

Cultural minorities

THEIR GROWTH, ACHIEVEMENTS & RELEVANCE TODAY

OF SRI LANKA

EDITED BY

E. Vijayalakshmi

Cultural Minorities of Sri Lanka
their growth, achievements and relevance today

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International Centre for Ethnic Studies

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Editor's Note

This book has its genesis in a workshop that was held on Oct.13, 1984 by the ICES (International Centre for Ethnic Studies). It was labeled 'Workshop on the Cultural Minorities of Sri Lanka' and saw representatives from all cultural minority groups of Sri Lanka presenting socio-historical and cultural perspectives on their respective communities.

Almost two decades later, Mr. Thambirajah of the ICES has taken the initiative to publish the profiles in the form of a book. The late Mr. Regi Siriwardena who had organized the workshop in 1984, selected five profiles from the original eight for this project.

Updating the profiles proved to be a daunting task since most of the authors had moved on. In some cases where it was not possible to access either the author or their kith and kin, I took the liberty of getting in touch with a prominent member of that community. In substance, the profiles have been left intact. They make fascinating reading as they give an insight into the numerically minor, yet vibrant communities of this country which go to make Sri Lanka truly cosmopolitan in nature. Additions have been made mostly in updating events.

In this connection, I would like to acknowledge the help of the following people: Mr Reggie Candappa who made available his excellent book, *History of Colombo Chetties*; Mr. M. A. Sourjah for updating the profile on the Malays; Mr F. R. Ragel for his valuable additions and comments on the Portuguese Burghers of Batticaloa; Mrs. Prabha Nagalingam for going through the profile on Malayalees with a fine toothcomb; and, Ms. Faraza Farooq, journalist, who supplied me with the article on Sri Lankan Parsis titled *Sri Lankan Parsis facing extinction?* that appeared in *The Sunday Times Plus* dated September 10, 2000.

My sincere thanks to Mr. Thambirajah for entrusting me with this task.

January 2005

E. Vijayalakshmi

The Colombo Chetties

some historical and social perspectives

Yasmin Tambiah

Introduction

Small cultural communities, with no stake in the mainstream politics of the country sometimes make a mark both for themselves and their adopted land. Their survival as a community often depends on their ability to adapt to and accommodate the dynamics and tensions of the macro-society, while maintaining their own identity. Alternatively or subsequently, these dynamics and tensions could cause these communities to assimilate themselves into the mainstream.

Both these have been the lot of the Colombo Chetties in Sri Lanka. This paper is an attempt to offer some historical and social perspectives on the community particularly its evolution, social significance, achievements, decline and resurrection.

History & Background

The *Setthi* or *Etti*, usually translated as ‘merchant’, has held a position of social significance in pre-modern India and Ceylon. Authorities on ancient Ceylon have pointed out that *Setthi* was an honorific title bestowed by the king on wealthy citizens,¹ which suggests recognition of their social and economic importance in the realm. Most of these citizens were bankers rather than merchants.² The chief of the *Sethis*, the *Setthinatha*, was a member of the Council of State³ (understandable, since bankers have constituted the financial backbone of kingdoms internationally).

¹ M.B.Ariyapala, 1956.

² *Ibid.*

³ Simon Casie Chetty.

In India, the *Tana Vaisiyas* (nobles involved in commerce), at first held the exclusive right to hold the honorific suffix of *Etti*⁴, which was also conferred by the Crown. It was subsequently extended to all those involved in commerce. '*Chetty*' is synonymous with *Settbi* and *Etti*.

The Colombo Chetties belong to the *Tana Vaisiya* caste.⁵ The *Tana Vaisiyas* are divided into seven sub-castes. There is every likelihood that the earliest ancestors of the Chetties inhabited northern and north-western India near Coorg and Benares and with others of the Hindu nobility were driven south by the conquests of Mohammed of Ghazni in the 11th century AD.⁶ They settled in places such as Negapatnam, Tanjore and Tinnevely and commenced trade with Ceylon from the Malabar and Coromandel coasts of South India. Perhaps the earliest mention of Chetties in textual sources is in the *Mahawansa* which records the arrival in Ceylon of the princes of Mallawa, accompanied by some Malabar Chetties who were given land by the king of Ceylon in return for their gifts.⁷ Other Chetties seem to have settled in Ceylon as far back as the 13th century,⁸ and held important offices at court.

The Chetties visited the island frequently in the interests of commerce in pre-colonial times and in all likelihood competed with Moorish and Arab merchants.⁹ Political upheaval in southern India and a famine in the early half of the seventeenth century caused the migration of those first Chetties, who in more recent times intended permanent settlement in Ceylon with an eye to protecting commercial interests.¹⁰ Casper Kasie-Setty (ancestor of the famous Simon Casie Chetty), who came to Ceylon in 1620 was among them.¹¹

⁴ M B Ariyapala.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Aserappa, 1930.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ K M de Silva, 1981.

¹⁰ Aserappa, 1930.

¹¹ *ibid.*

The community migrated to Ceylon in larger numbers during the Dutch and British periods. In the Dutch era some came to pursue trade, others were eminent physicians invited by the Dutch governors¹² and yet others came with appointments as shroffs and administrative officers of various concerns set up by the Dutch East India Company.¹³ Several obtained land either to build houses, or as 'accomodesans' rented from the government¹⁴ and in accordance with the classification of communities, occupied the Chetties' quarters in places like Chekku Street, Hill Street, Pickering's Road, Jampettah (former Muttukishna Street) and New Chetty Street in Colombo.¹⁵ They were accompanied by members of the various other castes that served them such as barbers and washermen. It is said that whenever a Colombo Chetty sold land in these areas, it was usually bought by another Chetty. And nearly all of them lived (and still live), in their own houses.¹⁶ Besides Colombo, the Chetties settled in Galle, Calpenty, Puttalam, Chilaw, Negombo, Toppu, Peheliyagoda, Kandy, Hettipola, Kurunegala, Naval, Kellamthurai, Vaddukodai, Araly, Jaffna, Batticaloa and Trincomalee.¹⁷

Among the eminent Chetties of this period may be numbered Michael Jurie Ondache (Ondaatje) (d.1714), a celebrated physician to the first Dutch governor and founder of the family that bears his name; Don Simon de Melho (d.1758) (Chief Tamil Mudaliyar of the Governor's Gate and head of the Protestant Chetties, who was attached to the personal staff of ten Dutch Governors);¹⁸ Rev. Philip de Melho (1723-1790) (biblical translator, linguist, poet who translated the Old and New Testaments from the original languages into Tamil);¹⁹ Simon de Rosairo (Administrator of Public Affairs and chief landholder in Calpenty who on instructions from the

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ Mr. & Mrs. Joe A. Perumal in conversation: Oct. 3, 1984.

¹⁷ Aserappa.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ *ibid.*

Dutch governor handed over the keys of the Calpentyn fort to the British);²⁰ and Dr. Quint Jurgen Ondaatjie (d.1818) (A.L.M. Ph.D., J.U.D., appointed to the Imperial Council of Prizes by Napoleon I in 1811 and named a High Court Justice of the Netherlands in 1814).²¹ There were also several educationists, clergymen and some prominent landowners in the Dutch period.²²

A substantial number of Chetties came from India to Ceylon as officials when the island was administered under the Madras Presidency in the late 18th century and very early 19th century.²³ In 1833, most of the 'Tamils' in Colombo were Chetties.²⁴ They rose into prominence as a wealthy, cultural community under the British administration and occupied positions of trust and responsibility in several professional spheres. The Chetties were legislators, lawyers, shroffs, clergymen, scholars and doctors of medicine, besides pursuing their more traditional occupations in commerce and landholding.

One of the most distinguished Chetties of this period was Simon Casie Chetty (1807-1860), often referred to as Ceylon's first civil servant. He was a scholar and prolific author besides being a judge and a member of the legislative council. He served the government for years, during which he also established himself as a distinguished man of letters. In 1831, Simon Casie Chetty was created a corresponding member of the Royal Asiatic Society (R.A.S.), London, by its President, Sir Alexander Johnston, after he presented some articles, which included the *Classification of Tamil Castes*, and the *Origin and History of the Mukkuvas in the District of Puttalam*.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.*

²² For an exhaustive list of Chetties who held positions of distinction under Dutch & British rule (upto 1930) see Aserappa.

²³ H W Tambiah, 1954.

²⁴ Simon Casie Chetty, 1834. (The quotation marks on the word Tamil are my own insertion. It denotes the cultural similarities between the Chetties and the Tamils, rather than the Chetties' ethnic origins. (See section on "cultural identity").

When the Colombo branch of the R.A.S. was formed in 1845, Casie Chetty was one of its earliest members and in the course of his membership read about ten papers covering a variety of topics. Casie Chetty's published works include the Ceylon Gazetteer (1833), the Tamil Plutarch, and an Anthology of Tamil Poetry. Among his unpublished works are an English and Tamil lexicon, a Sanskrit and Tamil dictionary, and the Hindu System of Natural History. He also ran a Tamil newspaper *Udavaditya* (Rising Sun), for about a year and a half. It was primarily literary in character.

Other distinguished personalities of this period include Dr. Philip Sebastian Brito²⁵ (1856-1906), a pioneer in medicine remembered for his attempts to harmonise the Eastern and Western systems of medicine, and Lawrie Muttukrishna and his sister Violet who founded the Polytechnic Institute in 1901 for teaching stenography and typewriting when the typewriter was first introduced to local business houses and government offices.

The above-mentioned personalities typify the versatility and high level of intellectual activity among the Colombo Chetty community in the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries.

Social Perspectives on the Community

The Colombo Chetties have been classified as Tamils at various points in their evolution as a community. The British grouped them with the Ceylon Tamils while labeling as 'Malabars' all Tamil-speaking people, both indigenous Tamils and those from the Malabar and Coromandel coasts who were culturally close to the Tamils (i.e. the Chetties). Simon Casie Chetty has pointed out that the use of this term to describe the Tamils (and those culturally close to them) was inaccurate.²⁶ It is likely that in the instances that the Chetties refer to themselves as Tamils, they are in fact invoking a cultural heritage common to both the Tamils and themselves.

²⁵ Arnold Wright, 1907.

²⁶ Simon Casie Chetty, 1834.

In 1983, the Sri Lankan Chetty Association made representations to the government and submitted a historical account of the community written by its general-secretary Shirley Pulle Tissera.²⁷ Many meetings and discussions later, a government circular issued on Jan 14, 1984, granted official recognition of the Colombo Chetty community as a distinct ethnic group.

(Following this, much later, on Oct 31, 1989, the then President of Sri Lanka, J.R. Jayawardene issued a directive to enumerate the Chetty community as a separate ethnic group from the Tamils, in the national census).²⁸

Language

The Colombo Chetties consider Tamil their 'mother tongue'. It is entirely possible that during their long sojourn in South India, they first learned the Tamil language to facilitate commerce between the indigenous and immigrant populations of South India and themselves and subsequently imbibed the culture that the Tamil language had already given expression to (it is interesting to speculate on what the former language of the Chetties would have been if Tamil was an acquired language). Consequently, some of the great Tamil scholars and Hindu saints of old were Chetties, like Perumal and Nayanar.²⁹

Aptitude for languages seems to have been a characteristic of the Chetty community, perhaps dictated by both professional necessity and intellectual curiosity. Simon Casie Chetty was familiar with eight languages; Philip de Melho with about six; several others were competent in both Tamil and the official language of the imperialist powers as evidenced by the considerable number of Chetties employed as interpreters and other important officials in colonial administration.

In fact, some hold linguistic aptitude of the Chetties partly responsible for the decline of their cultural identity, for, the language

²⁷ Desabandu Reggie Candappa, 2000.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ H W Tambiah, 1954.

in usage had often been learnt at the expense of the mother tongue. English, rather than Tamil even came to be the language spoken at home and initially, only a few conscientious Chetties had their children educated in the Tamil language. Today, both through necessity and in the interests of integration, most of the Chetty youth are educated in Sinhalese.

Customary Law & Religion

Many of the customary laws of the Colombo Chetties were very similar to the Hindu ones with some variations, especially with regard to inheritance. This is understandable since the Chetties were once Hindus, and it is possible that even after Christianization, the laws were adhered to as cultural traditions. In more recent times, it was made clear in the civil courts that the Chetties, although some of them were residents of Jaffna, were not governed by the *Thesawalamai* in the realm of personal law.³⁰

As mentioned, the Colombo Chetties were originally Hindus. Aserappa records the conversion of several founders of Chetty families and their descendants, to Roman Catholicism or Protestantism. Sir Alexander Johnston, while collecting his data on customs and laws in 1807, makes several references to 'heathen customs' practised by the Chetties. However, it does not automatically follow that hence in the early nineteenth century, as Sir Johnston implies, the majority of Chetties were Hindus.

Customs based on religion are often clung to even after the adherents have converted to a different belief system (the tying of the *thali* chain by Christian Tamils and Chetties is an example of this contradiction; they christianize a Hindu tradition by tying the *thali* during the wedding Mass). Furthermore, the notion of a 'majority of Hindu Chetties' would be at odds with the large number of Chetties who worked for the colonial administration, which traditionally preferred to employ Christians.

³⁰ Chief Justice Wood Renton, 1917, New Law Reports.

Both genuine conviction and educational, professional, and commercial expediency may have induced several of the Chetties to convert to Christianity. Today, 75% of the Chetties are Roman Catholics while the rest are Anglicans. Of those who identify themselves as Chetties, none seem to be Hindus.

The community's Church organization incorporates a social structure within a religious one. Both Sir Alexander Johnston and Aserappa³¹ refer to the Hindu or Christian Head of the Chetties – the *setthi-talamal* who was responsible for the general reputation and social well being of the community. In more recent times, among the Roman Catholic Chetties, the office of Head or *Muppu*³² was closely aligned with the community's church. The *Muppu* was usually the wealthiest member of the group and the financier of the church: he was directly responsible to the Archbishop. His office was hereditary and he was consulted on a number of personal and communal issues.

Caste, Class and Intermarriage

The Colombo Chetties as mentioned earlier belong to the *Tana Vaisiya* caste and today perceive themselves as members of the middle class. There are no stratifications with respect to class within the community: the stratification into the seven sub-castes of *Tana Vaisyas* seems to have come into play only when marriages within the community were considered. According to members of the community, occupation, and consequently the amount of familial wealth were instrumental in determining the sub-caste. The caste with which the entire Chetty community identified was much more an issue and determining factor in the spheres of employment in the colonial administration and intermarriage with the two major communities.

The Chetties were respected both as a community (by virtue of their learning, high culture and wealth) and for their position in the

³¹ Aserappa, 1930.

³² Mr. & Mrs Perumal. (The office of the "*Muppu*" persists).

caste hierarchy. The foreign administrators who made use of hierarchical systems inherent in the social structures of the colonies for their administrative purposes, fully utilized this factor. For instance, as shroffs in banks, the Chetties were able to advise their employers as to whom credit facilities could be extended³³, since they were familiar with prospective investors. Thus, they played a kind of 'middle person' role. The Chetties were also *adigars*, district and *kachcheri mudaliyars*, and interpreters.

Similar factors were important in the intermarriage of the Chetties with other communities. The four main settlements of the Chetties were in Colombo, Puttalam, Galle and Kandy areas. At the outset, several Colombo Chetties married within their community. In the pre-British era, some Chetties, especially those resident in Colombo, intermarried with the Portuguese and the Dutch who encouraged these attempts.³⁴ In the case of the Portuguese particularly, it was part of their imperialist policy to encourage such unions in order to 'establish firmly the affinity between Portugal and her dependencies'.³⁵

Professional and economic expediency probably dictated marriage between the Chetties and the Dutch. In these instances then, intermarriage occurred more in a class rather than a caste context. Matters were slightly different with regard to the Sinhalese and Tamils. The Chetties in Puttalam married into the *Vellala* caste in Jaffna, and those in Colombo, Kandy and Galle into the *Govi* caste of the area. For the *Vellalas* to marry into the *Tana Vaisiya* caste, and the *Govis* to marry into the *Welende* was a rise in caste rank, but given the conservatism of the Sinhalese at marrying into a different community, especially one that seemed culturally aligned with the Tamils, this gives cause for speculation. There may have been two reasons; one, the high reputation of the Chetties in various fields and their social status made it desirable for the Sinhalese to marry into the community. And two, the Chetties who initially contracted

³³ Mr.Mervyn Casie Chetty, in conversation: Aug. 25, 1984.

³⁴ Aserappa, 1930.

³⁵ *ibid.*

marriages outside the community, were either less wealthy or in straitened circumstances. But the reputation of the community made marriage alliances desirable for the Sinhalese even in such circumstances.

The Chetties usually contracted most of their inter-communal marriages with the elite of the two communities. (For instance, the Alles's and De Costas of Galle intermarried with the Abeysunderas).³⁶ Intermarriage may have also served social stability and hence more effective commerce for the Chetties. Hence, just as the Sinhalese married into the Chetty community, so did the Chetties desire alliances with the majority Sinhalese community. Another reason could have been the great disparity in the numbers between males and females in the Chetty community. E.g, census of 1871 shows that out of a total of 3,114 Chetties, 2302 were male and only 812 were female.

Contributions of the community

It is difficult to ascertain what the Colombo Chetty community as a whole has contributed to Sri Lankan society, but if the contributions of the community may be deemed the total of individual contributions then indeed there are a remarkable number of achievements to list for such a small community.

The Chetties have contributed substantially in the intellectual realm. Simon Casie Chetty has often been regarded a very reliable source of empirical information. De Melho translated both biblical testaments into Tamil. John J.Casie Chetty's translation of Voet's Roman Dutch Law into English is considered a distinct contribution to the legal literature of Ceylon. Antony Aserappa lists several other publications by individuals in the community ranging from botany to legal studies.³⁷

The Chetties have claimed several 'firsts' for Ceylon. Dr. Peter Philip Jurgen Quint Ondaatje was the first Asian to figure in modern

³⁶ Mr.Mervyn Casie Chetty.

³⁷ Aserappa, 1930.

European history: Rev. Philip de Melho was the first Ceylonese to be admitted to the Christian ministry; Henry Francis Muttukrishna³⁸ was the first Tamil Barrister in Asia; Dr. William Charles Ondaatje³⁹ was the first Ceylonese director of the Botanical Gardens; Dr. Simon de Melho Aserappa⁴⁰ was the first Ceylonese who obtained the degree of Doctor of Medicine from a British University; John J Casie Chetty⁴¹ was the first Bachelor of Civil Laws (Oxford) in Asia; and Arthur L R Aserappa⁴² was the first Ceylonese who won the Cambridge Junior Exhibition.

Colombo Chetties Today

Several in the Chetty community seem to have so inter-married with the major groups that they have lost their identity as Chetties. They now regard themselves as either Sinhalese or Tamils. This process has been facilitated by the ability to change those names adopted by the Chetties at conversion (usually names of their Portuguese and Dutch patrons). Hence, 'Fernandopulle' and 'Rodrigopulle' became "Fernando" and "Rodrigo", respectively: the "pulle" suffix denoted a Chetty. Today, it is estimated that the Colombo Chetties number about 150,000 in the island.⁴³

The process of name changing may have progressively accelerated in the post-1956, post-1977 and post-1983 era when the Chetties were grouped with the Ceylon Tamils. Often on birth certificates, the Chetties were asked to insert 'Ceylon Tamil' against 'Race'. Given the sentiments of the majority Sinhalese community at that time this was far from an ideal state of existence for the Chetties.

