa. In temple dances also the applied aspects of the art loomed large.

The importance attached to the concept of pure dance or absolute dance (implied in the dances of Nataraja) is a distinct landmark in the history of Bharata Natyam. Compositions like

Alarippu, Jathiswaram and Tillana which provided full scope for Nritta and Abhinaya receive equal emphasis. In the padam the art of Abhinaya in all its ramified aspects received the fullest attention. In the modern concert of Bharata Natyam, the sequence of the items, is based on the principle of Nritta, Nritya and Abhinaya.

Whereas a music concert provides entertainment only to the ear, a concert of Bharata Natyam provides entertainment both to ear and the eye.

The tradition of Bharata Natyam has been carefully preserved and nurtured in Tanjore. The dance drama as conceived by Bharata, is still being performed in Melattur and other places in Tanjore District. The modern concept of Bharata Natyam, where a solo dancer gives an interesting programme for over three hours, dates from the early nineteenth century. It requires talent of a high order and capacity of varied nature to become proficient in dance. The artist must possess a good memory, alertness, mental equipoise and a keen sense of rhythm. She should dance in a clean, polished and effortless manner. The subject of Aharaya (the make-up, costumes and jewels) has received intelligent attention in recent times. It should be remembered that the complicated foot-work involved a variety of adavu, jattis and the abhinayas involving facial expression and complicated gestures, are things wholly unknown to the West

It is a matter for joy that some brilliant students from Ceylon who came to India and had their training in Bharata Natyam, are running flourishing schools of dance in Jaffna, Colombo and other places. Madras had the opportunity of witnessing Bharata Natyam by girls from Ceylon. In recent times these girls have acquitted themselves well. There is a bright future for Bharata Natyam in Ceylon. It is hoped that some of these talented artistes will visit foreign countries and give dance recitals and bring fame to this great art of the East.

## Folk Plays and Folk Dances

### 1. THE KOLATTAM AND THE KUMMI

**T**HE Kolattam and the Kummi belong to the category of dances, classified as the Community or the Choral dance. Examples of the choral dance are many all over India. A typical dance of the maidens of Kerala, is the Tiruvatira Kali, the circular dance play of the Tiruvatira season, November - December. The dancers move in a circle with swaying and swinging movements in varying turns and reels keeping time by rhythmic clapping of hands. Essentially, the technique of the dance is the same in Kummi, the dancers keeping rhythm by the clap of the hands.

The accompanying songs and tunes are simple, but varied and graceful. The themes of the songs in the Kummi cover a wide range from poetical descriptions of Nature to the simple joys of life and romances of the gay Spring season, from plentiful harvest of the fields to the worship of gods and goddesses, and a practical philosophy of life. The movements of the hands, are single or double, co-ordinating and harmonising with the foot-work and the movement of the group in pleasing gyrations.

The Kummi is played on all joyous social occasions, as at domestic events as celebration of the coming of age of girls, besides at school functions as the annual demonstrations of sports and pastimes.

The main distinction between the Kummi and the Kolattam is that while in the Kummi, the players keep time by hand clapping, in the Kolattam, the rhythm is kept up by the striking of sticks, which has given rise to the name, Kolattam.

In Ceylon, many varieties of the Kolattam may be seen at the seasonal peraheras at Buddhist temples. By origin, the Kolattam was a play in the cult of the gods as may be seen from an understanding of the accompanying songs, whether in Tamil or in Sinhalese. In Sinhalese, the play goes by the name of Li-keli, the stick-play. In Jaffna, as in Malabar, where Kolattam is part of the cult of the gods, the players move about round a Kuthu Vilakku.

Of the many types of Kolattam, the Pinnal Kolattam leads as the most spectacular and artistic. Hanging from the top of a central pole planted on the ground, are coloured ropes or ribbons. The loose ends of these are attached to the sticks of each of the dancers. The girls move round and round in varying rhythmic patterns striking the sticks to the rhythm of the songs. In the process of moving about, the coloured ribbons get plaited, and get unwound by contra-movements.

In the rural areas of South India, the Kolattam is popular on certain festival occasions. Days before the coming of the festival, girls train themselves, and go from house to house. Bathing early on the festival day, they prepare themselves for the evening procession of a decorated palanquin bearing a picture or an image of Lord Sri Krishna. The procession goes round a prescribed route over the village area, singing and dancing on the way. Nagaswaram band accompanies the procession, the piper following in refrain the singing by the girls.

### 2. SPORTS AND PASTIMES

#### The Musical Kite

A pastime typical of Jaffna is the Musical Kite. Made in varying patterns of bird or animal form, the more common are



the peacock and a conventionalized form of the bird kite, the form popularly called Paruntukkodi, a stylized pattern of the Brahminy Kite, (*Haliastur indus*). The eight angled form is also common.

What is here described is the conventionalized form of the Brahminy Kite. It has a technology of its own. Built on a frame of bamboo strips, the kite has an interesting and elaborate structure. The constituent parts are the *Naduthadi* (A.D. in Text Figure), the central piece, the back-bone of the kite; two wing strips one on either side, the *Sirakutadi* (X 'Y' and X "Y") and the tail part or *Valtadi* (TL), half the length of the centre piece. The wing strips are fastened to the central strip at two points (B and C) equidistant to each other. This divides the centre strip into three parts (AB, BC and CD), the top or the head, the central or the body, and the bottom, the tail. The flexible wing sticks are inclined towards each other and the ends tightly fastened at points X and Y. The tail piece TL is secured to the centre strip at point D. From points T and L, two short strips bind the arched tail (TL) to the lower *Sirakutadi*. The whole structure now forms one integrated whole. The framework being ready, it is papered suitably to the colour of the Brahminy Kite, white neck and brownish body, or made all white. Articulated to the main points of the body of the kite, is a string structure centred and knotted at O, the middle point of AD, the point at which the finished kite finds its true poise. An important appliance is the balance string, the *Mutchai* formed of two strings, *Mahal-Mutchai* or baby Mutchai from points E and F and the *Thai-Mutchai* from point C. The Mutchai structure is linked with the ball of long string at point H. The technology of the kite is so highly evolved that a flowing tail attachment is seldom necessary as generally in kites. Correct structural measurements obviate the need for a separate tail. In the event of a kite not maintaining its balance, and consequently failing to take to the air, a long trail of a tail is added.

The musical mechanism is separately made and comprises of the bow with the bow string. The bow or the *Virn thadi* is a flexible strip of the areca palm equal in length to the *Naduthadi*,

the vertical stick. The bow string (SS) is a strip of the palmyrah leaf stalk fixed to the ends of the bow and kept taut by a wooden bit on either side, called the *Sutakkattai*. The musical bow thus formed is fastened transverse at the back of the kite, flush with the upper wing frame. The kite is now ready to take to the air. Waving and whirling it a number of times, the force of the wind carries it aloft, controlled by the string and the resistance of the atmosphere. It rises up like an angered cobra. As it heaves high up, the wind has free play on the bow string and the vibrations producing a sound quite musical, the resonance alternating with the frequency of the vibrations.

The musical effect depends upon a number of factors — first, the tension of the bow string. The greater the tension the higher the frequency of vibration, and the higher the note. The next is the velocity of the wind. The note is either soft or loud according to the density of the wind that plays upon the reed string. How far it gives an alternating series of notes seems to be a debatable point, differing according to different observers. The tension of the palmyrah stalk string remaining static, yields a note that is more or less constant, the pitch of which remains high or low, loud or soft, according to the density or the velocity of the wind. While this is the truth of the physical phenomenon involved, it nevertheless is also true that the kite is an unscientific stringed instrument tuned up by different wind pressures at different heights, and the possibility of the wind exerting alternating pressure on the bow string, producing an approximation of a series of notes to the sensitive ear, cannot be altogether ruled out. This indeed is supported by what Mr. A. H. Hill tells us in his account of the Musical Kite of Kelantan, Malaya when he informs us that it "gives out a loud low pitched note or harmony of notes when the wind blows across it in flight."<sup>1</sup> This reveals the strong parallelism of the Musical Kite of Malaya, with the Musical Kite of Jaffna.

1 Some Kelantan Games and Entertainments — Kite-flying (Main Wau)

J. M. B. R. A. S. Vol. XXV, Part I, 1952, pp. 26 - 28

The physical factors of North Ceylon are favourable to the sport. The wide open stretches enjoy good blowing from about April to August—the season for Musical Kite. A kite once heaved into the air, and floating high up, remains there by unfailing seasonal wind velocities. The coastal areas surrounding the Jaffna Peninsula make record flights every year—Point Pedro, Kayts, and Chavakachcheri being among the main popular centres. Seasonal winds inspire the participants in the right mood for kite racing. Kites are not always hauled down with night fall as players wait in hopes of favourable wind velocities which may take the kite up greater heights. The competitors observe the play of the wind, and if conditions are satisfactory, kites are not hauled down, but are kept pegged to a post. As the velocity of the wind tends to drop, the kites are hauled down.

The maximum height a kite reaches, is judged by the length of the string sent up. Strings are not measured, but an estimation is made of the volume of the ball of string used for each. When the game is over and the kites are hauled down, the balls of string are compared and the man whose roll is the biggest, declared the winner. When the rolls of strings are almost the same size, it often gives rise to much argument. Prizes are not generally awarded. It is more a pastime than a competition. Competitions do however take place, which draw interested sight-seers, quite a crowd. Ten or more competitors take part. The participants jointly with the sight-seers make a collection and reward the winner.

The Musical Kite belongs to the group of Aeolian musical instruments—from Acolis, a district of Asia Minor, colonized by ancient Greeks, where it signified “a harp-stringed instrument producing musical sounds on exposure to wind.” The term has been extended to cover all devices in which musical sounds are produced by exposure to wind. So far as at present known, the Musical Kite has been reported from the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian Islands. I am grateful to Dr. P. D. R. Williams-Hunt, Director of Museums, Malaya, for the following note on the Musical Kite of Malaya, which he was good enough to let me have on one of his visits to Colombo: “Kites are particularly common in the States of Kedah and Perlis (and

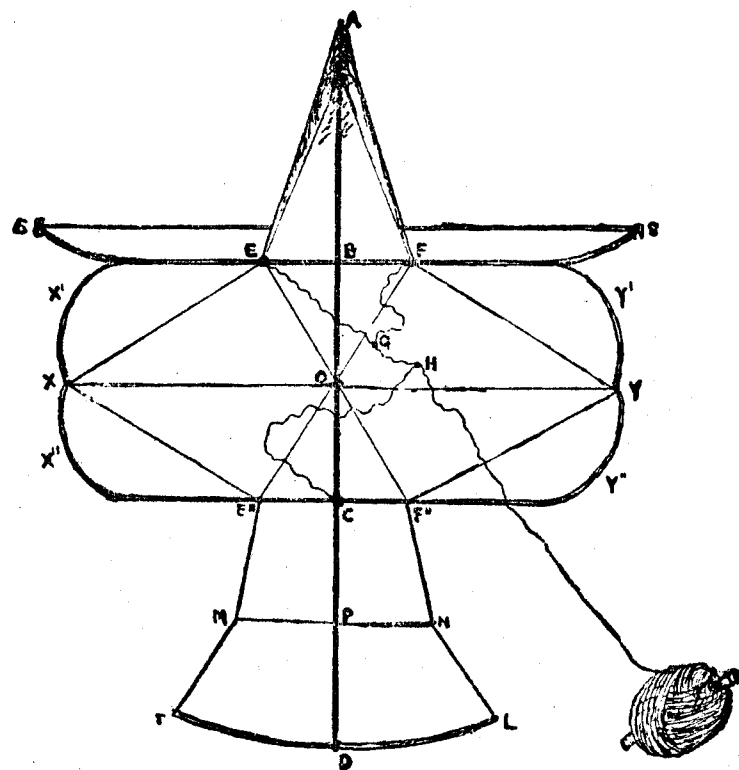
I believe Kelantan) where there is a hot dry season with strong winds. There are many varieties of kites, often without the tail. They are constructed of thin paper laid over a bamboo frame-work and are often gaily decorated with floral patterns cut of coloured paper. The average size is about 2½ feet wide, but the largest may run over 4 feet. Most of these kites have a sounding device consisting of a strip of leaf (usually pandanus) tightened by a bow of bamboo. This type of kite is known by the general name of *Wau* and as the same type of kite is found with the Javanese in the State of Selangor and also known by the same name in Java, it seems possible that it has developed from an Indian proto-type.”

The distribution of the musical kite covering regions as far apart as Ceylon on one side and the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian Islands on the other, raises problems of ethnological interest as to the original centre of dispersal—whether it arose, in North Ceylon and spread to Malaya and beyond, or whether it originated in the Malay region, whence it spread to North Ceylon. The possibility of independent origins in the two regions cannot also be entirely ruled out, though we may rightly assume that a highly technical and specialized appliance of the sort is far more likely to have spread from a common source than arising independently in each locality. We know that the Malay Archipelago has been a centre of pronounced activity in the technological development of the kite. Here developed a most ingenious method of fishing,<sup>1</sup> “by the use of a kite which is flown over the water and to which is attached the fishing line. To the end of the latter is fastened a line or a baited hook or noose which is made to play over the surface of the sea by the movements of the kite in the wind.” The distribution of kite fishing covers an extensive area—Malay, the Indonesian Islands and beyond to Melanesia. The Musical Kite which pervades large areas of Malaya and occurs in Java, and possibly elsewhere in Indonesia, has presumably originated and flourished in the cultural setting of Jaffna and spread over

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1 Balfour, Henry: Kite - Fishing:  
Essays and Studies presented to William Ridgeway on his Sixtieth Birthday—Cambridge, 1918.

to Malaya and beyond. Place names such as Chavakachcheri and Chavankottai recall Javanese contacts with Jaffna Peninsula, while Chavakam comes to light as a term signifying the entire group of Indonesian Islands. Javanese contacts with Jaffna find mention in early Tamil literature. The epic poem "*Manimekalai*" (2nd century A.D.) describes how ships operating between South India and Java touched at Manipallavam (identified as in the vicinity of Jaffna). References to the Malays and to the Javanese soldiers and the part they played in the story of Jaffna and the rest of the Island are facts of Ceylon history, and the Malays are today an integral factor of Ceylon's social life. It is more than probable that in the wide open stretches and the prevailing winds of Jaffna, the



TEXT FIGURE

Javanese found conditions so strikingly similar to what they have been used to in their home lands, that it was not long before these stirred in them a passion to resume a sport which at home gave them hours of recreation and entertainment. The lead thus given has kept the indigenous Musical Kite of Jaffna soaring and singing high, arousing a good deal of enthusiasm, over the coastal villages of Jaffna, where it has been among the foremost of folk sports finding vent in a season of leisure in the life of the Jaffna peasant following a period of intense agricultural activity.