The Chetties have dabbled in politics in recent times. A prominent member of the community, Jeyaraj Fernandopulle, who was earlier the Deputy Minister for Finance, became the Deputy Minister of

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ Reggie Candappa, 2000.

Planning & Ethnic Affairs in 1994 under the People's Alliance government. Another Colombo Chetty, Richie Fernandopulle, was the Chairman of the North-Western Provincial Council between 1988 and 1993, while Neil Fernandopulle is a sitting member of the Western Provincial Council since its inception.

Recent generations of Chetties, particularly those in Colombo, have gone into the professions of law, medicine, accountancy and the Roman Catholic priesthood, while some hold positions of considerable responsibility in banks and government concerns.

In the world of literature, Michael Ondaatje⁴⁴ made a huge impact with his book *The English Patient*, which won the coveted booker prize for literature. Michael Ondaatje was born in Sri Lanka and moved to Canada in 1962. Mervyn Casie Chetty, the grandson of Simon Casie Chetty is a reputed poet and lawyer.

Reggie Candappa is regarded the doyen of advertising in Sri Lanka, and the Founder-Chairman of Grant Advertising established in 1958. In 1997, he was conferred one of the highest national honours *Desabandu* by the President of Sri Lanka for his contribution to the world of media and advertising.

In the world of business, the name of Dr Philip Christopher Ondaatje is synonymous with philanthropy and business acumen. Dr Christopher Ondaatje, who was born in Kandy and graduated from the London School of Economics, founded the McCutcheon & Company Limited in 1970. He is also inventor of the sliding scale convertible debenture, one of the esoteric devices in the investment world. He was also a member of Canada's Bob-Sled team that won a gold medal in the 1964 Olympics. He was awarded the Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in the Queen's birthday honour list in June 2000.

Conclusion

The erudite scholar Anthony F Aserappa wrote in his book, *A Short History of The Ceylon Colombo Chetty Community*, "If the communities preserve their own traditions and are prepared to put into the

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

common stock the good which they have inherited from their ancestors, there is every hope that we may build up here in Ceylon, a happy and united Ceylon...". This, in a way, also sums up the attitude of the Colombo Chetties today.

(The editor acknowledges the help of Desabandu Reggie Candappa, President, Colombo Chetty Association of Sri Lanka, for making available the book 'History of the Colombo Chetties', a comprehensive historical and social account of the community, edited and compiled by him).

The Portuguese and The Dutch Burghers

an overview

Percy Colin-Thome & F R Ragel

Introduction

One of the great shifts in world power and economic strength took place between 1450 and 1700. Before that, western Europe had been of little consequence in the affairs of the world. In this era, Portugal and Holland, two small European countries had an enormous impact on world history by virtue of the skills of their navigators, ship builders and gunners supported by their traders, administrators and clergy.

History & Background

Portuguese Conquest

In September 1500, an expedition under Pedralvares Cabral which had left Portugal the previous March arrived at Calicut. This was perhaps the first trading mission to come to India from the West. In November 1502, Vasco da Gama appeared at Cochin. These incursions were the prelude to the presence of Portuguese armadas in the Malabar waters in the early 16th century, which compelled the Moors engaged in the spice trade to create a new route for themselves between Ceylon and the Maldives.

On hearing of this new trade route, the Viceroy Dom Francisco de Almeida decided to send his son Don Lourenço to investigate the new route as well as to report on Ceylon and the Maldives, which were of such importance for their cinnamon and coir trade. Dom Lourenço was carried by currents and arrived in Galle in 1505. He sailed away after a brief stay there.

It was not until 1518 that the Portuguese established a foothold in the island. Lopo Soares d'Albergaria arrived at Galle with a powerful fleet, and a month later sailed for Colombo and landed there after overcoming a short resistance. A fort was built and Portuguese power was gradually consolidated and extended along the coastal areas. The drive behind these risky journeys to the Far East, in frail boats and through perilous seas, has been described by various writers. Joso Ribeiro in his book *Ceilao* describes it well:¹

“The king who allowed us to enter the island was the King of Cotta, and as I have already stated he was styled Emperor. Almost all his territory which stretched from Chilao to two miles beyond the Temple of Tanavare were cinnamon jungles; these are so dense that a man cannot walk through them (more than) a stone's throw. In shape the leaves of the cinnamon resemble those of the plantane in that they have three ribs, and in texture the laurel; when crushed between the fingers their smell is as of the best cloves of Rochella. The trees are not very tall for they do not exceed two bracas at the most, and as there is rain here daily they do not shed their leaves, and they frequently bear in the year two crops of fruit similar to the laurel berry; when this falls on the ground it immediately starts growing in consequence of the heat and moisture, and it is for this reason that the inhabitants have a law that they should clear their roads frequently; unless they do so they would be overgrown with forest in one year. Nonetheless their roads are only broad enough to admit one person going at a time, and therefore our armies could not march except in single file. Precious stones are also found in great abundance in the kingdoms of Ceitavaca, Dinavaca, Candia, Uva and Cotta, within a circumference of sixty-seven leagues. Here all the

¹ Joso Ribeiro, 1909.

valleys and mountains are full of them and they are obtained with little trouble; such as rubies, the finest that can be found anywhere within our discoveries, all in separate crystals; sapphires, topazes, (some of them of extraordinary size), cat's eyes, (some have been found worth 20,000 cruzados), garnets, beryls, jacinths, tourmalines, and various others of which they make no account, as they are the stones with which the river beds are furnished. There is an abundance of cardamoms in the Kingdom of Candia and they are of such a great size that six of the Cananor kind do not equal one of the Candian; throughout the island there is plenty of Brazil wood, which is called Sapan in India where it fetches a high price. Every year there is exported from the kingdom of Cotta up to a thousand champanas of areca; (a champana is like a sumaca of forty tons) for this article is in great demand over the whole of India. There are also a large number of elephants and much pepper both of which rank among the best in the East. The earth yields much iron and also two kinds of resin; the varieties of timber are so numerous that the choice of them will cause confusion; and there are several other products which I shall for greater clearness describe each in its own place."

In addition to its riches, the strategic value of Ceylon in relation to the Indian peninsula became known in Portuguese times. As early as 1614, a Portuguese captain warned Phillip III of Portugal that Ceylon was the 'key to all India'. He concluded a long memorial on the subject by saying, "If your Majesty loses Ceylon, we can say we have lost all India and its commerce – which may God prevent!"² In 1770, Abbe Reynal wrote about Ceylon's 'excellent cinnamon' and 'richest Pearl Fishery of the East'. He further described the

² G.D. Winius.

island by saying, "its ports were the best in India, and its geographical position surpassed all those extraordinary advantages. It is the center of the East, the passage which conducts to the most wealthy regions. Numerous squadrons sent forth from its various harbours would have commanded the respect of all Asia, and their vessels cruising in the neighbouring seas would easily have intercepted the navigation of other powers".³

Indeed, even after Ceylon was actually lost, the memory was so distressing to the Portuguese that Frei Fernao de Queiroz began his history of the island by saying, "Of all the great and lamentable losses and ruins of the Portuguese State in the East Indies, the greatest and most painful was the Island of Ceylon".⁴

Since the administration of Alfonso de Albuquerque in India (1509-1515), the Portuguese followed a policy of assimilation by promoting marriages between the Portuguese and Indian women. His troops married women of good caste, who, moreover, had first been baptized. Unlike the Dutch and the British who were mainly birds of passage, the Portuguese intended to settle permanently in the colonies. The localities where the Portuguese were permitted to trade was looked upon by them from the first as destined to become colonies of their 'Most Christian King'. Where they landed, they meant to stay. They brought no women with them in their crowded flimsy crafts in which they struggled past the Cape of Storms, afterwards named the Cape of Good Hope, until they anchored off Indian, Ceylonese and Sumatran ports. A high death rate from malaria, dysentery and other tropical diseases were other hazards, which discouraged women from venturing with their men to the East. It was inevitable therefore, that the Portuguese took to themselves wives from the places where they settled. In Ceylon, the Portuguese Burghers are the descendants of the intermarriages between the Portuguese and the Sinhalese and Tamils in the coastal areas.

The fortunes of this community prospered so long as Portuguese power prevailed in the island. They were attached to the courts of

³ Abbe Reynal, 1770.

⁴ Queirez.

justice apart from being in administration and trade. The Portuguese retained the old Sinhalese administrative organization which prevailed in *disavas* and *kerales*, modified and altered to suit the needs of the conquerors.⁵ In addition to the territorial divisions under officials whose functions were political or military, there were other departments concerned with the collection of revenues or utilization of labour services, which employed the *topazes*. However, most of the higher offices were held by Portuguese. All the inhabitants were enlisted into militia companies, some being exclusively Portuguese, while others were heterogenous companies consisting of descendants of Portuguese-native marriages, Sinhalese, Tamils and *Kaffirs*, besides the Portuguese themselves.

With the capitulation of Colombo to the Dutch on May 10, 1656, the fortunes of the Portuguese community plummeted. The trade rivalry and the fanatical religious quarrels between the Portuguese and the Dutch were transported from Europe to the tropics and inflicted on a defenseless people. The Dutch Calvinists matched the fanaticism of the Roman Catholics with their own brand of fanaticism. Under the Batavin Code of 1642, no other religion was to be "exercised, much less taught or propagated either secretly or publicly, than the Reformed Christian Religion as it is taught in the public churches of the Netherlands." The punishment for violating the law was confiscation of property and according to circumstances, "put in chains, expelled from the country or receive a punishment involving limb or life." The severity of these laws was however directed not so much against other religions as against Catholicism, the reason for this opposition being largely political.⁶

A large number of Catholic churches and schools were taken over by the Reformed Church, while in the sphere of trade, shop keeping and other employments, Protestants were given preference to others. Abandoned by the Portuguese, the descendants of the Portuguese-Sinhalese marriages who remained fervent Roman Catholics, became victims of the Dutch persecution. At the same time, they were despised by the Sinhalese who associated them with the catalogue

⁵ C.R.de Silva, 1972.

⁶ Phillipus Baldaeus, 1958-9.

of atrocities of the *conquistadores*, to whom the service of God and Mammon was inextricably interwoven.

The Portuguese Burghers of Batticaloa

Right in the heart of Batticaloa is a little bit of Portugal. In this pleasantly odd quarter, nestling at the foot of the 'Singing Fish Bridge' and flanking the lagoon live the descendants of the Portuguese Burghers of the 16th century.

About the 15th century, Batticaloa district formed part of the Kandyan Kingdom, when the Sinhala kings held away, and Batticaloa was known as 'Puliyanduwa' though it also did have another name – "Mada Kalapuwa". The Portuguese who came in gave this town a new name 'Batecalou' and this name was changed to 'Batticalou' by the Dutch and to 'Batticaloa' by the British who followed the Dutch. It is also claimed that the district grew a lot of rice which they called "Bate", hence the Portuguese called the Batticaloa District, 'the Kingdom of Rice'. The British anglicized Batecalou to Batticaloa and called it the 'Granary of the East'.

History reveals that Batticaloa was taken by the Portuguese in the year 1622 and retained as part of their occupied territory until 1639 when the Dutch made themselves masters of this district. Since then, as already mentioned, the descendants of the Portuguese-Sinhalese marriages were reduced to a state of penury, a situation from which the majority of this community has never completely recovered, up to the present day.

Although the Portuguese have carefully maintained the traditions and customs of their ancestors, it must be admitted that today their customs are a quaint mixture of both East and West. The members of the community have very carefully maintained their traditional *caffrinha* dance and the Lancers' dance. No wedding or even a smaller social function like a birthday party or coming-of-age function is complete without a dance and a meal together. The traditional custom of celebrating a wedding for four days is generally maintained.

This community has also not forgotten the Portuguese language. The Portuguese spoken by them has been described as Creole

Portuguese. Ian R. Smith in his books has stated that the Portuguese spoken today has incorporated some distinctive features of the local Batticaloa Tamil dialect. In his book, *Convergence in South Asia: A Creole Example*, Smith says, "The initial Indo-Portuguese trade language was brought to Ceylon from Goa, but in the linguistic environment of the island, it underwent substantial structural convergence with the local languages. Despite the long and tenacious history of the Creole Portuguese speech in the island, Batticaloa harbours the only significant concentration of Creole speakers now in Sri Lanka and their fluency is being strongly threatened by the local emphasis on Tamil."

The majority of the Portuguese descendants are craftsmen. Their skill at trades of all kinds cannot be disputed. Among these mechanically gifted people are found expert blacksmiths, gunsmiths, master carpenters, tailors, printers, painters and mechanics.

Till recent times, the only owners of printing presses in Batticaloa have all been Burghers. Even in the printing press managed by the Catholic clergy, the master printers and binders were all of Portuguese origin. It is an undeniable fact that Batticaloa's best painter and block maker was the late Clarence Hendreck, also a delightful musician. He was a violinist without whom no Burgher function was complete. Another of the talented and experienced printers was the late Peter Claver Ragel. He had been in-charge of the destinies of the Catholic Press until he started a printing business of his own in the year 1946.

There are many Master tailors among the community of the Portuguese. Though only a few can afford to maintain tailoring shops or purchase modern machines, others, mostly young girls, work in the dressmaking shops owned by Muslims in Kattankudy and even in Colombo.

This community, to the present day, remains devoutly Roman Catholic, which underlines Dr. S. Arasaratnam's comments that "the Dutch were not replacing a decadent and inactive church, as they had replaced a declining political power. On the contrary, they saw that the Catholic Church was a living entity and had penetrated the

life of the country with great intensity in certain parts of the country.”⁷

The Catholic Church at the sand bar dedicated to the Lady of Voyage, is believed to have been constructed by the Portuguese. There is also a recent construction of a beautiful church in the heart of ‘Little Portugal’ dedicated to the warrior saint Sebastian. Rev.Fr.Francis Xavier Mayer of New Orleans who was the chief architect made good use of the talents of the people to set up this Singing Fish shaped church.

Till quite recently, the Diocese of Trinco-Batticaloa had a good percentage of Burgher priests. Even today, the Vicar General is Very Rev. Father Joseph De Koning, a veteran priest. Rev.Fathers Theophilus Ragel and Joe Dias are missionaries deployed in the various parishes. There are also many Jesuit priests from among the members of the community.

The local Burgher Union has a library of Portuguese books in their possession. These books donated by the embassies from time to time provide light reading for some of the interested members of the community. However, a great majority of the population cannot read or write the language. The Batticaloa Burgher Union conducts all its meetings in the spoken Portuguese language. Minutes are kept in the language and prayers, too, are recited in the same language. The community has played an active role in local politics. The late M C Pieters had been a member of the local body almost half a century ago. His period was brief. But he was followed by F R Ragel who had not only been a member of the Urban Council in 1963 and its Vice Chairman, but had also been Deputy Mayor of Batticaloa for a full period of the Municipal Council of 1970. The late E. J. Barthelot was also a member of the Urban Council and its Vice Chairman for a very brief period.

The language policy of the government created dilemmas for the community. Since no provision was made for English medium education in Batticaloa, the Burgher parents had to necessarily send their children to either tamil or sinhala medium schools. Most parents in Batticaloa opted for sinhala medium hoping that it would enhance employment opportunities, especially in the government

⁷ S. Arasaratnam.

sectors. Unfortunately, the ethnic tension following the ethnic clashes in Colombo and other cities, made the Sinhala teachers engaged in Sinhala schools in Batticaloa flee, leaving the children who had opted to learn in the Sinhala medium high and dry. The Sinhala Maha Vidyalaya was closed down and St Michael's College and St Cecilia's Convent catered to the Sinhala students, but these two school too, later decided to close up the Sinhala stream.

Of course, the parents had the option of sending their children to more affluent cities like Colombo or Kandy, perhaps, to give their children an education of their choice. But how many of the parents could have afforded this?

What followed was pathetic. These children of Portuguese Burghers who either spoke Portuguese or English at home, were necessarily admitted to these local schools where education was either in the Sinhala or Tamil medium. These children had to learn one of these languages and compete with those whose mother tongue was one of the national languages. Universities thus became out of bounds for these children. Job opportunities were nil, for they had not only to compete with the Tamil and Sinhala children, but also have had the need to make the necessary entries in the 'Race' column.

Despite these drawbacks, the community has made contributions to the society. The late Norbert Ragel was instrumental in forming over twenty conferences of St. Vincent de Paul Society in the district and worked for the upliftment of the poor. The home for the mentally retarded children for which he laboured night and day is nearing completion at Sainurukondan, a village two miles north of Batticaloa.

Regis Ragel was the secretary of the Old Boys' Association of the leading college for over fifteen years. He had been the secretary of the District Soccer Association, the Schools Athletic Association and a score of other welfare associations.

The special problems of the community are varied. Although there is a Burgher Union to cater to the social and intellectual needs of the population, yet there are other urgent needs of the group. There are too many school dropouts in the community. This early drop out is due to more than one reason. While some of the children find it difficult to cope with work in school, others are compelled

for economic reasons to leave school early and help their fathers in the crafts. Very often the income of the father is hardly enough to maintain the family of sometimes six to eight members. Hence, it becomes imperative that the elder boys leave school to earn a living. It was the intention of the Burgher Union to help these drop outs with some form of technical training. Although they possessed the basic technical knowledge, it was necessary that they had to be given a more specialist training in order to be able to compete with others who have now mastered the trades.

It was at this stage that the Union turned to Cebemo of Holland for financial assistance to purchase a piece of land and put up a multi-purpose building. The members lacked a meeting hall, or community hall, a library, a recreation room and above all a workshop to train the young boys and girls in modern crafts. The organization very generously made available funds which were just enough to purchase the land and put up one storey, which houses the meeting hall, library and Community Hall. The second floor which was really intended to provide facilities for a workshop could not be accomplished for want of funds.

For centuries, the Burgher population of Batticaloa have lived and died amidst the Batticaloa Tamil and Muslim population. But they still remain a distinct group, small but stubbornly separate. They love and respect the indigenous population, but they very seldom merge. Of course, there are rare instances of inter marriage. Some boys and girls have married from the Tamil and Sinhala population and sometimes even Muslim and Malay families.

There may be more than one reason why they do not wish to lose their identity as Burghers. Quite a number of them are keen on preserving their language and culture. No wedding or funeral is complete without the traditional customs being followed. At Christmas time or during happy occasions like a wedding or a birthday party, all members of the entire clan come together and enjoy themselves with food and dancing to a background of old Portuguese songs and ballads set to spritely tunes. Music is in their blood. There is many an old Portuguese fiddler who can set one's feet a tapping with a heady tune or move one to tears with a well-

beloved tune of unrequited love. The youngsters are experts on drums of all kinds and can beat out an intoxicating rhythm on even biscuit tins. The local folk flock to watch the Portuguese weddings merely to enjoy the *caffrinha* music and dancing. Almost the entire community get together on such occasions and the onlooker is easily convinced of the amity and solidarity that prevail among them.

Probably, the Portuguese descendants feel that they are a small minority and cannot afford to mix, lose their identity and pave the way for the eventual extinction of the community that had preserved itself for such a long time.

At the invitation of the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute, our group of musicians and dancers performed in Colombo for the *sawasangeetha* programme quite recently. The numerous letters of appreciation received and the bouquets showered on the community by the members of the public through mass media is clearly an indication that the great majority of the indigenous population are happy about our existence in this country.

The peace-loving Portuguese population of Batticaloa faced various problems. A sizable population had to leave Batticaloa due to a host of problems. Some of them migrated to Canada and Australia in search of secure living and probably looking for greener pastures. Some of them moved to towns where they could send their children to Sinhala schools. Hence quite a number of families moved towards Colombo, Kandy, Kandana and Kalutara.

The Portuguese Influences

A century after the Portuguese arrived in Ceylon, their language was spoken throughout the island. In 1602, when the Dutchman Admiral Joris van Spilbergen visited Ceylon, it is recorded that Emmanuel Dias, King Wimala Dharma Suriya's *maha mudaliyar*, spoke Portuguese *zeer costelyk* (very well). Both the King and the Queen as a result of close contact with Europeans also knew the Portuguese language well. The farewell banquet to the Admiral was prepared in the manner of Christians and enlivened with music. Spilbergen was also dined and wine (on local wine made from Ceylon grapes) and

received by the Queen and her children in the Queen's private chambers where, dressed for the occasion in European clothing, she conversed in fluent Portuguese with her guest.⁸

After the capture of Colombo and Jaffna from the Portuguese between 1656 and 1658, many of the Dutchmen married the Indo-Portuguese woman who stayed on (voluntarily or otherwise), in the island.⁹ This helped to perpetuate the Portuguese language both during Dutch rule and even during the British occupation until the end of the 19th century. A Portuguese *patois* continued to be spoken by the Burghers and also by many Sinhalese families during this period. According to F H de Vos, at the end of the last century, there were Portuguese interpreters and Portuguese-speaking jurors in the Courts of Justice.¹⁰

The *chicetia*, which formed a special feature in Portuguese merry-making in Ceylon, contained good examples of the *patois*. They consisted of extemporaneous verses and repartees, also in verse, something like the harvest songs of Portugal. The dance par excellence of the Portuguese in Ceylon was the *caffrinha* to which the *chicotis* formed a necessary adjunct. The *patois*, the music and the dances with modern accretions are still preserved by a small community of Portuguese Burghers in Batticaloa which will be dealt with later.

An import of exquisite beauty by the Portuguese was their traditional carols which were sung every Christmas by choirs accompanied by violins, cymbals and a bass drum. The beautiful Portuguese carol, which used to be sung by the Portuguese Burghers in Galle until the last world war was an example:

“Louvai nos per Deos
Este grande dia,
Ja nasce Senhor
Per Virgem Maria.”

The Portuguese invasion of Ceylon has had a long-term impact in many areas. There are over a million Roman Catholics in Sri Lanka

⁸ Vesak Nanayakkara, 1971.

⁹ C.R.Boxer, 1965.

¹⁰ F.H.de Vos, 1950.

today. The Sinhala language has absorbed many Portuguese words and many inhabitants of this country still have Portuguese names. Galle lace still preserves the delicate designs and techniques introduced by the Portuguese. There is a revival of interest in the Portuguese jacket trimmed with lace. The hat and waistcoat still worn by Kandyan Chiefs on ceremonial occasions retain their Portuguese influence. Soon after their arrival, the Portuguese became captives of rice and curry, which they enriched with secrets of their own cuisine, resulting in such delectable dishes as *pol buth* and 'toddy roast'. Delicious sweets made from Portuguese recipes are still made such as *bolo de coco* (coconut cake), *bol fiado* (laminated cake), *foguete* (pumpkin preserve in pastry rolls) and *pente frito* (plantain fritters). The Portuguese have also left their influence in the design of churches, residences and furniture.

The smallness of this minority deprives them of any significant role in politics. Their only hope is to articulate their political demands through the mainstream of political parties in this country. As they have no political influence there is a tendency to neglect and ignore the welfare of this community. Their main occupations are still their traditional ones: tailoring, shoemaking, tinkering and carpentry. Very few of them have joined the professions or the affluent merchant and landowning classes. Few have been elevated to the higher rungs of public service. It is heartening however, to realize that in Batticaloa they have formed a Union, which caters to their social, religious and educational needs. They are a law-abiding community and live in peace and harmony with all other communities. They have yet to produce their chroniclers and bards.

The Dutch Conquest

The Dutch connection with Ceylon commenced in 1602 when Admiral Joris van Spilbergen arrived with two ships off Batticaloa to trade in cinnamon and pepper.¹¹ There were two other visits by the Dutchmen Sebald de Weerd (1602) and Marcellus de Boschheuver (1612) but the invasion of Ceylon started in earnest in 1638 when Admiral Adam Wsterwold arrived with a fleet off

Batticaloa and captured the Portuguese fort there with the tacit approval of Emperor Raja Sinha II who was desperately seeking the friendship of the Dutch as a counterpoint to the Portuguese. The Portuguese were ousted from Trincomalee, Negombo and Galle in 1640. Negombo was recaptured by the Portuguese later in 1640. But in 1644, the Dutch expelled them from Negombo once again. Kalutara was captured in 1655. Colombo capitulated to the Dutch in 1656 and with the capture of Jaffna in 1658, Portuguese rule in the island ended. By the time the struggle ended with the expulsion of the Portuguese the V.O.C. had become the controlling power in the coastal districts, and the Emperor of Kandy was eventually deprived of an outlet in the sea. The feelings of the inhabitants in the coastal regions of Ceylon subjected to Dutch rule after the expulsion of the Portuguese in 1658, were epitomized, as Robert Knox noted, in the Sinhalese proverb concerning a man who makes a bad exchange: "I have given pepper and got ginger".¹²

The attitude of the directors of the Dutch East and West Indies Companies vacillated between assimilation and apartheid, on the question of emigration.¹³ Originally, the chartered companies were not organized to foster female emigration. There were many who argued that white women seldom became acclimatized in the tropics. The acute discomforts and risks of long voyages in rough seas was another deterrent. On the other hand, it was believed that the only hope of founding stable and loyal communities in the colonies was to foster intermarriage with the indigenous women, always provided that these latter were converted to Christianity. However, because of the real or alleged shortcomings and inferior quality of the 'Free Burghers' who were allowed to settle in the colonies after their contract of service with the V.O.C. had expired, several higher officials periodically advocated the emigration of married couples or families from the Netherlands, as the only means of establishing a reliable settled Dutch community in the East. The Heeran XVII

¹¹ Francois Valentijn, 1978.

¹² R.Knox, 1681.

¹³ C.R.Boxer, 1965.

tried to recruit suitable families for emigration to the East, but the response was negligible.¹⁴

The Heeren XVII later gave active support to Johan Maetsuyker's modest scheme for Dutch colonization at Batavia and Ceylon. Maetsuyker, at an early age of his colonial career, was a professed admirer of the Portuguese system of promoting colonization by encouraging white men to marry Asian or Eurasian women and settle down in the East. The children of these mixed marriages, he averred, were better acclimatized than those born of pure European parentage, and, after the second or third generation, they differed little if at all from pure Netherlanders in complexion. He admitted that many of these half-caste offspring at present were apt to turn out rather badly. But this he ascribed to their lax upbringing in households where slavery was the general rule, and not to inherent racial defects. The remedy for this state of affairs, he added, lay in the provision of good schools and in proper supervision by parents. Maetsuyker maintained that with the suitable encouragement by the Company's high officials – which so far had been conspicuously lacking – the 'Free Burghers' could establish themselves as cobblers, tailors, smiths, armourers, jewelers, carpenters, masons and surgeons. He even claimed that they could compete with the Chinese in agricultural pursuits. He further alleged that the Company's senior officials were the worst enemies of the 'Free Burghers', since they favoured their Chinese and Asian competitors on account of the 'squeeze' and bribes, which they received from the latter.

Maetsuyker endeavoured to put his colonization theory into practice during his governorship of Ceylon (1644-50), but it had limited success. There were only sixty-eight married 'Free-Burghers' in the island when he relinquished office in February 1650. After the capture of Colombo and Jaffna from the Portuguese between 1656 and 1658, about 200 Dutchmen married some of the Indo-Portuguese women who stayed (voluntarily or otherwise), in the island. In the early Reformed Church registers in Ceylon which go

¹⁴ Ibid. p.218. The Heeren XVII were the 17 directors of the V.O.C. – *Veereenigde Oest-Indische Compagnie*, or "United East-India Company".

back more than two and a half centuries, names like Cabral, de Costa, de Fonseca, Dias, Pieris, Perera, Rodrigo, de Silva, de Silvester, and de Zouza, belonging to mixed Portuguese and Sinhalese families occur in the entries of marriage with Dutchmen.¹⁵ This is also evident in many of the genealogies of Dutch burgher families published in the journal of the Dutch Burgher Union of Ceylon. The conqueror of Jaffna, Rijkleff Van Geens, who subsequently governed coastal Ceylon for many years, was another enthusiastic advocate of Dutch colonization. In the shortage of Dutch women for the 'Free Burghers', he was prepared to 'tolerate' intermarriage with Sinhalese, Tamils and Eurasian women. But he stipulated that the daughters of such unions should be married to Netherlands, "so that our race may degenerate as little as possible". However, Van Geens's predecessor, Governor Van Kittensteyn was a strong opponent of miscegenation believing as all European colonizers did, that a Christian European was *ipso facto* superior to the members of any other race-Christian converts not excepted in practice, whatever they might be in theory.¹⁶

The Origin of 'Burgher'

The word 'Burgher' is derived from the Dutch word 'burger', which means a citizen of a burgh, borough or town. Article 9 of the Articles of Capitulation by the Portuguese to the Dutch, concluded on May 11, 1656, refers to the 'Portuguesche Burgren'.¹⁷ The expression which was first used in this country by the Dutch, referred to a civil status. Writes S.A.W. Mattau, "There were two different classes of Hollanders in Ceylon during Dutch times. One, the Dutch Company's servants who were like government officials today, and served under the Company and received their salary from the V.O.C. coffers. Even the Dutch *padres* at the time were in this category. The second type was the 'freelancer', who came on their own for

¹⁵ R G Anthonisz, 1927.

¹⁶ C R Boxer, 1965.

¹⁷ Phillipus Baldaeus, 1958-9.

private business and trade in Ceylon. Most of them had shops and ran such establishments as bakeries, inns and taverns. They were called by the term 'Burghers' or 'Free Burghers', as distinct from the Company's servants who received official acts of appointment from the V.O.C. in respect of the posts they held respectively."¹⁸ A retired Company servant, if he remained in Ceylon joined the class of Burghers. The Company's servants and the Burghers together formed socially the *Hollandsche Natie* or the Dutch community.¹⁹ (The word 'lansi' is derived from the Dutch word 'Hollandsche').

For a few years after the Dutch capitulation to the British in 1796, some of the official lists and documents referred to 'Dutch inhabitants and Burghers'. For instance, Article 15 of the Articles of Capitulation of Feb 15, 1796, uses this term, but this distinction became anomalous as the rule of the Dutch East Indian Company had ceased and the distinction gradually disappeared.

One of the earliest reference to Dutch Burghers in an official document in British times was made by Lord Liverpool, Secretary of State, in his instructions dated Sep 30, 1810, to Governor Maitland, directing him to interpret 'Europeans' in Article 30 of the Charter to include 'Burghers' as it was in accordance with "the wish of His Majesty's Government to conciliate by every means the Dutch Burghers in Ceylon."²⁰

An authoritative definition of the term Burgher, which was generally accepted by the community, was given by Sir Richard Ottley, Chief Justice, to the Colebrooke-Cameron Commission in 1830: "The name Burgher belongs to the descendents of the Dutch and Portuguese and other Europeans born in Ceylon; the right to this distinction must be decided by the country from which the father or paternal ancestors came. To whatever the number of generations through which the family had passed in this island, if the male ancestor were Dutch, Portuguese, or other European, whoever may have been the female parents, if the parents were married, the

¹⁸ S A W.Mottau, 1984.

¹⁹ R G Anthonisz, 1927.

²⁰ T Nadaraja, 1972.

country of the mother would decide the question. If the right to be denominated Burgher be once lost by the legitimate father being a Cingalese or other Indian, it cannot be recovered.”²¹

Mr. Justice Marshall stated to the Colebrooke-Cameron Commission that where the questions of legitimacy or race arose, as with “that heterogeneous mixture called the Portuguese,” whose descendants generally belonged to the lower strata of Eurasian society and were assimilated to the ‘native’ population, these questions were settled (like the question of residence within the jurisdiction of the court) as preliminary questions of fact by oral or other evidence.²²

Phrases such as ‘descendants of Europeans’ and ‘European descendants’ were sometimes used to describe Burghers. Colebrooke, in his Report upon the Administration of the Government of Ceylon, 1831, refers to “the burghers or descendants of Europeans.”²³ In 1871, the British dropped the reference to “European descendents”. Section 3 of the Village Communities Ordinance No.26 of 1871 provided that “Native shall mean those resident in the country other than persons commonly known as Europeans, or persons commonly known as Burghers.”

The vagueness of the phrase “persons commonly known as Burghers,” whether deliberate or not, permitted it to cover not only those who came within the description of Burghers given by Otley in 1830, but also all Eurasians. In 1901, the Superintendent of Census grouped the Burghers and Eurasians together for the purpose of Census. This was resented by the Burghers who wished to preserve their Dutch heritage. Eurasians were the progeny of British and Ceylonese unions in the last century.

The Dutch Burgher Union was formed in 1908 to counter this trend and to unite the scattered members of the community in maintaining their traditions. The drive for establishing the Union came mainly from R G Anthonisz, a teacher who later was appointed the first Government Archivist, as he was an expert in medieval Dutch. One of the main objects of the Union was to see the Dutch descendants

²¹ Ibid p.74; Colonial Office Papers, Public Record Office, London.

²² Ibid p.74; C.O.416/17 F 42 p.281; C.O.416/16 F.41 pp.402, 403.

²³ Ibid p.75.

of Ceylon recognized as a distinct racial unit, with an origin, history and character of its own. It was felt that the term Burgher, under which they were included, and which at first belonged to them exclusively, had ceased in common use to have this restricted application. Membership in the Union is open to all Dutch descendants "of full age and respectable standing." The term "Dutch descendants" under Article 3 of the Constitution of the Dutch Burgher Union "shall include the descendants in the male line of all those of European nationality who were in the service or under the rule of the Dutch East India Company in Ceylon, and the children of such descendants in the female line by marriage with Europeans." The primary object of the Union is "to promote the moral, intellectual, and social well-being of the Dutch descendants in Ceylon", as per Article 2.

The Legislative Council Ordinance No.13 of 1910, section 3(a), in effect adopted the definition of the term 'Burgher' in Article 3 of the Constitution of the Dutch Burgher Union of Ceylon, as persons qualified to be "registered as voters to elect a member from the Burgher electorate". Section 3(b) however, widened the class to include those who are of legitimate birth, and are descended in the female line from any such descendant as aforesaid, and are able to read, write and speak the English language. This definition was repeated in the Ceylon (Legislative Council) Order in Council, 1920, clause 28 and in the Ceylon (Legislative Council) Order in Council, 1923, Article 31.

Burghers under British Rule

The history of the Burghers since the Dutch capitulation to the British in 1796 has been like the swing of the pendulum: of growth and decline. Under the Articles of Capitulation of 1796, the British undertook to respect the laws and customs of the country and held out that no fresh taxes and duties would be imposed provided proper provision was made for the defraying of expenses of internal government. Trade would be free and the inhabitants would be permitted to trade with the British territories⁴⁴ on a MFN (Most

Favoured Nation) footing. "The officers of the Dutch Government would be left in full and free possession of their employment until his Majesty's pleasure shall be known." Many of these assurances were not honoured.²⁴

One of the earliest unpopular measures was the introduction of a tax on coconut trees of 'one silver *fanam* per tree' per annum by Robert Andrews, who had been appointed by the Madras Government as Resident and Superintendent of Revenue in Ceylon. The tax was unjust, as the value of the trees varied greatly according to their location and the tax was sometimes greater than the produce. The local inhabitants, including the Dutch Community, were adversely affected by this tax, which caused a great deal of unrest. A memorandum was presented by the last Dutch Governor Van Angelbeek and other Dutch residents to the Government at Madras, and the tax was accordingly abolished by resolution of the Committee on Sep 2, 1797.²⁵

A report sent by the first British Governor Lord North, in 1800, to Lord Dundas, Secretary of State, stated that "the Dutch inhabitants are inimical, being almost to a man ruined by our occupation of Ceylon" and that "their personal as well as the national connection between them and the mother country and the remaining Dutch settlements require their exclusion from government employments" so as "to render us independent of the Dutch and to destroy their influence in the country."²⁶

Many of the Dutch inhabitants emigrated to Batavia after the Capitulation in 1796, their passages in cartel ships being paid for by the British until 1806. However, a majority of the Dutch inhabitants remained in Ceylon in the hope that in the final settlement after the war, the island would be restored to the Dutch. But when the settlement took place in 1815, such an expectation was not realized. Many were also forced to remain because they could not sell their landed property for suitable prices, the range of possible buyers

²⁴ Percy Colin-Thome, 1978-9.

²⁵ J R Toussaint, 1931.

²⁶ G V Grenier, 1967.

being limited. This situation was because of a command from His Majesty prohibiting the purchase of houses and tenements by Europeans without the four gravets of Colombo. Such prohibition was found to be "very prejudicial to the servants of the late Dutch Government who have houses in Jaffnapatanm, Trincomalee and Galle which cannot be sold to natives without great loss... many families are compelled to remain in Ceylon for the fear of losing a considerable part of their property by removal."²⁷

Many such families had to depend on poor relief provided by the British and had to take to minor trades and avocations to supplement their income. The human aspect of the problem touched the Secretary of State, who observed that "the circumstances of the Dutch and other inhabitants considered as Europeans makes it requisite to act in a manner consistent with both the principles of justice and humanity and with these of sound policy and security to our dominions in the Island."²⁸

Rev. Cordiner who was in Ceylon at this time made the observation that "the Dutch inhabitants of Ceylon are about 900 in number, (and) except a few families, are reduced to circumstances of great indigence: but by rigid and meritorious economy and some of the lesser labours of industry, they maintain an appearance in the eyes of the world, sometimes affluent and gay, always decent and respectable".

According to him, "They are chiefly composed of officers (prisoners of war) with their families and widows and daughters of deceased civil and military servants of the Dutch East India Company. The greater number amongst them are proprietors of houses, which they let with considerable advantage to the English inhabitants. If a poor family should only possess one good house they retire into a smaller house or less convenient one, which they receive by relinquishing a more comfortable dwelling."²⁹

²⁷ Ibid. Governor North's dispatch of May 9, 1803, to the secy. of state.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Rev. James Cordiner, 1807.

It took the Dutch inhabitants who were unable to leave for Holland or Batavia, a decade or two to adjust to British rule. Some were induced to accept employment under the British. A few of the former Company's servants were appointed to magistracies, others were employed in the revenue service, a few received commissions in the local military regiments then formed. Several took up commercial pursuits, and not a few retired into private life on the small income left to them. A few rose to high offices. For instance, Gualterus Schneider, who was a subaltern in the Dutch Engineers, became Surveyor-General of Ceylon; Johan Gerard Krickeneek and Cornelis Arnoldus Prins, bookholders in the Dutch Company's service, acted at different times in the Office of the King's Advocate, which corresponds to the Attorney-General today; Jacob Nicolaas Mooyart entered the Civil Service and retired as Acting Auditor-General. J.G.Hillebrand became a Judge of the Supreme Court.³⁰ The British Government did not take an active interest in education until after the Colebrook-Cameron reforms in the 1830s. Education prior to that was in the hands of missionary schools, which imparted a smattering of education to local youth, sufficient for qualifying as clerks. As a result, the Clerical Service was almost exclusively staffed for several decades by Dutch Burghers, who in posts of trust and responsibility, as secretaries of the principal courts, head clerks of revenue departments, land surveyors, customs officers and school masters, diligently performed their duties.