### 3. KITTI AND PULLU

"Kitti and Pullu" is a play very popular with children, with a wide distribution in South India and Ceylon. It is much the same as the Gudu of Sinhalese children. Pullu is a short piece of stick about six inches long, tapering to a point at either end. The longer start striker is the Kitti. The pullu is either laid on the ground, or placed transverse across a small depression scooped out on the ground. The player strikes its tapering end with the striker. As the pullu springs in the air, the player hits it again with all his force. This sends it far afield. If it does not, but misses, or is held by the opposite party as it falls, the boy goes out. When it falls further off the field as it does on a well aimed blow, the distance from the starting point to where it falls, is measured, in terms of the striker. Boys band themselves into two parties, with a leader for each party. Whichever party gains more points is the winner.

The losing side pays the penalty. One among the winning side, now wields the *kitti* and strikes at the *pullu* sending it over the greatest length to which he could project it. The leader of the losing side, or one among them, has now got to hold his breath, and run covering the long distance, all the while intoning a set line of words. This taxes his powers of endurance, and more often than not, he is unable to hold out. He either stops short in the course of his process, or defaults in uttering the words. The watchful adversaries exercise their right. The exhausted victim has again to go through the same process, much to the amusement of the winners, and the chagrin of the losers. With such trials the play comes to an ignominious end to the discomfited party who leave the field depressed and dejected, and even hooted by the jubilant winners.



## Folk Songs of Jaffna & Batticaloa

NOTHING reveals the folk mind in the infinite range of its reactions, as the folk songs of a people. Spontaneous in character, giving vent to inmost emotions, and sentiments, these songs in simple tunes, have an appealing charm of their own. Rural life in its rich variety gives us a wealth of folk songs. Very little of this has yet been collected. The only collection so far as I am aware, is the one made by Mr. M. Ramalingam, who has done a great service in making these collections. He was good enough to send me copies of these songs, published by him in 1950. To me they have been a valued possession ever since and now come in handy to supplement these studies. The collections as Mr. Ramalingam published, bear the title: "The Folk-lore of Jaffna," contributed to the Diamond Jubilee Number of the *Hindu Organ*, Jaffna.

(1)

All alone in her hut, a maiden sits lamenting her lot. She has to cook for her aunt, two uncles, and a grandfather, all out in the paddy-fields. Her aunt will soon appear to fetch food

for the hungry males. But the maiden has made no headway with the pounding of the paddy. Presently, she gives vent to her feelings in words which evoke sympathy :

1. காயாப் புழுங்கலொடும்  
கப்பியொடும் மாய்கிறேனே,  
எனக் கெழுந்த சூரியனே,  
எனக் கொருவன் வாரானே !

With parboiled paddy undried and  
And grain in coarse grits,  
I wear myself to death.  
O, Sun, who has risen with me  
Won't a man come for me.

2. தோயாத் தயிரொடும்  
மத்தொடும் மாய்கிறேனே;  
எனக் கெழுந்த சூரியனே  
எனக் கொருவன் வாரானே !

With uncurdled milk and the churn in hand,  
I wear myself to death.  
O, Sun, who has risen for me.  
Won't a man come for me !

For ages past girls awaiting husbands have worshipped the Moon. No sooner husbands swam into their ken, than they gave up the Moon, and worshipped their husbands. The Moon cult was a symbolic worship, not nature worship. Love is warm when the Moon is on, so is a woman when her mate is found. "See darling moon" is taboo to the Tamil girl who is on courtship or just married. What better fate than the fickle Moon who wanes and waxes casting gloom and light in quick alternation !

Akin to this custom, perhaps is the custom of a lady bent with age, who goes out to catch the first glimpse of the moon on the third night from the New Moon. As she sees it, she calls out to her children and grandchildren keeping her gaze all the while fixed fast on the phase, and kisses them one by one.

The way she fumbles to grip the first child square by the shoulders, shows how careful she is to set her eyes next on the face of the child only. The switching of her look from the phase of the moon to the face of the child, is not without its psychic gain. The first child is indeed the luckiest. In this, as in most rituals, sons and grandsons come in for preference.

( 2 )

Paddy-pounding is essentially a work of women. One woman begins a lyric. The other replies in the same tenor. The theme of the lyric may be love, may be a comment on the suitors. Here is a comment on the dress. One wore a saree dipped in the Jaffna dye in the wont of the well-to-do, in the days when the Chayaroot (*oddenlandia umbellata*) was much in vogue. Dress is a tickler to damsels. Envy in the other springs with a sting :

வட்ட வட்டத் திட்டையிலே  
வரகரிசி திட்டையிலே,  
ஆர் கொடுத்த சாயச் சோமன்  
ஆலவட்டம் போடுதடி ?

Friend, who gave you that dyed dress of yours ?  
That circles fan wise round and round  
As you polish the millet,  
And the rice in the shallow mortar.

The wearer of the dyed dress pops out a sharp answer :

ஆருங் கொடுக்கவில்லை;  
அவிசாரி யாடவில்லை;  
கை யெரியப் பாடுபட்டுக்  
கட்டினேன்டி சாயச் சோமன்.

No one gave it me,  
Nor did I wallow in wanton life,  
With smarting hands worked I hard,  
And donned that dyed dress.

In the days of Jaffna when local trade flourished, diving for chank in the waters and digging for chayaroot in the soils of Jaffna, were common occupations. Sarees of women and Vetties of men coloured in the chayaroot were popular in Malaya, and were exported from Jaffna. These trades are now languishing.

( 3 )

As elsewhere the crows are a nuisance in Jaffna. They have no respect for place, age, nor for sex. We hear of a crow baring the breast of Sita, the ill-fated queen of Ayodha. We know of crows carrying away the nosegay of girls, the necklace of a gay woman. A village girl's priceless possession is her paddy, she has put out in a pounder to husk or on a mat to sun :

தாயாருமில்லை நான்  
தனியே மசித்த நெல்லு  
அள்ளுகிறாய், காகம், உனக்கு  
ஆகுமென்றால் கொண்டோடு.

Mother mine, is nowhere about,  
The grains husked with a lone hand,  
You are sweeping away,  
O Crow. If you deem it meet, take it then.

This is an every day experience.