It was only in 1834 that higher education was taken in hand by the government and the Governor Sir Robert Wilmot Horton founded the Colombo Academy at San Sebastian in 1835 under the stewardship of Rev. Joseph Marsh, with twenty pupils. It was formally opened by Horton on Oct 25, 1836. Rev. Dr. Barcroft Boake succeeded Marsh and remained Principal of the Academy from 1842-69. Under Boake's regime, the scope and usefulness of the institution was considerably improved. The subjects taught followed the pattern of education in Europe at this time with emphasis on the Classics, mathematics and general English literature.

³⁰ R.G.Anthonisz, 1927.

Distinguished names associated with the early days of the Academy were R F Morgan, James Stewart, James d'Alwis, Edward Fredrick Kelaart, Frederick Nell, Charles Ambrose Lorenz, John Boyle Siebel, J H Eaton, Edwin Koch, Pieter Daniel Anthonisz, James Loose and J L K van Dort.

In the 1840s, the Academy was a kind of microcosm of the larger social world of Ceylon, with Lorenz at the center of everything. The impetus, which the new higher education gave the Dutch Burghers who mastered English quicker than the other communities, is echoed in the words of Sir Emerson Tennent, Colonial Secretary, who said in 1860, "They (Dutch Burghers) have risen to eminence at the Bar, and occupied the highest positions on the Bench. They are largely engaged in mercantile pursuits, and as writers and clerks they fill places of trust in every administrative establishment, from the Department of the Colonial Secretary to the humblest Police Court. It is not possible to speak too highly of the services of this meritorious body of men, by whom the whole machinery of Government is put into action. They may fairly be described in the language of Sir Robert Peel as the 'brazen wheels' of the executive, which keep the golden hands in motion."³¹

Charles Ambrose Lorenz was a charismatic figure who made an enormous contribution to the political, social and cultural progress of this country in the last century. Born at Matara on July 8, 1829, he was the youngest of nine children of Johann Freiderich Lorenz and Anna Petronella Smith. He joined the Academy in 1842 (at the age of 13) and had a brilliant career at school. In 1846 he shared the coveted Turnour Prize with Frederick Nell.

Lorenz' literary talent manifested itself early in life. He was one of the promoters of *Young Ceylon* (1850-1852), then the leading literary journal in Ceylon, completely managed by Ceylonese, with Frederick Nell as editor. It was the first publication to agitate for social reforms for the people of Ceylon. According to E W Perera, the word "Ceylonese" was coined by Lorenz and became a favorite expression of his. Later, when he became editor of *The Ceylon Examiner* (1859-

³¹ Sir Emerson Tennent, 1860.

1871), it became the policy of this paper to refer to the people of this country as 'Ceylonese' and not as Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim or Burgher.

Lorenz was enrolled as a Proctor in 1849 and later became an Advocate. In 1855 he was enrolled as a Barrister-at-Law of Lincoln's Inn. Lorenz was a scholar who translated Van der Keessel's theses *Selectae Juris Hollandici et Selandici*. He published this work in 1855. Then came his valuable series of Law Reports, which caused him to be called the 'Father of Ceylon Law Reporting'. His first Law Reports covered the period 1856 to 1859. He continued to edit these reports until 1870, shortly before his death. In 1860 he published his Notes on Civil Practice under the Roman Dutch Law. He was the first lawyer who moved for the establishment of a legal association to further the interests of the profession and to "introduce reforms from within". For some years he was the Secretary and Treasurer of the Law Library at Hulftsdorp. At his death he bequeathed to the Law Library at Hulftsdorp his valuable collection of books, including the original manuscript of the *Dietata ad Grotii Introductionem* by Van der Keeseel.

In his memoir of Charles Ambrose Lorenz, Leopold Ludovici said, "The troubled period of the so-called 'Rebellion' in 1848 gave fresh impulse to his talent in this direction, and identifying himself on the side of the opposition, he rendered eminent service in representing the unconstitutional proceedings of the local Government and in securing inquiry into them and into affairs generally of the Island, by the Imperial Government. Individual opinions may differ as to some of the results which that enquiry led to. But one thing is clear, that it taught a useful lesson to Colonial rulers, which will not easily be forgotten."³²

After the rebellion in 1848, Lorenz was among those who supported Dr. Christopher Elliot (an Englishman) in the agitation for a more representative Council and for an "Unofficial Majority" in the Legislative Council. This first agitation for reform failed. The next attempt to alter the functioning of the Legislative Council appears

³² Leopold Ludovici, 1871.

to have been essayed in 1859. It appears to have extracted an important concession, through convention rather than statutory declaration, namely, the right of 'unofficials' to introduce bills in the Legislative Council. By this stage, Lorenz was a member of the Council, having been nominated as 'Burgher Member of the Legislative Council' after the incumbent, Richard Morgan, was appointed District Judge of Colombo in July 1856. It would not be incorrect to say that Lorenz pursued this additional public and political role with both zest and distinction until the famous "walk-out" of the Unofficial Members in 1864.

George Wall (an Englishman), James Alwis (scholar, lawyer and Councillor) and Lorenz were among those who stood shoulder to shoulder in the years 1864-68 in opposition to the Imperial Government's unilateral decision to have the whole of the military expenses, expenses which were in fact part of the imperial order in the Indian Ocean, foisted upon the local government. This struggle resulted in the memorable walkout of all the 'unofficials' in the Legislative Council on Nov 15, 1964. Writing about the incident, James Alwis had this to say about these years:

"It was always a pleasure to me, nay, a privilege to have been associated with the Burgher leaders. They never failed their Sinhala and Tamil countrymen with whom they made common cause, in fighting for and advancing the interests of the country in all matters. Their public spirit and independence were unmatched. They showed admirable sense and a feeling of patriotism as they claimed Ceylon as their Motherland. This struck me somewhat forcibly."

In 1859, Lorenz and a syndicate purchased the newspaper *The Examiner* and he became its Chief Editor. This was the first Ceylonese newspaper and until his death in 1871, he wielded the powerful influence of his pen in support of social reforms for the Ceylonese. In his first editorial in *The Examiner* he wrote, "It seems hardly necessary that we should introduce ourselves to our readers

with anything beyond the assurance that we work for the public welfare. We have no personal interests to secure. The opinions we may express on current topics of the day, will, we trust, be disinterested. Our anger will, we trust, be honest: our praise sincere. As the exponent of the opinions of a numerous class, our occasional observations may not be deemed unworthy of a passing perusal. The Press generally as a vehicle of current information, as a medium of communication between the ruler and the subject, as a theatre for the discussion of public grievances, as a guide to popular feeling has long since asserted its place and its rights in Ceylon. As a junior member of the great Estate, we shall endeavour in our humble way to fulfill its destinies.

Between 1860 and 1865, Lorenz published his masterpiece *The Christmas Debates* in *The Examiner*, which satirized the proceedings of the Legislative Council, presided over by the Governor. In the section of the debates published on Christmas Eve in 1865, Lorenz depicted the President of the Council as singing:

“Believe me if all these remarkable men,
Who deserted us two years ago,
Were to come back tomorrow and labour again,
Forgetting that Cardwell’s their foe;
I’ll treat them most kindly, I’ll give them a ball,
I’ll ask Walker to lend them his band:
And give Thompson and Capper and Lorenz and Wall,
And Alwis and Eaton my hand”.

The political crisis of 1864 led to the inauguration of “The Ceylon League”, which was formed by Wall, Lorenz, d’Alwis and others for the purpose of continuing the agitation already begun. It won a wide measure of support among the literate, indigenous people and had the backing of most of the English plantation and mercantile ‘settlers’. Although its demands for social and political reform were denied by the Imperial Government, it is arguable that the League created a general appreciation of the need for constitutional reform

and planted an ideological seed which could blossom later in different hands and different circumstances.

In a speech delivered at the unveiling of Lorenz' portrait in the Law Library in 1929, the late Francis de Zoysa said, "He was the leader of a band of patriots who in the middle of the last century started to secure the political emancipation of the people of this country, and to secure for them the full rights of British citizenship. Those who have worked in subsequent years in the same great cause have been but building on the lead given by him and his distinguished fellow-workers".

Lorenz did not make politics a full-time occupation. In the course of time he became leader of the "Unofficial Bar". He served on numerous public committees, and was an original member of the newly established Municipal Council of Colombo representing the Cottanchina Ward (Kotahena and Mutwal) from 1866 to 1870. The strain of his many commitments took heavy toll of his health in the late 60s. Several attacks of bronchitis eventually affected his left lung. Charles Ambrose Lorenz died of tuberculosis at Karlsruhe, his last home in Colombo, on Aug 9, 1871. His untimely death was mourned by all communities in the island whom he loved and served. Lorenz's scholarship, his culture and philosophy of life are summed up in his poem, "The Wishing Well", which was published in Fraser Magazine, London, in 1854. He memorably wrote:

"Give me, fair stream, not gold nor love –
Nor fortune high nor wealth of days,
Nor strength to rise the crowd above,
Nor the deceit of human praise
But this: That like thy waters clear
Though creeds and systems come and go,
Unvexed within a narrow sphere,
My life with even stream may flow –
May flow: and fill its destined space
With this, at least, of blessing given –
Upward to gaze with fearless face
And mirror back – Some truth of Heaven."

Contribution of the Burghers in the 19th Century

In this era, from about the middle of the last century till its end, Burghers dominated the legal and medical professions, holding their own with their British counterparts in these professions. The higher echelons of the Civil Service were reserved for Britishers until the 1930s.

Among the eminent Burgher lawyers besides Lorenz were R F Morgan, James Stewart, Frederick Nell, John Boyle Siebel, J H Eaton and C L Ferdinand. Sir Richard Francis Morgan had a meteoric career. In 1851 he was appointed Burgher Member of the Legislative Council. In 1855, he became District Judge of Colombo. In 1863 he became the first Ceylonese to be appointed Queen's Advocate - a post he held until 1874. In that same year, he was appointed Acting Chief Justice and was knighted shortly afterwards. He was offered the permanent post of Chief Justice by Governor Sir William Gregory but declined the offer on account of ill-health. He died on Jan. 27, 1876 at the age of 54.³³

Some of the eminent doctors of the last century were Dr. James Loos, M.D. (St. Andrews), M.R.C.P. (Edin) who was a pioneer of medical education in Ceylon and the first Principal of the Medical College established in 1870 by the government. He was succeeded as Principal in 1875 by Dr. E. L. Koch, who was the leading surgeon at the time. The Memorial Clock Tower in the Medical College grounds commemorates Dr. Koch who died in Colombo in December 1877, at the early age of 40.

Dr. Peter Daniel Anthonisz, C.M.G., M.D., F.R.C.S., (Edin.), M.R.C.S.(Eng.), M.R.C.P.(Lord), Colonial Surgeon, Ceylon Medical Department, Burgher Members of the Legislative Council from 1886-1895 and President of the Ceylon Branch of the British Medical Association in 1887, was another leading doctor at the time. The clocktower in the Galle Fort, was erected by public subscription during his lifetime. The marble tablet at the base of the clocktower bears the inscription: "This tower was erected by Public Subscription

³³ William Digby, Vol.2.

to the perpetual memory of Peter Daniel Anthonisz born at Galle in testimony of his skill and benevolence in relieving human suffering". The costly clock was the gift of *mudaliyar* Samson de Abrew Rajapakse of Kosgoda, a grateful and devoted patient.

Dr. E F Kelaart, M.D.(Edin), M.R.C.S.(London) F.L.S., F.G.S., who died in 1860 was one of the most distinguished zoologists in this country in the last century. His *Prodromus Faunae Zeylanicae* is a notable contribution to the natural history of Sri Lanka.

J L K van Dort was one of the most brilliant artists in the last century. His picture and sketches, which appeared in *Muniandi* (the Ceylon *Punch*) and in the Christmas supplements and illustrated supplements of *The Examiner* and other local newspapers, are not likely to be forgotten. He had the rare gift of capturing vivid movements, as his sketches of Kandyan dancers, Caffrinha dancers, the Races and the Governor's entourage galloping to Galle Face illustrate. His oil panels, which presented scenes of Ceylon were exhibited at the Chicago Exhibition and some of his pictures were also shown at the Great Paris Exhibition.

Executive and Legislative Councils were established in 1833 following the Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms. "The Legislative Council gave the representatives of the people some opportunity to examine the regulations which the Governor proposed to make. It was to consist of nine officials and six nominated 'unofficials', half of whom were to be European and the other half, representatives of the Burghers, Sinhalese and Tamils. The Officials were to be composed of the six members of the Executive Council and three others. The 'unofficials' were to be nominated from the principal merchant and the upper classes of the people of the country. Hitherto, all laws in Ceylon had been made by the rulers or at their command, by their officers. But an important change now took place. It is true that the Governor and the officials were not responsible for their actions to the Legislature, and the majority of officials in the Council made the 'unofficials' powerless. But

henceforth, the officials had to pay some attention to their opinion, and Ceylon realized the beginnings of representative government.”³⁴ Consequently, Governor Sir Robert Wilmot Horton nominated J.G. Hillebrand in 1835 as the first Burgher member of the Legislative Council. Hillebrand was succeeded by a long line of Burgher representatives who were either lawyers or doctors. Among them were, J.F. Giffening, James Nicholas Mooyrt, R. F. Morgan, C.A. Lorenz, J.H.Eaton, James Martensz, C.L. Ferdinands, James van Langenberg Sr., Sir Samuel Grenier, Dr.P.D.A. Anthonisz, H.L. Wendt, F.C. Loos, James van Langenberg Jr, Dr.W.G. Van Dort, Sir Hector van Cuylenberg, Charles van der Wall, Allan Drieberg, N J Martin, Dr.V. Van Langenberg and Dr.V.R. Schokman.

Under the Soulbury Constitution (1946), the Burgher representatives appointed as Senators were Sir Eric Jansz, L.L. Hunter, F.C.W. Van Geyzel, R.S.V. Poulier and E.C.T. La Brooy. Burgher members appointed to the House of Representatives were E.F.N. Gratien Q.C., Rosslyn Koch, J.A. Martensz, Dr.V.R. Schokman, Dr.E.C. Brohier, R.S.V. Poulier, T.V.K. Carron and Vernon Jonklaas, Q.C. When the Constitution of Sri Lanka (1972) abolished the category of appointed members, an unbroken line of Burgher representation in the Legislative Councils and Parliament since 1835 was severed. P.B.G. Keuneman is the only Burgher to be elected to a seat in the House of Representatives since the first Parliament was established in 1947. He represented Colombo Central from 1947-1977.

Towards the end of the last century, the spread of higher education and the gradual growth and rise of national aspirations in other communities lessened the influence which this small middle-class community had in official circles, but the Burghers continued to maintain their identity and to fill a not unimportant place in the island in the first half of this century. The professions, the public service, the mercantile sector and journalism continued to attract the Burghers. A few took to planting and private business. A large number of Burghers continued to be employed in the clerical service, police, customs, railways, excise and the armed forces. Many Burgher

³⁴ G.C.Mendis, 1944.

women joined the teaching and nursing professions. Some took to dress making and others became stenographers and typists. A few became doctors.

The teaching profession had many dedicated Burgher teachers such as L.E. Blaze, Cyril Jansz, E.H. Vander Wall, Cedric Corloff, B.R. Blaze and others. The legal profession continued to produce eminent Burgher lawyers of the caliber of Frederick Dornhorst K.C. and Sir Steward Schneider K.C.

Those appointed to the Supreme Court since 1900 included H. L. Wendt, Joseph Grenier K.C., Allan Driberg K.C., L.M. Bartensz, F.H.B. Koch, O.L. de Kretser Sr, V.L. St.Clair Swan, M.C. Sansoni, O.L. de Kresser Jr and Percy Colin-Thome. M.C. Sansoni was appointed Chief Justice in 1964. There were four Burgher Attorney General - Sir John Samuel Grenier in 1886, James van Langenberg K.C. in 1912, E.F.N. Gratiaen Q.C. in 1956 and Douglas St.Clive Budd Jansze, Q.C. in 1959.

Noel Ernst, J.R. Toussnaint, Sir Eric Jansz, Eric Christoffelsz, R.S. V.Poulier, Douglas Nisso, M. L. D. Caspoersz and others reached the higher echelons of the Civil Service. The medical profession was enriched by the services of Dr.Andreas Nell, M.R.C.S. who was not only a skilled eye surgeon but also one of the most learned antiquarians and historians of this country. Dr.Lucian de Zila M.D., and eminent gynecologist, was a scholar and literateur. Dr.R L Spittel, F.R.C.S, was a brilliant surgeon and author of several classics on the Ceylon jungles. Dr.Carvin Mack, M.D., was a leading physician. Professor A C E Koch, Dr.Nel Bartholomeusz, F.R.C.S, and Dr.Drogo Austin, F.R.C.S, have had distinguished careers.

In the field of arts, music and drama, Burghers have made good contribution. George Keyt, George Claessen, Geoffrey Beling, Christie Beling, George and Terry de Neise are well known painters. Lionel Wendt, Irene Sansoni and Douglas Ferdinand were gifted musicians. Prof. E.F.C. Ludowyk, who obtained a first class in English, both at London and at Cambridge, and was the recipient of the coveted Oldham Shakespeare prize at Cambridge, has made an impact on the theatre in Sri Lanka which is incalculable. Arthur van Langenberg and Denis Bartholomousz were also creative and gifted producers of plays.

Dr.R.L. Broher, an antiquarian and scholar, is best known for his *magnum opus*, *The Ancient Irrigation Works in Ceylon*. The contribution to scholarship and historical research by the Government Archivists, R.G. Anthonisz, E. Reimers, J.H.O. Paulusz and S.A.W. Mottau, is well-known. They have done much to reveal the contribution of the Dutch to the history and culture of Ceylon by their translations of some of the unique complete record of transactions connected with the Dutch administration of their territories in this island from 1640 to the end of the 18th century, consisting over 7,000 manuscript volumes and files.

This is a priceless legacy bequeathed by the Dutch to their successors and the people of Ceylon for studies such as, general colonial history with special reference to the Dutch, the political, social and economic conditions of this island, the history of the Sinhalese, Tamils, Moors, Malays and other communities in the island, the laws, customs and institutions of these communities, the progress and development of religion and education, the system of land tenures and registration of properties, and the diplomatic relations of the various Sinhalese monarchs of the Kandyan Province, with the native princes of India and other foreign powers.

Burghers have also played their part in the free Press of Ceylon. Reference has already been made to *The Examiner* (1859-1900) and the part played by Lorenz, Louis Nell, Leopold Ludovici, Francis Beven and later J.T. Blaze who at various times were editors of *The Examiner*. *The Examiner* exemplified the British dislike of autocratic and bureaucratic methods of interference with the conduct of the Press. A hired or inspired press runs counter to national instincts. The *Ceylon Independent* was started on July 4, 1888, by Hector Van Cuylenberg and William Maitland. It was the first penny newspaper to be published in Ceylon and was an immediate success. It flourished until about 1937. Hilarie Jansz in the 1930s, and Jan Modder in the 1950s, became editors of *The Observer*. Donovan Moldrich (1970) was for sometime editor of the *Times*. This is only a condensed list of Burgher achievement. The prowess of Burghers in the field of sports over the years is common knowledge.