( 4 )

Now a riddle. A minister was paying night visits to the queen in the absence of the king. One night while the king was in, the queen heard a rap on the door from outside. Fear coursed through her. "Will your Majesty solve this riddle?" asked the queen. "What is it?" was the king's reply. Realising that the king was in, the minister dashed off. The queen recanted :

வாராய் போராய் என்னுலே  
வந்திருக்கிறார் மேலானவர்;  
உன்னுலே நான் செத்தேன்,  
என்னுலே நீ சாகப் போகிறாய்.

You are coming and going because of me,  
The lord is come,  
Owing to you I am dead,  
And owing to me shall you be dead.

The king was at a loss to solve it. Next day in the audience hall he put it to his minister hypothetically. The minister opined that they were the words of a morally lax woman making known to her paramour the presence of her husband, and that death was the meet punishment to her. Quickly the queen was summoned; and the charge was put to her.

She laughed at their wisdom, and explained it away thus :  
“ they were the words of a prawn thrust on a fish-hook to a shark that came to swallow it.”

You are coming and going on my account,  
The angler is here. By you eating me I am dead,  
Being baited you are dead.

Who does not know the proverb :

இருல் போட்டு மீன் பிடித்தல்,

To throw a sprat to catch a salmon.

“ Lo, the wisdom of men dispensing justice.”

( 5 )

A love song of the Tamil land has no parallel. It is more than 2000 years old even on the classical model of Tholkappiar. Here is one from the lips of the folks.

It is time for the survivors of the war to reach their homes. A young husband had timed his return, for warfare had its seasons in the days of old. With the oncoming of the rains he was to be home. The first fall of the seasonal shower puts his longing wife in tension. Even moments and seconds seem years to her. No longer will she wait without a sight of her lord. She gives vent to this feeling in a strange way :

கடலே ஒலியாதே  
கற் கிணறே பொங்காதே  
நிலவே எறியாதே-என்  
நீலகண்டன் வருமளவும்.

O Sea, cease to sound ;  
O Rocky-well, fail to swell ;  
O light of Moon, stay thy shine ;  
Till my Blue-throated returns.

In her anxiety to let not the season slip away, she bids the starry heavens and the earthly elements obey her so that the first signs — the setting in of the rains — may yet linger on giving her the hope that the promised day is still on. The allusion of ‘ Blue-throated ’ is to Siva whose throat turned blue by swallowing the poison meant for others. Just as Siva was immune to death, so would her husband be ; hence the use of the epithet.

( 6 )

The funeral songs of the Tamils have a ring of their own. A widow is ostracized from society. She is kept out of the auspicious ceremonies like house-warming and wedding. She dare not wear coloured clothes, jewels of any kind, hair locks, and the like which beautify women. Here is a dirge of such a woman who has just lost her husband :

1. கறுப்பும் சிவப்பும்-எனக்குக்  
கலந்துடுக்கக் கை நோரும்;  
மன்னாருக் கச்ச இப்போ  
மடித்துடுக்க நாளாச்சே.

To wear in change the black and red  
My hands would weary.  
The day is now on for me to drape in folds  
The long cloth of Mannar.

2. பட்டும் பணிதிகளும்-நான்  
பல தினுசாய்ப் பூட்டிடுவேன்;  
பட்டைக் கழற்றி வைத்தேன்-இப்போ  
பாடகத்தை வாங்கி வைத்தேன்.

Silks and jewels  
I vary in wear,  
Silks I have doffed,  
Anklets I am casting off now.

3. ஆண்ட நகை கழற்றி-நானும்  
ஆபரணச் செப்பி லிட்டேன்.

The long-used ornaments I took off me,  
And put them back in their caskets.



4. ஓடியல்லோ வந்திடுவேன்-உங்கள்  
ஒழுங்கை தெரியாது;  
பாய்ந்தல்லோ வந்திடுவேன்-உங்கள்  
படலை தெரியாது.

I would come running to you,  
But I know not your lane,  
I would come galloping to you,  
But I know not your gate.

(7)

One of the oldest sub-types of folk-songs is the cradle song, the lullaby. The baby-boy who is lulled is often likened to the best of heroes his mother has heard of. For centuries the whim of women was caught by the valiant men of the Indian epics, Mahabharata and Ramayana :

1. ஐந்து தலை நாகம்  
அடை கிடக்குந் தாழையிலே  
அஞ்சாமல் பூ வெடுக்கும்  
அருக்கனஞர் உங்கள் ஐயா.

Your father is that daring Arjuna  
Who picks flowers in the wild pine  
Wherein lies brooding  
The five-headed cobra.

The sentiment here is valour. By extolling the father, the child is extolled. As the father so the child. The father is a veritable Arjuna, the king of archers.

2. முத்தளப்பான் செட்டி,  
முடி சமைப்பான் ஆசாரி,  
பட்டு விற்பான் பட்டாணி,  
பணி சமைப்பான் ஆசாரி.

Pearls, the Chetty measures out ;  
Crown, the sculptor carves ;  
Silks, the pedlar sells ;  
Coiffure, the sculptor fashions.

3. ஆசாரி பூசை செய்ய-உனக்கு  
ஆசைப் பால் ஊட்டியதார் ?  
பூசாரி பூசை செய்ய-உனக்குப்  
பூசைப் பால் தந்தவரார் ?

While His Holiness does divine service  
Who fed you with ambrosia ?  
While the priest does divine service  
Who fed you with consecrated milk ?

4. ஆரடித்து நீரழுதீர்  
அழுத கண்ணில் நீர் ததும்ப ?  
பேரை உரைத்தாக்கால்,  
பெரு விலங்கு பூட்டிடுவேன்.

Who beat you to sob  
And your tearing eyes to brim ?  
Him if you name,  
Fetters firm will I set.

It is the way of women to rock infants in their laps. Whereas men take them on their shoulders, and walk to and fro patting them with their hands. Even today when simplicity has been much robbed, these manners continue. These are thrown out in the following song.

அத்தை மடிமேலும்  
அம்மான்மார் தோள்மேலும்  
வைத்து முத்தாட்டும்  
மரகதமே கண்வளராய்.

Sleep Emerald, sleep,  
Caressed  
In the laps of your aunts  
And on the shoulders of your uncles.

Obviously the infant was the only one for many aunts and uncles.

The childless are believed to be under curses of the gods, stars, snakes, animals, birds, and Brahmins. To propitiate them many penances and ceremonies are performed, often at great expense. Yet when the child arrives, it is said to be the gift of God.

1. சிற்றடிக எல்லையென்று  
சிந்தை கலங்கையிலே,  
தம்பி நீர், சிவபெருமான்  
தந்த செல்வம்-

When for want of little feet,  
I was sick in heart,  
O little son, you became the fortune,  
Sent by Siva.

2. பிள்ளை யில்லையென்று  
பெருந் தவசு புரிகையிலே,  
தம்பி நீர், பெருமானார்  
தந்த செல்வம்.

When for want of a child,  
I practised austerities hard,  
O little son, you were  
The gift of the Lord.

- 3 பச்சை இலுப்பை வெட்டிப்  
பால் வடியத் தொட்டில் கட்டி,  
தொட்டிலின் கால் பொன்னாலே,  
தொடு கயிறோ முத்தாலே-

A live olive was felled, and a cot made  
While the sap was still dripping.  
The legs of the cot have an inlay of gold -  
Its handling cords of pearls.