Burghers Today

Certain trends in the 1950s and 1960s created a sense of insecurity in the Burgher community and they decided in large numbers to emigrate to Australia. The rise of communalism and the growth of attitudes hostile to Christianity and Western modes of life and thought, created conditions which the Burghers felt were inimical to the welfare of their children.

The feeling of uneasiness came to a head when the Sinhala Only bill was passed.³⁵ This bill created a major crisis in the country affecting all the minorities, especially the Burghers who had adopted English as their mother tongue for nearly one hundred and fifty years.

There has been a significant decline in the fortunes of the Burghers since the passing of the Sinhala Only bill. Burgher youth found it very difficult to adjust to an education in the Sinhala stream in schools. Today, one rarely sees a Burgher name in lists of successful candidates in examinations conducted by the Universities, Medical College and the Law College. The condition of the majority of Burghers today is one of hardship and poverty, similar to their condition at the beginning of the last century under the British. They are a small community and have no political organisation of their own. The only way they can articulate their political demands and air their grievances is through the mainstream of established political parties. The only way the Burghers can get back into the mainstream of life in Sri Lanka is by mastering Sinhala, while at the same time retaining a mastery of English.

The Department of Census and Statistics has followed the British practice of enumerating Burghers and Eurasians together. In 1971, the numbers were 45,000. In 1981, it had reduced to 38,000. Today, as per the 2001 Census figures, the number stands at 34,616. It is not certain what proportion of these numbers are Burghers and how many Eurasians there are in the island.

³⁵ R.A.Krickenbeek, 1962.

The Burghers have been a middle-class community, mainly concentrated in the towns. In the last century, many lived in Matara, Galle, Colombo, Jaffna, Kandy and Negombo. Today, most of them live in Colombo and in the environs of Colombo. Culturally, they have always been oriented to Western culture, and in religion they are mainly Presbyterian. Some have joined other Christian denominations.

Conclusion

The Burgher community has over the years integrated its ethnic identity with a larger Sri Lankan national identity. Relations with other communities have been harmonious. The individual Burgher is a law-abiding, peaceful citizen. What Digby said of Sir Richard Morgan³⁶ may be said of the community as a whole:

“A binder together of diverse races, having the blood of both the ‘stranger within the gates’ and the ‘son of the soil’ in his veins, and able to ‘put himself in the place’ of each – that essential requisite of a peacemaker.”

³⁶ William Digby, Vol.1.

The Malays

an overview of a unique history & culture

M.S. Osman & M.A. Sourjah

Introduction

The Malays of Sri Lanka, by virtue of their Malay identity, can take their proud stand as part and parcel of the 250-million strong *Dunia Bansa Melayu* (Malay world). This was the general consensus expressed by over 80 foreign delegates who attended the symposium *Dunia Melayu II*, organised by the Sri Lanka Malay Confederation (SLAMAC) and the Malay Writer's Federation of Malaysia (GAPENA), at Colombo in August 1985.

The symposium made the Malay speaking countries aware of the existence of members of their community who against all odds were maintaining the cultural traditions of their forefathers. The Malay speaking world was also made aware of the wealth of literary material in the form of ancient manuscripts, which had been discovered in this island.

History & Background

The 'old theory' that the Malays belonged to the 'yellow race' of Mongolian stock, which originated in the Yunnan province of China and entered the Malay peninsula about 2500 BC, has been convincingly negated. A 'new theory' has been propounded which holds that the Malays were the original and endemic inhabitants of the Malay world, based on the precious discovery of the fossil of the pre-historic 'Java Man', near the town of Mayakarta in Eastern Java. Researchers, Malay experts, anthropologists and social scientists from Malaysian universities under the guidance of Prof. Datuk, Dr Wan Hashim Wan Teh, Vice-Chancellor, University of Kebangsaan, Malaysia, and his deputy, Prof Nik Hasan Suhaimi, visited Yunnan

in China in August, 1994; their research investigations failed to support any evidence of the old theory. Thus the new theory was further corroborated and published in various newspapers and journals like the *New Straits Times* and *Star* in 1994.

When we think of the historical origins and the connection of the Malays with Sri Lanka, the medieval trade links with the Malay Archipelago and the early settlements in the maritime areas of the north, south, east and west are generally known. But what is new is the discovery that the *veddabs* of Sri Lanka and the *senoi* tribesmen of Malaysia belong to the same blood group as mentioned in the 1963 volume of the Royal Anthropological Institute's report which deals with the blood groups and haemoglobin types of the *Veddahs*. The occurrence of the abnormal haemoglobin, viz, haemoglobin E in these two ethnic groups, located geographically so wide apart, and the total absence of this among tribes in South India, would indicate that the *veddab* stock received contributions from South East Asia and this did not come via India.¹

The earliest references to the Javanese in Sri Lanka's recorded history is to be found in the *Culawamsa* which describes the invasion of Chandrabanu, the Buddhist King of Tambralinga, near the Isthmus of Kra in the Malay peninsula during the reign of Parakrama Bahu II, i.e. 1247 AD. Two invasions have been recorded and the Malay king appears to have become ruler of Jaffna for a short while. Jaffna was known as 'Javapatnam' during this period. The Malay association appears to have been confirmed by topological evidence. Chavakachcheri (Java settlement) and Chavakotte (Java Fort) are cases in point.

It is also of interest to note that many coastal towns in Sri Lanka suggest strong Malay contacts from early times. For example, Hambantota in the southern part of the island was a regular port of call for Javanese trading vessels on their way to Madagascar and the African coast. Hambantota is possibly a derivation from the Malay word *Sampan Tota* – *sampan* being a Malay word for 'boat'. There are other places too which have derived their names from

¹ R L Wickeramasinghe, 1994.

Malay origin – for example Ja-ela (Java Canal) and Ja-Kotuwa (Java Fort).

Students of history are familiar with Chandrabanu's Javaka army and their poisoned arrows, but few are aware that a Pali chronicle of Siam has recorded that Chandrabanu and the then king of Siam sent a joint envoy to Ceylon to obtain a famous Buddha image which is still preserved in Siam.

Parakrama Bahu himself sent envoys to the king of Tambralinga and persuaded the latter to send to Ceylon a saintly *thera*. Chandrabanu was a ruler of a land with which Sri Lanka was having religious intercourse. It is therefore worth inquiring why he came to Sri Lanka with hostile intentions? What of the descendants of Chandrabanu's army of occupation? They were Buddhists and would have been assimilated into the indigenous population leaving no trace. But, Sinhala names such as Malalagama, Malalagoda, Malalasekara and the facial characteristics of those who bear them are distinctively Mongoloid which give us food for thought. Much controversy has risen over Professor Paranavitarane's thesis based on inter-linear writings in the inscriptions. He claimed that the Kalinga dynasty, which ruled from the capital of Polonnaruwa from 1184-1235, had originated from Kalinga in the Malay archipelago. Although the first arrival of the Malays to Sri Lanka in the 13th century had been voluntary, the ancestors of the present day Sri Lankan Malays were forcibly brought here by the Dutch, during the period 1650-1788. Sri Lanka and the Dutch East Indies were under the same colonial master who found that the locals did not take kindly to their rule.

It is indeed true that though there were many Malays brought in to serve as soldiers, craftsmen and servants of the Dutch, there were others who belonged to the highest strata of social class in the land of their origin. These Malays were brought in by the Dutch as exiled kings and princess, and other men of the ruling classes, together with their wives, families and servants. Most significant amongst these exiles was Susunan Mangkurat Mas, the Javanese King who was captured and banished in or about 1707. A further batch of 44 Princes and noblemen were banished to Sri Lanka in 1723. The

lives of these exiled royal members were by no means comfortable, as only a paltry sum was made available to them for expenses. It is thus not surprising to learn that Surapati, a Javanese Prince, escaped into the territories of the Kandyan ruler in 1748.

Their lifestyle however improved with the arrival of the British, who agreed to pay a monthly allowance to the captive Princes while they remained prisoners of war. It was about 1807, that two ships left Sri Lanka carrying the exiled Princes back to their homeland. However, some of these persons preferred to remain in Sri Lanka. In fact no real research has been done in this area but there are many Malays who firmly believe that they are the descendants of this exiled nobility.

Malays in the Modern Period

Dr. Hussainmiya, in his work on the Malays in Sri Lanka has unearthed many Malay manuscripts which show that even in the 19th century, the Malays enjoyed a vigorous cultural life. The manuscripts include well-known romances, classical Malay literature and standard religious literature together with literary works produced by Sri Lankan Malays themselves. Further, *Alamat Lankapuri*, a fortnightly Malay language newspaper was published in 1869 in the Jawi script by Baba Ounus Saldin, the Malay savant. This clearly shows that Malays during this period were keen on maintaining their identity through their culture, but in harmonious co-existence with the indigenous population.

Malays found employment during the Dutch rule as soldiers in the army. As many as ten companies were formed into a separate regiment in the Dutch army. This trend continued under the British too, as they found the Malays to be very loyal and brave soldiers. In fact, under the British, a separate Malay regiment was formed, and they were awarded the King's colours in 1801 – the first Asian regiment to receive that honour.

In 1873, however, the Malay regiment was disbanded. Perhaps the main reason for this occurrence was that the salary of Malay soldiers was reduced. As a direct result of this and other similar causes, the

Malays searched for other avenues of employment. Many Malays found employment in the newly opened coffee plantations, which offered reasonably higher pay and more freedom. Others opted to join the civil police. Later there were quite a few Malays who found employment in the fire brigade, prisons department and customs department.

It would be relevant to make mention of a remark about the Malays made by the Hon. Vincent Perera, the then minister of parliamentary affairs and sports, who was also the mayor of Colombo. In his address to the pioneering Malay Cricket Club he stated, "If there is one thing that is outstanding, it is that Malay employees of whatever grade, (who) have always proved to be men of the greatest integrity and highest loyalty".

There was a time when the ranks of the Colombo fire brigade were open only to Malays. They have also manned the ranks of the armed service, the police and the prisons with recognition, where physical fitness and courage were matters of tremendous importance for selection. It may be of significance to mention here, that it was a Malay police sergeant Sayban, who climbed Uthuman Khanda and single-handedly captured Sardiel, the notorious highway robber considered similar to Robin Hood of Nottingham.

In the academic field too, the Malays have shone, and perhaps one of their greatest sons who has served both the Malay community and the country with distinction is the late Justice M.T. Akbar. Justice Akbar was not only a distinguished academician but was the first non-Christian Supreme Court judge to adorn the Sri Lanka bench. He was also the first Muslim attorney general of Sri Lanka. As an eminent scholar he won almost all the coveted prizes at Royal College and also won the prestigious scholarship to the University despite very strong competition at the time. However, he will be best remembered for his tenacity of purpose in arguing the case for a residential university in Kandy, as opposed to one of a similar nature in Colombo.

Dr. T.B. Jayah, another distinguished Malay was always in the vanguard of Ceylon's fight for independence. He was recognized as a great educationist and as a man of unimpeachable integrity. He is often

termed the father of Muslim education in Sri Lanka. He made it possible by his sincere persuasion for the Muslim community to consider education seriously by establishing new branches of Zahira Colleges in Aluthgama, Slave Island, Gampola, Puttalam and Matale. Leaders of other communities in this country treat the name of Dr. Jayah as synonymous with Muslim education.

In politics, Dr. Jayah presented the case of the Muslims. He was a true son of the people and in the fitness of things, the Muslims of the country recognized him without any doubts as the undisputed leader of this community. He was conscious and proud of the fact that he was Malay, but he nevertheless advocated a collective political programme for the Malays, the Moors and the rest of the Muslim community in Sri Lanka.

Dr. Jayah was free Sri Lanka's first Muslim cabinet minister. Later, as High Commissioner for Ceylon in Pakistan, he won the hearts of the Pakistanis to such an extent that he was offered the citizenship of Pakistan! He was also awarded a doctorate by the Punjab University.

The Malays were also fortunate in that they have produced academicians and fine teachers. Mr. B.C. Ahlip will be remembered for his profound scholarly lectures at the Law College and at the Ceylon University. He was the winner of an open scholarship to England and there he distinguished himself as the only Muslim to win the Arden prize for literature. It would be relevant to mention a few other names of dedicated teachers, which include T. Suhayb, T.P.S. Laxana, Noor Amith, Aniff Doray and the Bahar Brothers who made notable contributions as teachers and influenced the lives of a large number of young Muslims of this country.

In the field of journalism, the Malays made notable contributions. M.T. Jaimon was the first Muslim to become an editor of a national newspaper when he became Editor of the *Times of Ceylon*. Other journalists of repute include M.B. Marjan, who became Sports Editor of the *Times of Ceylon* and Ehsan Sourjah, the Features Editor of the *Observer*.

Although a minority community, the Sri Lanka Malays have significantly contributed to the promotion and development of sports in Sri Lanka: both as active participants and in administrative

capacities. One of the names worth noting is of A.C.Ahmath, a Thomian and a Malay Club cricketer, who has always been held in high esteem.

It is also worth noting that until recent times, no Ceylon soccer team has been complete without Malays in them. A number of Malays have represented the country with pride as true ambassadors of sports in hockey, boxing, cricket and athletics. Besides this, there were a large number of Malays who helped to foster a variety of sports by holding office in administrative capacities. For the record, it may be worth mentioning some of the names like M. S. Osman, Vice-President and Hony. Treasurer, Ceylon Olympics and Commonwealth Games Association and *chef de mission* of the Ceylon team at Asian Games, Jakarta, Indonesia, and W. A. Musafer, who was secretary of the Ceylon Olympics and Commonwealth Games Association.

In addition to these achievements, the religious zeal of the Malays can be best understood by their devotion and contribution to Islam. Many a devout Malay has been venerated for the saintly life he has led. The Grand Mosque at New Moor Street, where the Malay Saint Tuan Bagoos Balankaya lies, was designed and built by the Malay architect, Mohamed Balankaya.

In 1859, Taleep Akbar, a Malay, made a gift of land of nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre at Kew Road for the construction of a mosque. This mosque is today known as Masjidul Akbar. It appears that the present Thakiya in Kew Road, opposite Masjidul Akbar, has had its beginnings in the Portuguese period (1505) and was then the only mosque of the Muslims of Slave Island. There was also a greatly venerated Saint known as Tuan Punggeran, who was buried in Peer Saibo Street. History has authenticated that his mortal remains which were interred in Colombo, were taken by the Dutch after exhumation, to be re-interred in Sura Baya (Jakarta).

It seems then that the Malays of Sri Lanka have strong cultural roots in this country and have made immense contributions towards the improvement and progress of the country. What is important to note is that all these contributions were made with no state patronage. It may then be worth considering what would be the

impact of the Malays in Sri Lanka if the state gave them even the slightest consideration.

During the Dutch and British periods of Sri Lankan history, the Malays were successful in keeping their traditions and identity alive. From early times, the Malays lived in small communities known as the *kampong* life (traditional way of community living). Every police station became a Malay *kampong*, because Malays constituted over 50% of the entire police force during these periods. Near every prison there was a Malay *kampong*, as Malays formed more than 50% of the prison officers too. What is more, the Colombo fire brigade formed one large *kampong* as 100% of the staff comprised Ceylon Malays!

Hambantota was another *kampong*, as a colony of veteran soldiers of the Regiment had been established there as far back as 1802, to work the salterns. Similarly, many tea and rubber estates became Malay *kampongs*. However, as education spread among other communities, and when demands from members of other communities for employment opportunities in the police, the prisons and the estates became louder and stronger, the Malays began to be displaced from their traditional vocations. As a result, the *kampongs* began to break up, and this was the beginning of the suffering of the Malay community.

The Malays Today

Today, the Malays are distributed in various parts of Sri Lanka. However, when one looks at the census figures, it clearly shows that the Malays are still concentrated mainly in their traditional *kampong* areas. The Malay population in Sri Lanka is approximately 47,558 and constitutes about 0.3% of the population according to the July 2001 census. The district-wise population shows that a larger number of Malays are concentrated in the Colombo district (27,000), with smaller concentrations in Kandy (3,190), Hambantota (3,300), Kurunegala (1,400), Badulla (1,800) and the Estates (1,200).

The large concentration of Malays in Colombo could be explained by the fact that it was the traditional workplace of the Malays - the prisons, fire brigade and police services were all in the Colombo

district. Further, Colombo being the capital of the country and the center of commerce attracted many Malays who felt that employment was more readily available in Colombo. The relatively high population of Malays in the other towns is of course due to these being the traditional Malay strongholds in Sri Lanka. With increasing unemployment and the breaking up of the traditional *kampong* life, the Malay communities soon faced other social problems.

In consequence of increasing unemployment, the economic status of many Malay families declined. One of the consequences of this was, parents couldn't afford dowries, which in turn meant that more and more Malay girls remained single. The situation was so acute that during the last war when Malay troops (or *kawans*) arrived from Indonesia, many a poor young girl was given in marriage to them. Community-wise, Malays suffered the 'pall and gloom' of a retrograde ethnic entity. The community was compelled to subsist in areas where schools and religious institutions were few and inaccessible. The community's socio-economic outlook had never looked worse.

Hope dawned in the early 1970s during the premiership of Sirimao Bandarnaike, when the middle-east job market was flung open to Sri Lankans. A fair share of Malay youth, including Malay girls joined the mad rush for middle-east jobs. The socio-economic status of the Malay youth showed a marked upward spiral.

As far as the social composition of the community is concerned, there were no extremities because of two important factors that influenced the social structure. All the Malays in the country were Muslims, and as such the equality and the brotherhood that was preached among the Malays was practiced. Secondly, in the economic sphere there was no wide disparity, as by and large most of the community members were in government service. And anyway, those who migrated or those who were brought by either the Dutch or the British *Raj*, were not people who were interested in trade, and profit making was not part of their socio-economic structure. There was also the fact that the community was relatively so small that the life in the *kampong* helped to keep the population together.

Taking the entire population of the Muslims, the Malays have done relatively well in producing a civil servant, a Supreme Court judge, an attorney-general and a reasonable ratio of senior executives in the public sector. It would not be unreasonable to presume in this context that the Malays, if and when they were given academic opportunities, did show a tremendous enthusiasm and successfully reached the upper rungs of the particular vocation or profession they chose to pursue. With competition and problems of employment the race did decline economically, and this almost led to the obliteration of the race.

This fact is most conspicuous in the political sphere in the context of the emergence of what is commonly known as a 'Muslim community'. The new nametag is strangely peculiar only to this country. Although Islam is practiced in the Middle East, in parts of the Indian sub-continent and among the Dutch East Indies, no group is referred to as the Muslim community. This fact was firmly established by none other than the Holy Prophet himself through whom the religion of Islam is revealed. He has said that he was an Arab, who belonged to the *bani hasbeem* clan and the tribe known as the *qurash*. It would be laying emphasis on the obvious to make mention of the fact that the Arabs identify themselves separately, even though Arabs are Muslims. The same goes for Iranians, Iraqis, Egyptians and Saudi Arabians.

It has almost become a Sri Lankan custom to use the term 'Muslim' for all those who practice Islam, but for the purpose of governmental census or documentation like birth, death and marriage certificates and application for passports, the racial identity is required. The Malays have unfortunately been assimilated as part of a Muslim community, thereby depriving the Malays of their true identity.