Linked with augury as in other countries, is the bird lore. Cries of the puny crow bring in welcome news — coming home of a nearkin. The croaking notes of the larger kind, foreshadows

evil. The crow comes foremost. A forecast of welcome news of visits, is announced by a special pleasing type of cawing.

The nocturnal birds commonly portend disaster. The owl is very ominous. Directly its cries reach ear, men and women set out to chase it away. When the bird having death shrieks for its keynote, காக்குருவி (the hooting owl?), flies across the roof of a house the inmates are in a panic. Elders advise them to expose the roof by removing few tiles, to kill a fowl in expiation, or if (vegetarians) to cut up an ash-pumpkin smeared with turmeric.

Pigeons are not domesticated, because when they fly off for good, the wealth of the family goes to the bottom. So they are tended in the temples. Peacock suffers the same fate, but for another reason — it is the bird of Subrahmanya, son of Siva with perennial youth. Apropos is this proverb of the folks :

கந்தனுக்குக் கவனம் கவட்டிலே  
Skanda keeps an eye on his legs.

God Skanda (Subrahmanya) turned an Asura king into a peacock and used it as his vehicle ; hence he feared reprisals any moment.

The cock also is sacred to God Subrahmanya ; but it has earned little reverence of recent years. Of animal lore, cow, cat, elephant, assume sanctity. The life of a cat is equated with the lives of nine Brahmins ; so if you kill one cat you have killed nine Brahmins.

Mineral lore is of particular significance to Jaffna. There is a tradition among the learned and the folks alike that the Cobra (the Naga) carries in its hood a precious stone. Nainativu (Nagadvipa of the Buddhists), an island off Jaffna, abounds in cobras. Here is a temple dedicated to Nagammal, the guardian goddess of cobras.

On the west coast of Nainativu, gems shooting out rays of light — little suns, as it were — are believed to be seen during dark nights. The cobras spit them out while they are out prey hunting ; they go not far out from their stones. The way to

take them is to cover them with cow dung unseen. One may even go up a tree, cow dung in hand, and wait for an opportunity. So far no dare-devil has succeeded. All the same, the stone is reputed to exist. One such stone is believed to be the crest-jewel of the Goddess Meenakshi Amman of Madura.

The guardian goddess of Nainativu extends her sway over entire Jaffna. The childless over whom hangs the curse of snakes, pay annual homage to her. If a cobra strays into their homes, they trap it alive unhurt, often in an earthen pot, and take it with them to the fane along with the attendant materials of worship. The faith has had its reward, reflected in the names of the offspring: Nagabhushani, Nagammal, Nageswari, Nagalingam, Nagaratnam.

Folk songs of Batticaloa bear a close likeness in essential respects, to the folk songs of Jaffna, subject to an element of Muslim influence in an environment predominantly Muslim. As generally in Jaffna, themes of love, and of farming processes such as ploughing and harvesting, dominate.

Behind an elusive facade of obscenity, love songs reflect the artless simplicity of the unsophisticated rural mind. Despite a general correspondence common to folk songs of practically all lands, regional variations, give a distinctive individuality.

Conspicuous in and around Batticaloa, are songs of the ardent lover and his girl, giving free vent to their reciprocal sentiments; and of the girl's mother, expressing her own reactions and feelings.

Here are a few typical verses<sup>1</sup> :—

The enamoured lover sings :

கட்டை விரலழகி  
கமுகம்பூ மார்பழகி  
வம்மிப்பூ மார்பழகி — உன்னை  
மணம் முடிக்கக் காத்திருந்தேன்.

<sup>1</sup> Verses freely rendered in English by Mr. V. R. Mani, Curator of Archaeology, Madras Government Museum,

இலந்தம் பழமே — எந்தன்  
இன்பமுள்ள தேன் வதையே  
மருதங் கிளியே — மலை  
நங்கணமே எங்கே போக

வானத்தைப் பார்த்தேன்  
வளர்த்தேன் பலாமரத்தை — என்ற  
சனிப்பலாவே — உன்னைத்  
தின்னுமல் போக மாட்டேன்

உன்னை மணந்து  
உயர்ந்த கட்டில் மேல்வைத்து  
கன்னந் திருப்பிக்  
கதைக்க வெகு நாட்களில்லை

The girl is frank in expressing her feelings :

சோலை இளங் கமுகே  
திறக்க வொண்ணா என்கதவு  
இறப்பால பாய்தருவேன்  
இனிப்பாறிப்போ இருந்தே

விளக்கேற்றி இருசாமம்  
வெள்ளி நிலா வேளையிலே  
குளத்தோரம் வந்திடுங்கோ  
கூடிக் கதைத்திடலாம்

The reaction of the female friend and her description of the old man who is to marry her friend, is no less interesting :

சின்னச் சின்ன மாடுகட்டி  
கெலைமாடு ரெண்டு கட்டி  
வண்டி முட்ட பாரமேத்தி  
வாருண்டி உன் புருஷன்

கச்சான் அடித்த பின்பு  
காட்டில் மரம் நின்றது போல்  
உச்சியில் நாலு மயிர்  
ஓரமெல்லாம் தான் வழுக்கை



கண்ணுமொரு பொட்டை  
காதுஞ் செவிடாகும்  
குருத்தெடுத்த வாழைபோல — அவர்  
கூனி வளைந்திருப்பார்

முப்பத்தி ரெண்டிலே  
முனு பல்லுதான் மீதி  
காகக் கறுப்பு நிறம் — ஒரு  
காலுமல்லோ முடமவர்க்கு

The mother of the girl persuades her daughter to marry  
the old man despite his age :

போறும் மகளே உனக்குப்  
புத்தி சொல்லத் தேவையில்லை  
ஊரார் கருசல் மணி  
உடைஞ்சால் வந்திவரும்

கடப்பைக் கடந்து நீ  
காலெடுத்து வைத்தாயென்றால்  
இடுப்பை முறித்து — அந்த  
இலுப்பையின் கீழ் போட்டிடுவேன்

தோட்டம் துறவுமில்லை  
தொகையான காசுமில்லை  
சீதனமாய்க் கொடுத்து — மகளே  
சீராக மணம் முடிக்க

அட்டியலும் மோதிரமும்  
அழகான றவுக்கைகளும்  
வாங்கித் தருவாருனக்கு — அவருக்கு  
வயதுமோர் அறுபதுதான்

Besides the above there are many songs of a general  
nature such as *Polippattu* and *Erppattu*, sung by farmers. *Poli*  
refers to paddy. The following lines from a *Polippattu* eulogises  
Ganesha :

கணபதியே கரிமுகனே பொலி பொலி  
கந்தருக்கு முத்தோனே பொலி பொலி பொலியோ  
பாளை வயிற்றோனே பொலி பொலி  
பழமேந்துங் கையோனே பொலி பொலியோ

In the *Erppattu*, we often come across songs referring  
to the oxen and buffaloes used for ploughing the field.  
They are commonly denoted by the word *Sellan* :

சார் பார்த்த கள்ளனடா — செல்லன்  
தாய் வார்த்தை கேளண்டா  
பாரக் கலப்பையடா — செல்லனுக்கு  
பாரமெத்தத் தோணுதடா

Besides the above there are folk songs associated  
with the play of sticks, known as *Kombu vilaiyattuppadalkal*.  
All these folk songs are indicative of the simple and innocent  
life led by the farmers.

## APPENDIX

### The Dravidian Problem

**A**MONG the topics of the day in the social and cultural field, perhaps the most complex is what has been generally termed the Dravidian problem. In the present context we cannot enter into a full-dress discussion on the several issues that have been raised over the years on the problem of the Dravidians, in particular the one that centres round their origins. On the one hand are those who hold that the Dravidians are autochthonous to South India. Against this view, is the hypothesis that the home of the Dravidians may best be sought beyond the borders of India, the centre of dispersal ranging from Central Asia to the Mediterranean lands and the islands of the Aegean sea.

The first of these theories that the Dravidians are the children of the soil, takes us back to the days of pre-history and beyond to the geologic eras, to the Gondwanaland of the Permo-Carboniferous Age and to the submerged continent of Lemuria, the land mass considered to have once covered either side of India.

The Dravidian problem has so many ramifications, that in the very nature of the subject, it is hard to come to a finality on the implications of the problem. All that we are clear about,

is the linguistic status of the Dravidian family of languages, and of Tamil in particular, in the days of the Sangam Age — closing phase of the pre-Christian era and the early centuries of the Christian era.

My own introduction to the Dravidian problem is linked with a paper, "What is Tamil Culture?" read by Prof. V. R. Ramachandra Dikshitar before the Archaeological Society of South India on December 18, 1935. Dikshitar contended that the Dravidians are not aliens and that the term Dravida, like Arya, had no ethnic significance. There was nothing in ancient tradition or literature to show that the terms stood for different races. But there were two distinct cultures, Tamil culture and Vedic culture. The lecturer believed that racial characteristics of skin and colour were due to climatic and geographic influences. Caldwell was nearer the truth when he looked upon the term Dravidian as being purely philological, the name of a linguistic family. Hence the Dravidians were those who spoke Dravidian languages. But the term stood for the people who inhabited that tract of land which went by the name of Dravida in ancient Indian geography. The original home of the Dravidians was South India; and as no relationship has yet been established between Dravidian languages and those of any other family, the former might be regarded as indigenous. As regards the progress of the culture of the ancient Tamils, three distinct stages can be marked out, but no definite dates can be assigned: The pre-historic period, the pre-Sangam period and the Sangam period. On the evidence of archaeology it was pointed out that before the Stone Age there was a Wood Age. Early man used tools of wood and then took to tools of stone. Palaeolithic implements are of stone and no pottery is found with them, pottery first appearing in the Neolithic age. The implements found show that many occupations were pursued. The presence of chert proved the existence of trade by barter. The find of megalithic tombs and of the terra-cotta sarcophagus standing on short legs (found at Pallavaram) bearing a remarkable resemblance to terra-cotta coffins discovered near Baghdad, suggests an active intercourse between India and the rest of the world. The pre-Sangam period was an age of metal tools. Slowly the

pre-historic Tamils took to the use of all four metals, iron, copper, silver, and gold.

Five types of culture based on environment developed respectively in the *Neydal* or littoral region, the *Kurinjī* or hilly tracts, the *Palai* or deserts, the *Mullai* or forest regions, and *Marudam* or agricultural tracts. Later the *Palai* disappeared, getting merged in the *Kurinjī*. Here the chief economic pursuit was hunting. These mountaineers by their contact with people of pastoral and agricultural pursuits became more and more civilised : and the men of coastal culture, who pursued the occupation of fishing, developed in course of time an adventurous spirit and from pearl divers became expert sailors, occupations which persist even in historical times. But these tribes gradually declined in numbers and became relatively negligible. The *Marudam* region was agricultural. The tribes that inhabited it had a settled and civilised life. The existence of agricultural industry from the Stone Age in South India throws doubt upon the theory of Elliot Smith that agriculture first developed in Egypt. It was a connecting link between the pre-historic culture and pre-Sangam culture and of the Tamils. The development of agriculture did not mean abandonment of pastoral life. Pastoral tribes continued to tend sheep and cattle and supplied domesticated animals to the ploughman and milk and its products to all communities. The pastoral stage favoured the growth of the joint family and of the institution of kinship — the frequent contact of these tribes, each developing a cultural type of its own, exerted a good deal of influence on their cultures. It tended to break up traditional ruts and stimulate change. Some features of this stage of culture were the total absence of caste, the existence of two forms of marriage, Kalavu and Karpū, the peculiarities of war and war incidents, the town as the seat of refined manners, the use of pictographic script and the existence of village communities. The third stage was after the contact of the Tamils with Sanskrit culture. In spite of its dominating influence, the Tamils managed to preserve much of their old modes of life and forms of social organisation.

In the discussions that ensued, the hypothesis found general acceptance, that the dominant traits, racial and cultural, in the population of South India extend to regions far afield,

into North India and beyond. I gave expression to my personal feeling that the movement had probably come into India from the North West, at a time preceding the so-called "Aryan" invasion, and that cultural development was not a steady and uniform evolution from one stage to another. Dr. Venkataramanayya remarked that the author had approached the matter entirely from the Dravidian point of view and felt that other facts also called for explanation. The Ramayana distinguishes between two parts of South India, one inhabited by Rakshasas and another further South inhabited by monkeys who spoke and acted like humans, the latter including a place that had been identified with Hampi in the Bellary District. If the Dravidians were autochthonous, must not these Rakshasas and monkeys have been Dravidians? Mr. T. G. Aravamuthan thought that other sources of information needed to be considered. Lanka was occupied by Rakshasas, of whom the chieftain was well versed in Aryan learning. If so, how could Rama be regarded as the earliest carrier of Aryan culture to the South? And there seemed to him to be nothing distinctive in the environmental classification of cultures to which reference had been made, since it resembled the earliest Athenian classification. Caste, though not mentioned in the available literature, might nevertheless have existed, for this early literature consisted of a series of anthologies containing excerpts to illustrate not culture but perhaps different types of metrical composition. He thought the participation of Tamil kings in the Mahabharata war very doubtful, references to them being very few and probably not contemporaneous. And even if the identifications were correct, it was quite as likely that the dynasties moved South at some period subsequent to that war, as that the southern kings travelled North to fight in it. Mr. R. N. Aingar suggested that this might be a suitable subject for the society or some section of it to take up for continuous special study and discussion, in view of its great interest and controversial nature. The chairman Professor F. E. Corley agreed that much more investigation was necessary and quoted the warning that an Aryan (or Dravidian) head was as meaningless as a brachycephalic dictionary. He thought there was much to be said for treating a particular culture as belonging to a particular geographical area ; but that did not solve the question of how it



got there. New discoveries sometimes resulted in the complete supersession of one mode of doing a thing by another, but by no means always, and though we may use trains, cars and even aeroplanes, bullock carts are still in use and so are our feet. Thus the simultaneity of different modes, does not preclude the possibility of there having been evolution. He thought that a wood culture could hardly exist without some tools of harder material with which to work the wood.