The Malays have a language of their own, customs of their own, food of their own, culture of their own and even clothes of their own, establishing for themselves an identity (socially) of their own. It may be of interest to note here, that it was the Malays who introduced the *del gediya* (bread fruit), the *kos gediya* (jackfruit), the

kesel gediya (plantain) and the much talked of dessert, *wattalapam*. Fruits like *rambutan*, *dhurian* and *mangoosteens* are also of Malay origin. In the same way, the very popular batik is essentially Malay. For some peculiar reason, because of this common usage of the term 'Muslim', most of these traditional customs and practices of the Malays have been credited to others and the existence of the Malay community has almost been forgotten.

The Malays were not in a position to command an electorate for themselves and seek representation in the Parliament. For this purpose, both the Donoughmore Commissioners and the Soulbury Commissioners provided for representation of such ethnic groups, but alas, even here, the majority community appeared to forget the contribution of this very small but important ethnic group, choosing to treat the Malays as part of the Muslim community.

This was highlighted in 1970, when for the first time no Malay legislator was nominated to the Parliament, contrary to the spirit of the country's Constitution. It is now often represented that the sovereign power of the country is vested in the Sinhalese, the Tamils, the Muslims, the Burghers and others, thereby placing the Malays in the unfortunate position of not finding themselves represented either among the Muslims or among the others; if they seek a position in either of the groups, they are pushed to the other.

The net result of this position is that the Sri Lankan Malays, who as mentioned above, comprise about 47,558 people, are in the plight of not having a political identity. The Malay community has always functioned within the political framework of the indigenous population of this country. They have assisted and worked with the mainstream political parties of the country, in no way jeopardizing or obstructing the economic, social and political progress of this country. The Malays have actively participated with immense pride in the progress of the country and may even say with justifiable pride that no single Malay was ever brought before any of the Special Commissions that were established for the purpose of punishing those who violated laws relating to exchange control, or treason.

The demands of the race in the area of education could not be catered for because there was no one sensitive enough in the

legislature to understand the particular needs of this community. Malays no more adorned the judiciary, nor the executive posts in the public sector because education was not possible in the economic mire that engulfed them. Even the governments failed to appear to recognize the existence of such a race, when no invitation was extended to Malays to participate in the deliberations of the Constituent Assembly during the framing of the 1972 Constitution. The doing away of the nominated seats in the 1972 and 1978 Constitutions eradicated any possible representation of the Malays, as representation in the legislature was not possible through the ordinary channels of the use of the franchise.

The Malays were not even invited to make their contribution at the All Party Conference, and even though the Muslims were invited, the representatives consisted of Moors who were totally oblivious to the sentiments or sensitivity of the Malays or their political views. It may be reasonable to state that the Malays would be deeply appreciative if their community is identified as a separate ethnic group in total consonance with the thinking of the fellow citizens of the country that Sri Lanka is and should always remain a single unit, a single nation with the sovereign power vested in the people of the country.

The Malays wish to be identified as a distinct ethnic group with their own culture, language, customs, heritage and ways of life, which do not in any way jeopardize or oppose the life styles of any other race of the country. The Malays also should be recognized as a race actively participating, practicing and totally accepting an Islamic way of life, and as persons who cherish and maintain the highest traditions of Islam as set out in the Holy Quran.

The Malays seek recognition in the highest forum of the country, namely the legislature, as they were accustomed to be represented, and by this means wish to contribute their mite to the nation at large and also be given the right to air their grievances and shortcomings especially in the educational and socio-economic areas of the national life. They are most desirous today as they have always been, to actively participate, sincerely contribute, and be honourably

recognized as a separate identifiable race within a free and united Sri Lanka or nation.

Some recent events of interest which helped elevate the spirits of the Malays was the recent second annual International Conference for Malays held at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from Aug 20-26, 2001, attended by B D K Saldin. He was reappointed to represent Sri Lanka for the second year in succession. Saudara Saldin is the author of two books: *Orang Melayu Sri Lanka dan Bahasanya* and *A Guide to Malay*.

The World Malay conference (*Persidangan Dunia Melayu*) was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from Oct 12-15, 2001. The theme of the conference was, 'Focus on Malayness in various Malay Polygamic Communities'. Delegates from Sri Lanka who attended the conference were Saudaras Alhaj T K Azoor (President – KOSLAM), Alhaj Nizam Samath (Editor-'Terang' & Representative – Kandy Malays), Saudaris Kartini Mohamed (SLMA), and Eileen Dane (Mabole Malays). Such conferences help redefine and reaffirm the roots of the community, giving a sense of security to the members of the community.

Mention has to be made here of the community's watchdog – the *Terang Melayu Surat Khabar*, the only Malay newsletter, which incidentally originated as cultural impact of the *Dunia Bangsa Melayu* Symposium II of 1985, referred to at the outset of this article. The rare foresights and pioneering efforts of the founder-editor Saudara Farook Thaliph, brought it up and gave it the necessary fillip for a strong footing and after its 10 years commemoration, handed it over to the present editor Saudara Alhaj Nizam Samath.

The Colombo Malay Cricket Club (CMCC), which is the oldest Sri Lankan cricket club founded in 1872, hosted the Malaysian Malay cricket team in a series of limited overs cricket matches at the CMCC cricket grounds at Padang complex from Nov 14-20, 2000. This is meant to be an annual event to be played alternatively in Malaysia and Sri Lanka. Saudara T Arifeen Rasif captained the CMCC, while Sheikh Rohan Razak captained the Malaysian Malay cricket team. Last but not the least, mention has to be made of the 'anchorman' of the *Persatuan Melayu Sri Lanka* (SLMA), Saudara Mahamoor

Rajudin, the broad-shouldered former army colonel of Sandhurst vintage. He is softspoken, indefatigable, meticulously regimented and strategic even in his responsibilities as hon. secretary general of SLMA. He has already proved his extraordinary mettle in organization and management of the multifarious functions his office carries with it.

Conclusion

Malays of this generation should reorient their political conscience, realizing that the old format of communal politics has no place in the national politics of 'one nation, one country' concept of today. Malay youth wherever they may be, should come out strongly, out of their traditional shells, outgrow their sectarian and communal outlook, reach out to the national goal of 'one nation, one country', and thus pay tribute to their great leader Jayah who always put country before community.

Alien postures and migratory dreams are obsolete and negative concepts that had all these decades eaten into the Malay body politic. The lot of the Malays will only improve if they consciously get involved in a big way in the mainstream of national politics. They should aspire to national leadership through such broad goals and never fall prey to parochial communalism.

National politics is the only answer to the progress and well-being of the Sri Lankan Malays - a culturally vibrant and resurgent community. Dedication of purpose will achieve that much sought after political clout. This, nonetheless, calls for an impact at the national level:

“When the races all have blended,
And the voice of strife is dumb,
When we hark to a single bugle,
March to a single drum!”

The Parsis

*the influences & impact of a
truly minority community*

Roshan Peiris

Introduction

The Parsis are an ethno-religious minority. But despite their infinitesimal number (less than 100,000 people in the world), they are a people who have unswervingly held to their religion, culture and traditions. The most powerful impact was their religion of Lord Zarathustra or Lord Zoroaster.

It is a fact of history, ironical as it may seem, that the pacesetter role has often been taken over by dominant marginal minorities who due to their adaptability and innovativeness have become initiators of social change in their countries of adoption. It seems that without these minorities, the exogenous mobilizing elements would have had to remain in an isolated marginal position, without access to and contact with outside influences.

Among such creative minorities are the Parsis, be they in India, Sri Lanka, Mozambique, Pakistan or South Africa. Other such minorities are the Levantines and Armenians in the Mediterranean area and the Near East, the Chinese in South East Asia and the Indians in East Africa.

It would be interesting to examine the role of the Parsis: the part they played in the socio-political changes in India, their history and origin, their religion and customs, and more important, their role in Sri Lankan society.

History & Background

To trace the historical roots of the Parsis is meaningful, as it is of decisive significance in the shaping of group identity wherever they

may be settled today. The Parsis in Sri Lanka for over a century and a half have zealously guarded their religion, customs and traditions. Hence, when I deal with the religion and rituals of the Parsis in Sri Lanka, except with a slight alteration in the burial ceremony, the rest are identical with what prevails in India, more particularly in Bombay, where over 55,000 of the 100,000 Parsis live.

So today, be it in India or Sri Lanka, there are very many aspects of ancient Persian culture, which are still preserved and are relevant for understanding the Parsis' ethnic group identity, irrespective of their location.

The Parsis who today are considered an Indian minority are not historically really so. Their true homeland is Persia. The name 'Parsi' refers to the Persian province of Fars, which they left over 1,200 years ago, in order to save their religion, the teachings of Lord Zoroaster (Zarathustra from being Islamized by the invading Arabians.

The epoch of Persian history still relevant for the Parsis the world over begins in the 6th century B.C. and ends with the conquest of Persia by the Muslims in the 7th century A.D.

The relevant historical epoch of the Persians is characterized by the appearance of two dominant personalities who have become determining factors in Persian political as well as religious developments, namely Cyrus I and Lord Zoroaster.

With the two personalities, Iran entered a period of history characterized by an extraordinary intellectual upheaval. It was a kind of an 'axis-period' that has paved the way for the genesis of ancient high cultures, which in turn conceived the basic premises of our current philosophical thought.

Iran is located geographically between two diametrically opposite poles; the ancient Mesopotamian high cultures of Sumeria, Elam, Babylonia and Assiriya on one side, and the Turanian Steppes of Central Asia consisting of nomads, on the other. These two political and cultural poles are symbolized by Cyrus and Lord Zoroaster.

Lord Zoroaster's Teachings

While the Persian polity originated in Western Iran under Achaemenid Cyrus, the teachings of Zoroaster were conceived in

the East in direct confrontation with the nomadic culture on the threshold of history.

This dichotomy represents the basic principles of Iranian history, namely the call to establish an universal political order and the divine mission of *Abura Mazda*, God.

The present day Parsis in India hold to the view despite the many controversies over the actual historical appearance of Lord Zoroaster that he lived and taught between 6000 and 4000 B.C. This opinion is of enormous psychological relevance as it gives the Parsis that religious exclusivity which has been so necessary for the survival of a community that prides itself on the dedicated upholding of its religion and culture in their pristine forms.

There is historical evidence to prove that before the Iranian nation penetrated north-western Iran, the inhabitants of these regions were of Scythic or Turanian origin.

It appears that in these regions the sorcerers formed a separate class and did not conform to any moral code. They sought to secure material gains by the invocation of dark powers and black magic through which they oppressed the people. Alongside this cult existed the practice of demon worship. Against this practice of sorcery and black magic, Lord Zoroaster preached his religion of the *Gatha*, which placed stress on *vohuman* or good mind and *asha* or rectitude. He emphatically stated that there was only one path to righteousness, namely the cultivation of good words, good deeds and good thought, which will help man to worship the one God, *Abura Mazda*.

The Zoroastrian religion repeatedly emphasizes the law of cause and effect. Every event has its cause and every action has its reaction. Thus also the events of a man's life are based on the immutable law of cause and effect. Lord Zoroaster stressed these fundamental principle in his *Gathas* time and again.

The Zoroastrian religion has also never over-emphasized 'other worldliness' to the utter neglect of the material welfare. Man's basic needs should be satisfied prior to his moral and spiritual progress. Hungry stomachs are not likely to respond to the call of moral and spiritual well-being.

The Prayers or *Gathas* handed down in an extensive canon in the *Yssna*, *Visperad*, *Vendidad* and the *Khordab Avesta* are given to man so he can express with their help his veneration of *Abura Mazda*, the one supreme Godhead. The word *Abura* means the 'source of existence' and *Mazda* means 'omniscient'.

The importance and the role of the priests varied in the course of the Parsis' history. However, as each individual believer bears the responsibility for his deeds and his life after death, there is very little room in Zoroastrian teachings for the priest as the keeper of secret knowledge or as the mediator between God and man.

The priests, both in India, here and elsewhere, do play a prominent part at the initiation ceremony of a child called the *navjot*, ceremonies related to marriage and death and in the *Gathas* that begin six days before the Parsi New Year. They also hold *jashan*, religious prayers, on special days and at death anniversaries etc.

Between 226 and 651 A.D. with the Sassanians, a national and cultural renaissance took place. Although the Sassanian empire cannot, despite its universal claim to territorial expansion, be compared with the Achaemenid empire, the Indian Parsis' ethno-cultural feeling of group identity is influenced primarily by this phase of Persian history. Under the Sassanians, Zoroaster's teachings became a state religion for the first time.

The Iranian, Zoroastrian Empire came to a sudden and violent end with the conquest of Iran by Islamic Arabians in the 7th Century A.D. As a direct result of the forced Islamization of Iran, the exodus of the Parsis began.

The Parsis living in India, Sri Lanka, and elsewhere, are the descendents of a group of Persian refugees who first migrated to India after the conquest of Persia by the Arabians. In this regard, the historical dimension of the Parsis' consciousness of ethnic identity agrees with the findings of historical research, even if there is no agreement regarding the exact date of migration.

The question as to what extent the Zoroastrians in Persia were actually subjected to a bloody suppression by fire and sword as many Parsis see it, cannot be described extensively.¹

¹ P. Bulsara.

While some could not leave their hearth and home, and pretended to embrace Islam, others first fled to mountain strongholds protected by Parsi chieftans (*sepabads*). Quite a large number preferred to leave Iran in order to preserve their faith. Kohstan, Hormuzd and other border towns and provinces are known to have given temporary shelter to the homeless, devout Zoroastrians.

It is also known that many of them established settlements in North India. By far the largest convoy of ships touched at Sanjan and many others followed later. Even here, the Parsis came into conflict with Afghan adventurers in Gujarat.

At the earliest opportunity, they asked the permission of the King of Sanjam, Jadi Rana, to be allowed to settle in Sanjan and build a fire temple in Sanjan. As the Hindus themselves hold fire in veneration, permission and every assistance was given to build the temple.

The Sacred Fire

In 721 A.D, the sacred fire was kindled in accordance with the rites of the Zoroastrian religion. I would like to explain what the sacred fire means.

For the consecration of *Atash Behram* (sacred fire), several types of fire from various sources are brought together, filtered several times and conglomerated through a detailed process of meticulous rituals by *mobeds* or priests. Among the various fires required is the fire of lightning to be obtained generally from trees which catch fire in the monsoon on being struck by lightning.

Even today, the 100,000 Parsis who live in India and throughout the world, have an unbroken tradition to which they have adhered with rigidity to the worship of the *Atash Behram* at Udvada. No matter where they live they always unfailingly visit Udvada.

In Sri Lanka, the Parsi community does not have an *Atash Behram* since it has to be tendered around the clock, through the year. The Parsi community here has always been small, with generally only one priest living here, and hence a temple or *Agirai* as it is called which houses the sacred fire has not been built.

The community only has a prayer hall in 5th lane, Kollupitiya, called Navroz Baugh built in 1927 by P N Kapadia in memory of her husband (she was the maternal great-grand mother of K N Choksy and the paternal great-grand mother of P M Lakdavala). There is only a small, oil lamp burning in a special room at the prayer hall. Almost two decades after settling in Sanjan, the Parsis sought permission from the King Jadi Rana to settle in Gujarat in 785 A.D. When the Parsis first settled in Sanjan, the King Jadi Rana imposed on them several conditions; one, the Parsi high priest would explain their religion to the King; two, the Parsis would give up their native Persian language and accept the Gujarati language. (Even today all Parsis in India, Sri Lanka and elsewhere do not speak the Persian language, but Gujarati); three, the women would give up their traditional Persian garb and wear the customary dress of the country, e.g, the saree; four, the men would lay down their weapons. (It is said that the last condition found its fulfillment in the loyalty the Parsis observe today to the ruler or the government in the country they have chosen to settle. This perhaps also is said to account for the non-political professions and trade which they pursued until the latter part of the 19th century in India).

The last condition was that the Parsis would hold their wedding processions in the dark. Their religious and burial ceremonies should not be seen by others so that no influence of the Zoroastrian faith would ever be felt by others. This is the reason why non-Zoroastrians are not allowed to witness religious and burial ceremonies till today. However, if the initiation and wedding ceremonies are not performed in a temple, then the ceremonies can be witnessed by non-Zoroastrians.

Ever since the beginning of the 16th Century, Surat, the important seaport on the west coast of India and the center of trade for both the Mogul Empire and European Companies, had been increasingly attracting Parsis. By the early 18th century, it became the largest Parsi settlement.

The European merchants preferred to transact their business in the Indian hinterland through Parsi middlemen who acted as agents and brokers. They had the advantage on the one hand, of knowledge

of the land and language, and on the other, of being a minority which gave them the necessary flexibility in commerce with foreigners. The Portuguese, French, Dutch and English factories, all employed Parsis as their chief brokers.

The Parsis were noted for skillfully mediating between different interests and political powers (in this case the Nawab of Surat, the English East India Company and the Portuguese Viceroy of Goa). While doing this they brought their own business effectively into play.

After the Portuguese relinquished Bombay to the British in 1551, within a few decades Surat lost its leading role to Bombay, which was free of the pressures of the Moguls and the danger of Marathi invasions. Bombay was therefore developed by the British to be their main port on India's west coast.

A few Parsis had already settled in Bombay during the Portuguese period, but the actual Parsi migration started at the time when the British were developing Bombay as a trading center. The Parsi population in Bombay at that time was 3,887, which formed about 9.2 percent of the total population of 33,444.

By 1812, the number of Parsis had increased to 13,156. Today, 55,000 Parsees live in the city of Bombay. Simultaneously, dispersal of Parsis over the whole of India was also observed. They followed the British merchants or found positions in Princely states, thanks to their familiarity with British administration, language and manners.

Political & Social Perspectives

Earlier in my paper I referred to the pacesetter role of the Parsis in India. I will now discuss their educational, social and political activities in India. The Parsis' educational system was built with élan and enormous expenditure in their adapted homeland in the second half of the 19th century. It was ahead of all other communities in India and made it possible for a group of Parsis to move at this time into key economic, cultural and as far as was possible at that time, into political positions. A survey of Indians

staying in England for higher education in 1884 makes it clear that the Parsis formed 4 percent of the Indian students. The Parsis' strong representation among Indian students in England becomes even more obvious if one considers only students from Bombay Presidency; in this group the Parsis supplied a staggering 70.4 percent of all students.

After the Bombay Native Education Society was formed and the Elphinstone College was founded in the 1820s, a large group of Parsis appeared immediately to realize these new possibilities of social and educational mobility. In this context it was advantageous for the Parsis that they did not have a traditional educational system, as did the Muslims, for example, that could have mobilized opposition to western education.² Around 1850, the new educational institutions had generated such a desire for reforms among the Parsis that the subconscious assimilation process was turned into channels of consciously initiated social and religious reforms.

In 1848, one year before Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy laid the foundation of an independent Parsi educational system at Bombay with the first Parsi school, the Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy Parsi Benevolent Institution, a group of young reformers under the leadership of Dadabhai Naoroji started 'The Students Literary and Scientific Society' along with English teachers and some Hindus. The principal aim of this Society was to raise the educational standards of the population by providing school facilities and voluntary teachers. When the schools faced financial difficulties, Parsi donors helped out. Without this financial and personal support of the Parsis it would not have been capable of surviving in the following years. The society considered the education of young women to be especially important, something that had been neglected by the Elphinstone Institution up till then. It is to the credit of the Parsis that they proved to be decades ahead of all other Indian communities. The Society's nine schools for girls were attended in 1855 by 740 girls - 475 Parsis, 178 Marathi Hindus and 87 Gujarati Hindus.