The racial tangle to which Prof. Corley drew attention is too well known to need recapitulation. I had occasion to refer to it in the course of an Address at the Rotary Club of Colombo on April 28, 1955, in these words: "In the early days of racial studies, certain physical characteristics were stigmatised as associated with inferior races as for example the black Negro, the yellowish Mongoloid while certain others were considered to be associated with the superior races as Nordics and Alpine. These preconceived notions and prejudices developed into the evils of racialism, which now and again disturb the peace of the world. A notable evil was the exploitation of the doctrine of Aryanism by the Germans during World War II."

"Max Muller, the most prominent of the 19th century linguistic scholars, introduced the concept of a unified or ethnically single race which he called, the Aryan. The Germans gave a political twist to the idea of an Aryan race and used it as a powerful weapon in their policy of exterminating the Jews. The repercussions of this concept of an Aryan race were so great that they spread all over the civilized world. Max Muller was so much alarmed that he disowned his own baby in these strong words: "I have declared again and again that when I say Aryan I mean neither blood nor bones nor hair nor skull. I mean simply those who speak an Aryan language. To me, an ethnologist who speaks of an Aryan race, Aryan blood, Aryan eyes and hair is as great a sinner as a linguist who speaks of a dolichocephalic dictionary or a brachy-cephalic grammar." But it was too late. The idea had struck deep roots and evoked strong views all over the East."

"With the Aryan race concept was contrasted the idea of what was called the Dravidian race equally erroneous as a racial

term. The name Dravida is the name of the people speaking a group of South Indian languages — Tamil, Malayalam, Kanarese and Telugu. Tamil is the oldest of this family and the parental language. The people who lived in the Dravidian-speaking country developed a homogeneous but complex culture which is the Tamil culture. The term Dravidian denoted a resident of Dravidadesa who spoke a Dravidian language. That is perfectly right. That does not give us a racial type. No racial distinction as Aryan or Dravidian is found in Indian literature."

"Classification by races has not prevented the mixing of peoples. There are no primary races today. Racial studies as such—dividing mankind on the basis of physical features, are largely receding in the background except for such studies in physical anthropology as are of interest to and have a direct bearing on the culture of the people. In fact, the two sets of studies cannot be treated in isolation. The two make for an inter-related study, as here in Ceylon where particular problems come up for investigation, such as the inter-blending of Europeans with the indigenous peoples, and of European contacts with the peoples of Ceylon."

There is a consensus of opinion among anthropologists that the application of the terms 'Aryan' and 'Dravidian' to signify racial categories should no longer muddle racial thinking. One of the recent utterances was at a meeting of the Social Sciences Association of Madras held on 30th January, 1964, when Dr. Milton Singer addressed the Association on "ANTHROPOLOGY AND STUDY OF INDIAN CIVILISATION." In the course of the address, the main trends of the problem were passed in review covering important problems awaiting anthropological researches including within their range 'the Aryan problem' still haunted by racial theories.

"An earlier pronouncement on the Aryo-Dravidian complex was by Prof. Arnold Toynbee at a Press Conference at the Press Club, Madras (*The Hindu*, January 12, 1957) in these words:

"What we see of dance and music in South India is a fusion of the Aryan and Dravidian cultures. The domination of Aryan culture stopped at the Southern borders of Orissa and Maharashtra

from whence the Aryan and Dravidian cultures intermingled. Accepting much of the North Indian culture, the Dravidian culture had exerted a strong counter-influence on it. What now obtained was a common Indian culture and the Aryan and Dravidian elements had happily intermingled.' ”

At this stage we may revert to the claims of Ramayana as an account of the Aryan colonisation of the South. As a cross-section of these studies, I may reproduce below some of the points that are at variance with this claim of Ramayana, as a chronicle of Aryan colonisation. A revaluation of the Ramayana in respect of its contents, scarcely bears out this claim. Except that it is an account of the triumph of Sri Rama over Ravana, the King of Lanka, there is nothing in the pages of the Ramayana that would sustain it as an account of the colonisation or of the settlement of the Aryans in the South or in Lanka. Rama's mission accomplished, he returned with Sita and Lakshmana to Ayodhya, leaving Vibhishana as King of Lanka in place of Ravana. Ravana himself was the son of a Saint, a Brahmin (Uttarakanda, Canto 9). Hanuman and Vali are of celestial descent. Hanuman was the son of Vayu, the Wind God, and Vali, the son of Indra (Balakanda, Canto 7). Ravana's only Rakshasa descent and Vali's Vanara descent are traceable to the Rakshasa mother of Ravana and the Vanara mother of Vali. In his domestic life Ravana observed the orthodox religious practices, as did his son, Indrajit. Vali performed the Sandhya Vantanam.

Hanuman on his first encounter with Rama spoke as a man of learning which surprised Rama. “Only a person well versed in the Vedas can speak thus. He seems to be a master of grammar. He has spoken much but without making a single mistake.”

“Though we can scarcely credit Ramayana as a chronicle of the Aryanisation of the South, we may rightly appreciate it as a contemporary account of the state of South of India and Ceylon of the days of Sri Rama. In the Deccan we gain an insight into a number of hermitages in the Dandakaranya and its environs and a host of tribes of Vanara descent and others. From what we see, these hermitages were there well before Rama's presence in the South. The hermitages have been ascribed to the Brahmana period allegorically presented in the

legends of Viswamitra cursing fifty of his sons to go beyond the Northern homes and go down to the South and live there mixed with the South Indian tribes. These tribes are believed to be the Andhras, Pulindas and Sabaras. The presumption is that the sons of Viswamitra were the pioneers of Aryan culture. Prominent too in the Aryanisation of the South is Sage Agastya, traditions which point to Agastya as a pioneer in the spread of Aryan culture to the South. Of significance too is the authorship ascribed to Agastya of the first work in Tamil. This would reveal Agastya as a link between the two main cultures of India, the Aryan and the Dravidian.”

So far, we have discussed the issues as they developed round the paper presented thirty years ago before the Archaeological Society of South India by Prof. V. R. R. Dikshitar. Let us now shift the focus of the study, co-related to researches in the past few years. In the words of Prof. T. B. Nair :<sup>1</sup> “The problem of Dravidian origin is first how to determine the original area of Dravidian speech in India and secondly how to define both the region and the relative date at which the Dravidian speakers entered the country.” An integrated approach has been brought to bear on the study based on a variety of sources, linguistic, anthropological and archaeological. In brief, these studies take us to a clearly formulated hypothesis that “the Dravidian speakers of India are to be considered immigrants from beyond India long before the Indo-Aryan speakers arrived, that in their advance from the North-West they left a trail behind them, a delta of Dravidian speech among others in the Brahui of Baluchistan which shows still so many traces of the old relationship with the Dravidian, though separated long from its cousins in the South. Another line of study has disclosed a large number of Dravidian loan words in the vocabulary of the Rg. Veda. These several findings support the theory that before the advent of the Indo-Aryan speakers, the Dravidians were in occupation of a considerable large area of the country including portions of North and North-West India. Dravidian influence has been found not only in the vocabulary of the Indo-Aryan but also in its grammatical structure.”