² Ram Gopal.

While the Parsi schools initially taught only in Gujarati, English was added as a language of instruction after the 1870's. As a forerunner of this trend, the Alexandra Native Girls Education Institute founded by the Parsi, Manekjee Curstjee in 1863, had come into prominence. Even if Gujarati was still spoken in most of the Parsi families, this language soon ceased to be the cultural and educational language of the Parsis.

The eagerness to learn and become educated, which had already encompassed almost the entire community as we have seen in the last decades of the 19th century, and the establishment of educational institutes by the Parsis themselves has led to the Parsis having up till this very day, the highest percentage of literacy of all Indian communities.³

In 1911, 71 percent of the Parsis living in Bombay province were literate. Further, the 1931 census of India reveals that 79 percent of the Parsis living in India were literate which was the highest literacy rate. There was also an increasing demand among the Parsis for mechanical technical and commercial education. "If we are indifferent today to the cause of technical education, tomorrow we might be hustled out of the field and replaced by other races better fitted to survive", said J.F. Bulsara. Thus, for individual educationists such as Edalji Derajbi Talati, the main emphasis during the following years was on technical and commercial education. The Parsi industrialist J.N. Tata provided the strongest and most affective incentive in this direction with the founding of the first Indian school of technology in 1909 in Bangalore.

The Sir Dorabji Tata Trust was established in 1932 and is responsible for the establishment of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences; the Tata Memorial hospital – the first cancer hospital; the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research in mathematics and physics, which became the cradle of the Indian atomic energy programme; and finally, the National Centre for the Performing Arts.

This speaks not only for the educational genius of the Parsis, but their concern for the progress of their adopted country in all spheres.

³ Ekehard Kulke.

It was this forward looking basis for education that threw up a set of young reformers inspired by the liberal politics of Bentick, Elphinston, and Macaulay, consisting predominantly of Parsis in Bombay. These young reformers called themselves 'Young Bombay' and influenced by their English teachers, succeeded in channelising their enthusiasm into practical activity.

In 1851, the reform movement was established under the Parsi, Dadabhai Naoroji, for spreading progressive ideas in the Gujarati paper *Rasr Gofar* (Herald of Truth). In 1852, the first all-India political organization called the 'Bombay Association' was begun in Bombay by Dadabhai Naoroji, which functioned as a platform and mouthpiece for demands for political reforms.

It is strange that the ever-conservative Parsis joined actively in the AITUC (All India Trade Union Congress). B.P.Wadia, a Parsi, is considered as one of those who principally paved the way for the development of a modern trade union movement in India. A theosophist and one of Annie Besant's closest workers in the home rule movement, Wadia founded the 'Madras Labour Union' in 1918, which was the first modern trade union in India with a conscious orientation towards the Western trade union movement and with permanent membership fees.⁴ Dadabhai Naoroji has the distinction of founding the first all-India political association, seventeen years ahead of the Indian Congress.

All in all, three Indians succeeded in being elected to the British Parliament, and all three were Parsis. This fact is in itself so fascinating that I believe it demands a separate investigation and research in order to analyse the political role of the Parsis, especially if one considers that these three Parsi Members of Parliament reflected three different political groups. Dadabhai Naoroji was elected as the first Indian to represent India's rising political aspirations at an open electoral contest in England. This led naturally to a perceptible rise in India's national consciousness. With him, an Indian had proven that he could assert himself and defeat an Englishman in an open contest even in England. The Indian public

⁴ A.S.Mathur & J.S.Mathur.

considered him not only the Member of Parliament for Finsbury, but as a member for India, that is, as a legitimate representative of India in Britain's House of Commons. He contested as a candidate of the British Liberal Party.

Of the other two, M.M. Bhownagree won in 1895 as a member of the British Conservative Party, and S.D. Saklatvals won as a member of the British Labour Party in 1922, and in 1924 as a member of the Communist Party of Britain.

Of these, the most colourful was Dadabhai Naoroji. He was convinced as no other Indian politician at the time, that the political reform movement and Indian national movement could only be successful if they moved to the center of the British Imperium, where the political decisions relevant to India were being framed. His main concern as the first Indian in the British Parliament was to inform the British voter and the British public about India and its problems and thus indirectly influence the British decision-making process. Naoroji firmly believed that the British public was being wrongly informed about India. He also felt it was necessary to directly influence the centers of British power, viz., the Parliament, the Government and the India Office. He was also convinced of British justice and willingness to reform.

Parsis in Sri Lanka

Between the years 1901 and 1961, the numbers of the Parsi community in the Indian subcontinent rose from 93,552 to 105,974, an increase of 12.8 percent.

Many Parsi merchants traveled to China from the 18th century onwards. Those who traveled to China would probably have stopped at Galle, which was a developed seaport under the British, the Dutch and the Portuguese. As the population increased in India, the Parsis sought new pastures and Ceylon seemed a good option as it was not too far from Bombay.

K.D. Choksy of Ceylon who has written about the Parsis extensively, mentions that there are several references to the Parsis in Sri Lanka from the early 19th century. One of the records available is the Ceylon

Chamber of Commerce's work on the history of the Chamber for the years 1839 to 1964. This work mentions that at the very first meeting on Feb.20, 1839 of the Mercantile Community in Ceylon to consider the desirability of establishing a Chamber of Commerce, 11 firms were elected. Of these, 2 were Parsi firms, namely, Hormusjee Espandiarger and Shapurjee Hirjee. The rest were Englishmen.

There is no record of Hormusjee Espandiarger, but Shapurjee Hirjee may have been the father of Byramjee Shapurjee, trustee of the Kotanchina (Kotahena) Parsi Burial Trust established on April 19,1847.

The next non-European member of the Chamber of Commerce was also a Parsi firm, Framjee Bhikhajee & Co., which was elected in 1890. This firm with head offices in Bombay was established in Ceylon in the middle of the 19th century. Its activities varied, ranging from import and export, trade and banking, to indent agents and extraction of coconut oil at its oil mills in Grandpass.

There were later, two big coconut oil mills built during the first World War. One was the Colombo Oil Mills belonging to this firm and the other belonging to the German firm of Freudenburg, which was taken over by the British Government during the first World War and converted into a limited liability Company, namely the British Ceylon Corporation. The other main records available are those of the Ceylon Parsi Anjuman Trust Fund. The oldest deed, No.1179 was dated April 19,1947, regarding the first Parsi burial ground at Kotahena.

After using this Burial Ground for 40 years, the need arose for a bigger burial ground. Mr.Pestonjee Dinshawjee Khan obtained crown land of around two and a half acres on June 13, 1887, for the Parsis, which is still in use at Jawatte Road, Colombo.

The Parsi priests' maintenance fund was started in 1910. The Parsis had rented houses from time to time to be used as a Prayer Hall and living quarters for the priest and his family. Finally, P M Kapadia (Meherbai) in 1923 fulfilled the wishes of her husband and donated

56½ perches of land and built a house called Bavroz Banug, which is still in use at 5th Lane, Kollupitiya, Colombo.

The Parsis Today

The Parsis today number only 45 persons, down from 450 in the 1930s and 40s. At that time, the community got together and brought down a teacher from Bombay to teach Gujarati to the Parsi children. The Parsis in Ceylon began dwindling in numbers since emigration from Bombay stopped. Many Parsi professionals also left the country, particularly between the late 1950s and 1970s, for Australia. The trend of inter-marriage also started in the community, especially from the 1950s onwards, when the young men and women were exposed to university education and mingled freely with members of other communities; they naturally found partners of their choice. Conversion is not allowed by the Parsi community. If a Parsi woman marries out of the community, she cannot expect her children to be accepted into the Parsi community fold. The men who have contracted such marriages, however, can remain within the community if they wear the sacred shirt and thread.

The more conservative persons though, with a view to keeping their religious beliefs and community intact, sought partners in Bombay whom they married and brought over.

The Parsis in Sri Lanka have got along well with other communities winning their respect and friendship. They have moved around amiably while clinging to their own customs and traditions with almost a fanatical fervour.

The Parsis, in the early years concentrated on business. They were, to mention a few, Jamshed Rustomjee and P.N. Kapadia, importers of wheat flour and sugar. There was a firm of R.Rustomjee which exported coir and is still operational. One of the better known businessmen was E.S. Captain who came over here as general manager of the Wellawatte Spinning and Weaving Mill, one of the best known landmarks of Colombo, in 1914. The mill was planned and controlled by a group of businessmen in India until the early 1930s when it was bought over by the *maharaja* of Gawlior. Captain

remained its general manager, even when the mill was made a public company in 1955, until he retired in 1961.

His son S. E. Captain is an established businessman with varied business enterprises ranging from paints and furniture, to the manufacturing of tooth brushes.

There were Parsis in the life insurance business as well. D.S. Crawford and N.D. Jilla began some of the earliest dye works in Colombo. There was also the Ceylon Bakery begun by a Pestonjee. Edaljee Billimoria was a well-known ship chandler.

Even today, the brothers B.R. Rustomjee and T.R. Rustomjee and their sons, the Pestonjee brothers, S.E. Captain and Roitun Chyoksy to mention a few, are big time businessmen. The first Parsi businesswoman in Ceylon is Aban Pestonjee, who has started several business enterprises together with her husband. Framroze Parek was the only Parsi who owned and operated film theaters for a long time. On record, there is a Parsi who owned a tea estate, Wewessa Estate, belonging to the Colombo-Wallah family.

The early Parsis in Sri Lanka being affluent, sought to educate their sons and daughters in some of the best schools in Colombo. The sons in the early years attended Royal College and later St. Thomas College. The daughters attended Bishops College, Ladies and Methodist College and St. Bridget's Convent. For such a small community, the academic and professional record is outstanding. The professions favoured by the Parsis were mainly law, medicine and architecture.

I will mention only a few of them by name. There was Dr R Pestonjee, whose name was well-known in the country for his outstanding work for many years at the Leprosy Asylum at Hendala. He was the Director-in-Charge. Dr. K.D. Rustomjee helped in a great measure to eradicate malaria in this country, and later worked for the Cancer Society with dedication. Dr. J. Dadabhoy was an eye surgeon who rose to be the Chief-Surgeon in charge of the country's biggest eye hospital, the Colombo Eye Hospital, until his retirement in the late 60s. Dr. R.C.J. Rustomjee was a well-known E.N.T. Specialist who subsequently migrated to Australia. Dr. M.N. Nilla was an army doctor.

There are many lawyers from the community. N.K. Choksy is outstanding in that he became the first Parsi in Ceylon to be made a Q.C. He was acting Commissioner of Assizes and the Local Government service commission Chairman whose report, the Choksy Report, is still in use. His son K.N. Choksy is today the finance minister of Sri Lanka. He is also an outstanding civil lawyer and the first Parsi President's council. A proud record for any family. Proctor B.K. Billimoria also served for a long time with Ceylon Theaters. The brothers H.C.J. Rustomjee and N.C.J. Rustomjee were also lawyers and the latter was also a lecturer at Law College. Proctor Farmrose Rustomjee, who wrote many a booklet on the Parsi customs and rituals was also a well-known person in law circles.

Among the architects, H F Billimoria was the one who designed the Independence Hall and rose to be the chief government architect. H.J. Billimoria also worked as a government architect. J.C. Nilgiriya was a partner in the well-known firm of architects, Edward, Reed and Begg. The youngest of the architects is Firoze Choksy.

Then there were the Jilla brothers; F.N. Jilla in the Police, K.N. Jilla in the Navy and H.M.D. Jilla, who was a civil servant. It is also notable that K.F. Billimoria was the first Principal of Dharmaraja College, Kandy. He was principal for 31 years. This is a fine example of the Parsis' capacity for adaptability and integration. His widow installed a student scholarship which enables poor students to buy their books and clothes, apart from a university scholarship to educate a student at the university.

The girls too went in for higher education. Shera Pestonjee passed out as a doctor winning the gold medal for surgery. Her two sisters were general arts graduates.⁵

The Englishmen's enthusiasm for sports was always fervently imitated by the Parsis in India. Cricket in Bombay became a favourite sports of the Parsis overnight. The first Parsi Cricket Club was installed in Bombay in 1850. In Ceylon too, the Parsis played cricket for their colleges and clubs, especially the Jilla brothers who played

⁵ Roshan Pestonjee, the author, is herself an Honours graduate in History and an eminent journalist.

for Royal College, and M.N. Jilla who played for Medical College as well.

In the early years, Dr. D. Dadabhoy, according to S.P. Foenander a well-known cricket commentator, played for Royal College Eleven in 1900 when the Thomians were defeated by three wickets. He was considered one of the best school wicketkeepers of the time. He turned out for the Colts on occasions, and was for a time, a very efficient Honorary Secretary of the Club.

Foenander records that the Parsi community had always been warm-hearted supporters of the Colts Cricket Club. One of its members, F. Dadabhoy,⁶ assisted the Colts in various ways. He was largely instrumental in raising funds needed to send the Ceylonese team to Bombay in 1905, and he also took a leading part in inducing the Elphinston college, Bombay, past and present teams to tour Ceylon in 1904. He was also a senior vice-president of the Colts Club.

The Parsis shone at table tennis. M.N. Oakdavala, Pesi and Charlie Pestonjee and Rusi Captain have all played at national levels. H.C. Pestonjee had been a president of the table tennis association. In tennis, the late F. Dadabhoy had won at the national championships. Firoze Billimoria and Solli Captain have done well at golf. Solli Captain was the golf champion of both the Colombo and Nuwara Eliya golf clubs. P.L. Pestonjee was a well-known football referee, in the 1930s.

The Parsis had built a hall, Parasmony, at Clifford Road, Kollupitiya, where the land was donated by E. Rustomjee and the hall built by R. Rustomjee. Here the community met to play table tennis and for social occasions.

The Parsis, however, have not participated in national politics. They have steered clear of it. Their political tendencies are towards the right in voting at elections. – i.e. UNP or SLFP. They have unfortunately made no impact in national politics.

In local politics, J. Hormusjee, F. Dadabhoy in the latter 30s and early 40s was a nominated member of the Colombo Municipal Council. Dadabhoy was a nominated member for eight years.

⁶ The author's father.

The low profile in national politics may have been due to the fact that the Parsis preferred to remain neutral and safeguard their business enterprises or else, they were too busy in their professional carriers to devote much time to dabbling in national politics. It is a pity though, considering their distinguished record in India.

The Parsis in Sri Lanka have however done a great deal for the country in the way of charity. It was Soli Captain who met the costs for Sri Lanka's first Cancer Hospice. The Khan family built the Khan Memorial Ward at the General Hospital and the Khan Clock Tower in Pettah. They also presented the Khan Memorial Prize in Economics at the University and several gold medals at Medical College.

The Dadabhoy family gave two memorial gold medals at the medical college and endowed a prize at Royal College. The Parsis also worked in many social service projects such as the Social Service League, the Cancer Association, and the Home for the Incurables.

Although the Parsis of Sri Lanka live in accordance with the Indian Parsi lifestyle, they have been forced to make certain changes. Unlike in India, the Tower of Silence where a Parsi is placed after death does not exist in Sri Lanka and an alternative arrangement of burial has replaced this custom.

The funeral ceremony is usually conducted within 24 hours of death and burial takes place at the Parsi cemetery at Jawatte in Colombo. Fire, the symbol of purity is lit immediately when a person dies and the lamp is placed near the body of the departed soul. A unique feature in a Parsi funeral is the employing of a 'four-eyed dog' (a dog with two markings above its eyes), which is led up to the corpse. If the dog turns away from the deceased this serves as a final test to ensure that the person is dead. However, it is believed that for four days the soul will remain in this world, and on the fourth day after burial, the family meet for lunch.

The Paris Club, which seeks to keep the Parsi community together, engages in annual activities centred around fellowship. The President of the organization is Aban Pestonjee, the Managing Director of

Abans Ltd. The Parsi Club has gatherings three times a year, viz., on the Prophet's birthday, the Club birthday and on March 21. These take the form of a dinner and also some games.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the Parsi community is highly dynamic. But for the reasons mentioned earlier in this essay, the numbers of the community is diminishing at a fast rate. It is indeed a cause for concern. But so dynamic is the community that the community members will continue to prosper and contribute to whichever society they live in.

The Malayalees

their origins, growth and decline

Jagath Senaratne

Introduction

'Malayalees of Sri Lanka' is used as a generic term to identify all migrants to Sri Lanka from that territory of India which now constitutes the state of Kerala. Historical relations between South India and Sri Lanka have influenced the social life, customs and polity of this island for more than a thousand years. Sri Lanka has received enduring cultural and social impulses from Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu in the south-east of India, to Kerala in the west coast. It is thus in the fitness of things to examine the specific influence of Kerala, in our attempt to understand the dynamics of the Malayalee community in this island.

History & Background

"And now that ye may know how pepper is got, let me tell you that it groweth in a certain empire whereunto I came to land, the name whereof is Minibar, and it groweth nowhere else in the world but there. And the forest in which the pepper groweth, extendeth for a good eighteen days' journey, and in that forest there be two cities the one whereof is called Flanderina and the other Cyngilin".

- Frier Udoric of Pordenone¹

¹ Yule Sir Henry, 1866. (Frier Udoric came to the east around 1322 A.D. Minibar is an old Arabic form of the name Malabar and Cyngilin is understood as being derived from 'Sinhala' or 'Sihala').

Three great kingdoms - the Cholas, the Pandyas, and the Cheras, flowered in South India during the early Christian era. The Chera dynasty on the western coast, roughly comprising the Kerala state of modern India, reached the height of its power during 2nd century AD.

As the Chera kingdom disintegrated into numerous principalities constantly at war with each other, the Pandya and Chola kingdoms were expanding their influence over southern India. While warring with each other in their efforts at territorial expansion and dominance, they periodically undertook military forays across the straits into Ceylon.

The evolution over several centuries of a strong martial arts tradition in Kerala was fuelled by the constant needs of the principalities in the internecine wars. As the reputation of the Kerala warriors spread across South India, the Pandyan and Chola kings regularly recruited them in their armies. They not only fought the mainland battles, but were also part of the military expeditions to Ceylon. Clearly, the role of the man of Kerala was that of a professional soldier in the employ of Tamil kings. Having tasted this 'freelance' life, many Malayalees² crossed over to Ceylon either to settle into a peaceful life in the island or to step up their career by taking service under Sinhalese princes.³

During the reign of King Mahinda V (981-1017 AD), mutinous Sinhala, Keralese and Canares soldiers governed large areas of Lanka as they wished and a state of disorder prevailed.⁴ The usuper Kalinga prince - Magha (Ukalinga Vijayabahu) - held sway over Lanka for nearly forty years and is said to have invaded with an army of twenty four thousand men.⁵ The duration of his rule confirms the presence of a large and strong army. Magha's army was composed of mercenary recruits from Kerala and the Tamil kingdoms of South

² "Malayalees" refers to the inhabitants of Kerala and elsewhere who speak the Malayalam language

³ M D Raghavan, 1969.

⁴ Geiger Wilhelm, 1960.

⁵ S Pathmanathan, 1978.