1 In his Sir William Meyer Lecture, Madras University, 1962.

A cultural study of these loan words in the Rg. Veda has led the students of the subject as Prof. Nair, to postulate that when the Indo-Aryan speakers first met the Dravidian speaking people in the Punjab, the latter were primarily agricultural in their economy. Based on the linguistic sub-stratum of the Mediterranean and pre-Mediterranean world, it has been shown that "the Dravidian is not an isolated linguistic group but the survivor of an incorporated and poly-synthetic family of pre-Mediterranean, pre-Hamito-Semitic languages which covered without a break a vast zone of the Near East some four or five thousand years ago. The unity of the family was shattered under the pressure of the Semites, the Indo-Aryans and many other people." The culture of the Dravidian speakers based on the words which are common today to Dravidian and to the Basque, has been pictured in these words :

"On their arrival in India, the Dravidians raised sheep, pigs and asses. They spun and wove wool and probably other kinds of fibre and had in their houses ducks and no doubt other domestic birds such as pigeons, doves and peacocks. They could also build their houses of wood. They named their towns and villages and they appear to have lived under local chiefs or kings. Their religion was based on agriculture with rites celebrating fertility. They believed in resurrection and in the eternal recurrence of life. They could till the land and they planted fruit trees though few in number; and it seems that stock-farming played a greater part than agriculture. There is little evidence that this civilisation was martial and there seems to have been no name for any instrument or weapon made of metal but pottery and viticulture, on the contrary, were known."

Yet another line of study centred round the Neolithic culture and the early Metal Age culture, both generally traced to the Near East. On the problem of the language in relation to race, though linguistic groups and race do not always coincide yet a co-related study has led to interesting conclusions expressed in these terms :—

"At present linguistic groups do not coincide with uniform racial groups and therefore it is not possible to relate any particular language group to any specific ethnic stock. Nevertheless, where a stable ethnic type in a linguistic group is also

a major ethnic type in that group, a not unwarranted inference would be that it was also its original ethnic type . . . . It is true that Dravidian is a linguistic group and this group taken as a whole does not coincide with any single ethnic type; but the principal element in the racial composition of the Dravidian-speakers of South India is the dolichocephalic 'Mediterranean' of Sewell and Guha."

A significant contribution to the subject is by J. T. Cornelius<sup>1</sup> who in the course of a learned paper entitled "THE PROBLEM OF THE DRAVIDIANS AND THE PEOPLES OF THE SEA" read before the Annual General Meeting of the Social Sciences Association of Madras, on the 26th March, 1965, co-related the Dravidian peoples to the distribution of the Mediterranean peoples, the Pelasgians, the Ligurians, the Iberian and the Egyptian, and along the North African Coast in Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Morocco, South East Spain, Portugal, South Italy and the Mediterranean and the Aegean Archipelago, Crete and the South West Coast of Asia Minor—collectively termed the 'Peoples of the Sea.' The data analysed covered a wide field ranging from religious beliefs to basic occupational and economic life. It was pointed out that a common system of religious belief animated the life of the ancient Mediterraneans as of the Dravidians, beliefs symbolised by the Axe, the Horn, the Stone or the Pillar, the Bull of the Ligurians and the Dolmens of the Iberians. On the material side, three basic occupations emerge, cattle breeding, farming and carpentry and wood work.

From the little that we have presented above, it will be obvious that the Dravidian problem is one that ever widens in its range and scope and grows more and more exciting and fascinating with the passage of years.

Finally, we have the views of the Ceylonese Committee on the Hindu Temporalities embodied in the Report on the Hindu Temporalities Ordinance, issued by the Ceylon Government in 1955, views generally bearing on the Aryanisation of the Tamils.

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1 Cornelius, J. T. : The Dravidian Question : Tamil Culture, Vol. III, No. 2.



Reflecting as it does the views of the Committee composed of prominent citizens of Ceylon, these observations are entitled to a measure of recognition :

“The Aryanisation of the Tamils appears to have been carried out, not as in North India by conquest, but by peaceable process of colonisation and progressive civilisation. During such process, Brahmans appear to have been imported from the North. The names by which the Brahmans are designated in Tamil,—Aiyar (Fathers or Instructors), Parippar (Overseers), Anthanar (Gracious Ones) tend to show that the Brahmans acquired their ascendancy by high spiritual character and intelligence. After the Aryanisation of the Dravidians was completed, the Chieftains who founded the Pandya, Chola and Chera were called Kshatriyas; merchants and titled Vellalas were sometimes called Vaisyas and the untitled Vellalas, Sudras; which titles were quite inappropriate as these castes did not exist among the Tamils; but often the entire mass of the Dravidians had been dubbed by the Brahmans as Sudras however respectable their position was. However, in recognition of the higher class among them, the appellation of “Sat Sudras” was given if they were vegetarians and conducted themselves well, and Asat Sudras to the rest. According to Agni Purnam, however, the off-spring of unions between twice-born fathers and Sudra mothers were regarded as Sat Sudras.

“The ancient Tamil society knew no caste system of the type of Varnashrama classification of the Smrithies of the Aryans. Scholars are of the opinion that the caste system, even among the Aryans, is a later development. Tholkappiyam, the oldest extant Tamil grammar, has grouped the Tamils according to the characteristics of the areas in which they lived and not according to their occupations. Untouchability as a social or religious institution was unknown among the ancient Tamils.”

“The ancient Aryans were divided in Rig Vedic times into ‘Janah’ or tribes and the Janah into Visah, *i.e.*, Cantons and Districts, the Visah into Gramas, the Gramas into Gosthis (or Vrajas), the Gosthis into Gotras and the Gotras into Kulas or Families. The people were divided into classes, and not castes, and each class was named after the work it had to perform.

“The word Brahmana, the regular name for a ‘man of the first caste’ says Prof. Macdonell, ‘is still rare in the Rig Veda, occurring only eight times, while Brahman, which simply means sage or officiating priest is found forty-six times.’ During the Vedic period all the classes performed the Vedic sacrifices, and subscribed to the orthodox Vedic faith. Those who did not perform any sacrifice or believe in the Vedic Gods were put down as Dasas. These Dasas were later grouped as the Sudra class. Whether the Dasas were Aryans or non-Aryans, is still an unsolved problem. Some scholars are of the opinion that the Dasas were Aryans who gave up sacrifices and Vedic form of worship; others are of the opinion that they were the aborigines whom the Aryans encountered in their advance into India. Even in later times when non-Aryan social groups entered the Aryan social order accepting their Scriptures and their religious worship, such groups formed a new caste as it were and their Gods were included in the main Hindu Pantheon as secondary Deities. The Tamils were also such a racial group who embraced the Aryan social order. But unlike the other groups they have contributed a good deal to modern Hinduism. The religious culture of the Tamils gradually influenced the Aryans and modern Hinduism is a synthesis of both cultures. The Aryans gave up the Vedic form of religious worship and took to temple worship. The agamas are the result of this great synthesis.”

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