India, with the Kerala warriors figuring prominently in it.⁶ The Kerala mercenaries were a public disaster during the reign of the usurper Magha. They oppressed and harassed the people in a terrible manner, plundered their houses and took away their possessions and Magha himself, whose power depended on this soldiery, delivered to the Keralese whatever else belonged to the Sihalas writes Geiger Wilhelm.⁷

Malayalee mercenary soldiers were being employed as late as the reign of Parakramabahu VI (1411-1466 AD) and were prominent in the invading force of the Sapumal Prince when he besieged Jaffna. Notes G.V.P. Somaratne, "The Kotte army was composed of Demala (Tamil), Malala (Malabar) and Doluvara (Tulu) soldiers in addition to the Sinhalese".⁸

These armies of conquest and defense were evidently multi-ethnic in composition, and there appears to be no evidence of ethnic conflict arising within them. The hostile terrain and environment along with the primitive communications and logistic facilities available at the time ensured that the writ of the conqueror or defender ran tenuously, if at all, on the outermost perimeters of these principalities. The incessant warring was the result of the ebb and flow of fortune of these kingdoms, which found it difficult to maintain control over even relatively small geographical areas for reasonable periods of time. When a temporary cessation of hostilities occurred, there was a tendency on the part of the soldiers to disband and settle down amongst the local populace, Sinhala or Tamil dominated as the case may be.⁹

At this juncture, it is relevant to explore in greater detail the martial arts traditions of both Lanka and Kerala, as it serves to throw light on the historical relationships between them. The martial arts centers of Kerala were called *kalari* and were famous all over South India. The techniques of sword fighting, self-defence, pole-vaulting and

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Geiger Wilhelm, 1960.

⁸ G.V.P. Somaratne, 1975.

⁹ Through these assimilations and other influences, Malayalam has come to influence the Sinhala language and script in an indisputable fashion.

other forms of combat taught within them were called *kalaripayattu*. There is a striking resemblance between the Kandyan *haramba salava*, the specialized centers of martial training existing in Kandy during the same period, and the *kalaries* of Kerala.¹⁰ The practice of 'single combat' known as *angam* in Sinhalese as well as Malayalam is yet another example. The weapons used in the *angam* were death-dealing and the centers of martial combat were known as *marmasthana* in Kerala and *maranil* in Lanka. Research indicates that Lanka was the origin of this practice, with a good deal of exchange between the two lands.¹¹

According to popular malayalee sources, soldiers from Kerala arrived in Sri Lanka during the 14th century to aid besieged Sinhala rulers in their struggle against the *aryacakravarti* invaders from the North. Notes K.M. De Silva, "In the second half of the 14th century, the fortunes of the Sinhalese reached its nadir. Jaffna under the *aryacakravartis* was the most powerful kingdom in the island. As the Sinhalese power in the island declined, the Tamils moved southwards to exact tribute from the South-West and Central region."¹² A king from Kerala called Alageswaran (or Alagakonar) is said to have taken this opportunity to establish fraternal relations with the rulers of Lanka by offering military assistance. Most of these soldiers¹³ did not return to Kerala, and are said to have quickly settled amidst the Sinhalese.

¹⁰ M D Raghavan, 1969.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² K M De Silva, 1981.

¹³ In Alageswaran's army there were reputed to have been many young men from Nayar families like Kannankara and Kurup who were well versed in the arts of Kalaripayattu and members of Alageswaram's own caste like Ponnamp rumal, Nallaperumal, Thevaraperumal, Alagakonar, Weerakonar, Wijayakonar were also represented. Some of these names are clearly related to names found among contemporary Sinhalese. Others seem closer to Tamilnadu in origin, and may have been due to the presence of Tamilnadu mercenaries. It is also said that an inscription was made at the Kelani Vihara by Lankan Kings as a token of appreciation for services rendered by these soldiers from Kerala (reference is made to this inscription in Kuruppu, 1934).

At this point it is relevant to consider the remarkable Alagesvara family which came to political prominence at the very beginning of the Kotte kingdom. They undoubtedly made a valuable contribution in the struggle against the *aryacakravarti* invader. While the relevant period “is one of the worst documented periods in Ceylon history”¹⁴, it links the Alageswaras to Vanci,¹⁵ the capital of the Chera kingdom, which has now been identified as Kuruvur in Kerala. The Chera kingdom’s importance in international trade during this period leads to the conjecture that the Alagesvarans may have originally been traders. Hence it is quite possible that Malayalee warriors were brought from Kerala to help in the struggle against the *aryacakravartis*.¹⁶

Alagakonar’s main achievement was organization of the military campaign, which culminated in the *aryacakravarti*’s defeat. This made him one of the most eulogized personalities in medieval Sinhalese history. For instance, the *Niyamgampaya* inscription claims that “Alagakkonara became the favourite of the goddess of victory” and the two chronicles, *Nikayasangrahaya* and *Rajavaliya* further elaborate and confirm these statements in the inscription.¹⁷ Alagakonara built

¹⁴ Somaratne, 1975.

¹⁵ Kuruppu, (he was the President of the Ceylon Malayalee Mahajana Sabha and headmaster of Zahira college at that time. Community leaders like him were influential opinion creators among the Malayalees) writing in a popular vein, says that a Prince Alagakonar sailed from Vanci to aid Sinhala Kings against the Aryan emperor Pandyarajah.. They strove to emphasise the long historical relations between Kerala and Sri Lanka. Their writings illustrate the role of myth in the 20th Century Sri Lankan Malayalee’s yearning for an identity).

¹⁶ See Somaratne, 1975, for a comprehensive account of the role played by the Alakesvara family in the Kotte kingdom. While popular Malayalee sources say that an inscription was made at the Kelani Vihara mentioning the contributions of Keralese soldiers, there seems to be no epigraphical basis for this. Among the inscriptions that do exist is the Kitsirimevan Kalani inscription of 1344 AD which refers to a minister named Alagakkonars, and of his great services to the kingdom. See further, Bell & Mendis Guneseckera, 1916.

¹⁷ Pathmanathan, 1978.

fortifications and raised a large army prior to his campaign against the *Aryacakravarti*, and one of the important fortresses he constructed later came to be known as Kotte.

As mentioned in the *Rajavaliya Chulavansa* and *Rajaratnakariya* chronicles, it was defended by iron spikes (*idangini*), tiger-faced traps (*pulimukam*), caltrops (*bhumiyntattu*), and watch towers (*attala*). "The use of Dravidian loan words suggest that the technique of constructing fortifications as practiced during this period was borrowed from Kerala and the Tamil kingdoms from where a large number of mercenaries came to the island", according to Padmanathan.¹⁸ The events of this period are of considerable importance. They provide the factual elements around which powerful Malayalee and Sinhalese myths were to evolve.

Malayalees and Trade

Sri Lanka's external trade relations with Kerala were another source of constant Malayalee migration to the island, at least from the 11th century onwards. Muslim Arabs had acquired a foothold in Kerala by the 10th century and a significant Muslim Malayalee community emerged in Kerala. They proceeded to expand their trading activities all over the Coromandel coast and their dominance of Indo-Lanka trade by the 13th century paved the way for increasing numbers of Muslim settlements in and around ports on the western and south western coasts of the island.¹⁹ "The trade with India was in the hands, largely, of foreigners – some Tamils, Malabari Muslims and Chetties, with the Chetties and other Hindus perhaps the largest group numerically. Many of them had long been settled in the ports of Colombo, Galle and Jaffna and were an important link with the Indian traders. The Malabari Muslim traders had relatives living in Mannar, Galle and Batticaloa, while some of them had a dual domicile".²⁰

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ K.M. de Silva, 1981.

With the entrance of the Portuguese into Kerala towards the end of the 15th century, a series of events, which had far-reaching repercussions on the Kotte Kingdom was initiated. The thriving Muslim Malayalee-dominated trade network between Kerala and Lanka came into conflict with the imperial ambitions of the Portuguese. The *zamorin* of Calicut, although a Hindu, supported the Muslim shipmasters and traders in this conflict so as to save his long flourishing trade with the Muslims.²¹ The strategy of the Portuguese on the other hand was to manipulate the political rivalry then existing between the *raja* of Cochin and the *zamorin*. At that juncture, the *zamorin* was on the point of overpowering the *raja*, having brought South Malabar under his suzerainty.²²

While slowly but surely entrenching themselves in Kerala, the Portuguese were also able to extend their power to Kotte in Sri Lanka by 1505-6 and were able to build a fort in Colombo by 1518.²³ Although the Portuguese continued to trade with the Muslims who had hitherto monopolized the external trade of the Kotte Kingdom on equal terms for the first dozen years, they strove to dominate and monopolize trade as their political power grew.²⁴ "The initiative in concerting action against the Portuguese in these matters was taken by the Muslim traders resident in Kotte and their co-religionists in Malabar, who resented the loss to the Portuguese of their trade in the island."²⁵ It is clear from this that the Malayalee Muslims were an economic force to be reckoned with and were not averse to giving political expression to their grievances. The Malayalee Muslims had experienced Portuguese incursions earlier than the Sinhalese and were aware of the repercussions.

Although they were mainly interested in defending their trade interests, it is their initiative which created a sympathetic response within the people against the Iberian invasion. When King

²¹ Somaratne, 1975.

²² E.M.S. Namboodiripad, 1963.

²³ K.M. de Silva, 1972

²⁴ K.M. de Silva, 1981

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Bhuvanekabahu was compelled by the Portuguese in 1526 to move against the Muslims, King Mayadunne, the ruler of Sitawaka and the Raigama chose to defend the cause of the Muslims.

Mayadunne played a leading role in the events of 1521²⁶ and had ambitions of controlling entire Kotte. With his brother Bhuvanekabahu in alliance with the Portuguese, Mayadunne established a link with the *zamorin* of Calicut, "whose navy though not the equal of the Portuguese, was of great assistance to him over the next decade."²⁷ This is clear affirmation of the long and established relations with Kerala, and the decade-long alliance would have undoubtedly strengthened the presence of Malayalee traders as well as soldiers in the Kotte area.

The simmering antagonism between Bhuvanekabahu and Mayadunne flared into open conflict towards the very end of the 1530's, and although victory was within Mayadunne's grasp, the more advanced military technology of the Portuguese finally prevailed and Mayadunne was compelled to sue for peace. Narrates De Silva, s" "The terms imposed on him were utterly humiliating and none more so than the requirement that he execute the leaders of the Malabari forces who had come to the island to assist him and send their severed heads to the Portuguese. Mayadunne complied with this demand to the disgust of the *Zamorin*, and as a result, the Sitawaka – Calicut *entente* was never to be revived."²⁸

The ordinary Malayalee soldiers are believed to have settled down in the Kotte and Sitawaka areas, doubtless playing a role in the numerous skirmishes subsequent to Mayadunne's initial defeat.

With the inexorable growth of the European imperial powers, and the parallel transformations taking place in the social structure of Kerala, the Malayalee mercenary soldier gradually exited from the historical scene.

²⁶ The assassination of Vijayabahu VI by his three sons and the division of Kotte among them.

²⁷ K.M. de Silva, 1981.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Malayalee Migration under the British

With the greater control exerted by the Dutch, and the total subjugation of the island by the British from 1815 onwards, Sri Lanka's economy and society as a whole began to change rapidly under colonial domination.

The rapid monetary growths of the economy, coupled with the growth in both internal and external trade, stimulated further migration of Indian trader groups into Sri Lanka, among whom the Malayalees were well represented. Large-scale migration of Malayalees began towards the late 19th century and continued till World War II. The growth of highly labour-intensive coffee, tea and rubber plantations created a labour demand which could not be satisfied through indigenous means, due to the Sinhalese peasantry's refusal to be incorporated into the labour process on the plantations. It was on the crest of this demand that large-scale migration of south Indians from Tamilnadu, Kerala and even Andhra Pradesh (Telegu speaking) and Karnataka (Kannada speaking) took place.²⁹

Quite apart from the plantations, the development in commerce and industry created a labour demand in Colombo and its environs. Malayalee workers adapted themselves very well to the required degree of work discipline and were living in all parts of the country by the 1930's. "They were an important part of the Sri Lanka working-class in the 1920's and 1930's being known locally as

²⁹ It is interesting to note that today these disparate groups have been welded into a close-knit community (ie. Tamils of Recent Indian Origin), hardly more than a century after their arrival. They speak a distinct version of Tamil incorporating a few Telegu and Malayalam words and constructions, which is recognisably different from that which is spoken by Tamils in the north and east.

*koichiyas*³⁰ since many were from the Cochin area. In Colombo they worked in mills and factories and were employed in other key sectors such as the port and railways. In addition, Malayalees were popular as domestic servants in the homes of the European and local bourgeoisie. The Malayalees also included members of the Irava (*ezhava*) caste who had migrated to Sri Lanka to work as toddy tappers. There was also a petty bourgeoisie of Malayali clerks, teachers, small traders and tea shop owners. In 1911, there were around 1,000 Malayalis in Sri Lanka, but the numbers had risen to 30,000 in the 1930's.³¹

Many of these Malayalee workers lived together in large houses in communities of 50-60. Most of these *chumeries* had organized night schools and members were affiliated to various Malayalee religious, cultural and political organizations. In fact, the night schools were a distinctive feature of the Malayalee organizations. The teaching of English was given prime importance, presumably to enhance job and promotional prospects in the English dominant private mercantile and government sectors. Incidentally, these night schools were forums where trade union organizers were active among the workers. The LSSP (Lanka sama samaja party), and later on the CP (communist party), used these forums very successfully for their political work. These activities facilitated the easy organization of Malayalee workers in Colombo.

Malayalees living in urban areas were multi-lingual through force of circumstance. Working class Malayalees knew Sinhala or Tamil and sometimes both, in addition to Malayalam. Those who had

³⁰ Raghavan, 1969. "Ceylon's relations have evidently been more deeply rooted in the State of Cochin than in the rest of Kerala. Cochikade is the name both of a ward of the Colombo Municipality and of a town of considerable business activity in the vicinity of Negombo. Heard in and about Colombo, is the term 'Cochiyan' which generally signifies a man of Malabar descent or ancestry. Alternatively, the term 'Cochin' is used as a more decent form to denote a man from Kerala, irrespective of its different parts, like Travancore, Cochin or Malabr, a relic of the old inter-relations between Ceylon and Cochin".

Jayawardena, 1984.

settled amidst Tamils in the north west and east habitually spoke Tamil as it was the language of education and general social intercourse. A similar pattern obtained in the Sinhala speaking areas. During this time, there were reputed to be only 600 Malayalee women among the total estimated 40,000 present in Sri Lanka.³² While many Malayalees considered themselves expatriate workers and went back to Kerala after sometime, a significant number married Sinhala women and settled down here. This bred a degree of hostility among the Sinhalese and it was popularly held that the Malayalees used sorcery to ensnare Sinhala women!³³

Malayalee Influence in the North and the East

The *Mukkuwas* of the coast of Malabar and the *Mookwanas* of West Gujarat closely resemble the *Mukkuwas* of Ceylon. The *Mukkuwas* are said to have fled the Mohammedan Arab invaders who overran the Malabar coast and landed first at Kudremale in Lanka.³⁴ During the times of the *aryacakrawartis*, large settlements were founded in Jaffna. However, according to legend, the *Mukkuwas* were expelled from the northern coastal areas for having desecrated the beaches of Kankasanturai and Kirimalai. Large settlements of the *Mukkuwas* are found even today in the Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Calpentin, and Puttalam districts.”³⁵

³² Kuruppu, 1934.

³³ This is a highly contentious issue. The occult arts have a very long history in Kerala. Superstition and sorcery govern the daily lives of the Keralese to an inordinate degree, and the Sinhalese too evince similar disposition. Many Malayalees took to the vocation of a *Kattadiya* (native witch-doctor) in Sri Lanka, and were renown islandwide for their powers. A notice advertising ‘Malayalee Manthrams’ (ie. Charms) was a familiar sight outside their residences. (Incidentally, Dr.A.T.Kovoor, the famous Rationalist was a Malayalee. His uncompromising battle against the occult is said to have been stimulated by the affinity of his community to sorcery.)

³⁴ H. W. Tambiah, 1954.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

The close affinity between Kerala, Jaffna and the eastern province is further revealed clearly by the close affinity between three systems of customary law – the *mukkuwa* law, the *thesawalamai* law and the Malabar *marumakattayam* law.³⁶ There is a remarkable correspondence between the *mukkuwa* law, the *marumakattayam* and the *aliyasantana* laws of Malabar. States Tambiah, “The resemblances are so great that it is legitimate to surmise that the original *marumakattayam* law in its pristine purity and before it came into impact with the civilization of the Nambudhri Brahmanas and other races that settled down in Malabar, was almost similar to the *mukkuwa* law of Ceylon”.³⁷

Raghavan goes on to describe the similarities in social and cultural practices like marriage customs, cooking traditions and modes of dress, which underscore the long and deep relations between Jaffna and Kerala.

Caste, Communal Identity and Assimilation

Caste identity is crucial to the Malayalee and it continues to play an important role in Kerala’s social fabric and social intercourse. From

³⁶ *Ibid*; Raghavan, 1956.

³⁷ Tambiah, 1954: With reference to the origins of Mukkuwa Law Tambiah quotes from Chief Justice Sri Alexander Johnston’s dispatches written around 1815.. “The modification which prevails among the Mukkuwa inhabitants in the Province of Puttalam, on the west, and in that of Batticaloa on the east side of Ceylon, of the peculiar law of inheritance which is observed amongst certain classes of people on the Malabar Coast, these modifications of the Law prevail in Ceylon amongst the people called Moguas, who about 5 or 6 centuries ago, came from the Malabar Coast, and made establishments in the Province of Puttalam, on the west; and in that of Batticaloa on the east side of the Island, in the former although some of the Moguas became landholders they did not acquire much influence in the Province; but they also gradually acquired the complete government of the Province, in both these Provinces in as far as their own land properties were concerned, they introduced the same Law of Inheritance as prevails amongst the Nayars and many other classes of inhabitants, on the Malabar Coast.”

around the 14th century onwards, high caste Malayalee migrants seem to have assimilated freely with the Sinhalese and the Muslims up till the mid 19th century. This pattern changed with the migrations of the 19th century after which they seem to have kept themselves aloof. Large numbers of them went back to Kerala even over three or four generations and in most cases to villages of corresponding caste, for the purpose of contracting marriages.

The reasons for this may be three-fold. One, the earlier settlers had a longer and easier period in a pre-modern, non-centralised society to put down roots and integrate. Two, the Sinhalese ruler looked upon them in most instances as valuable allies who had come to their aid. Whatever the outcome of the military conflicts, the Lankan rulers may have given land as tokens of gratitude and encouraged them to settle down. According to popular Malayalee sources, Malayalees were even absorbed into the *goigama* caste, the highest in the Sinhalese caste hierarchy.³⁸ The third factor, and possibly the determining one, when we consider the situation faced by the other cultural minorities as well, is the lack at that time of the 'exclusionary' Sinhalese nationalist movement. Such a movement and a striving towards a Sinhala nation-state, however embryonic, had both begun to emerge by the late 19th century.

In the case of the *ezhava*³⁹ caste (or *thiyya* as they are known in Kerala), considered low by Malayalees, the situation was quite different. They migrated in large numbers and according to some sources, about

³⁸ Kuruppu, 1934.

³⁹ In the course of discussing the origins of Christians, Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists in Kerala a writer says: "Equally unhistorical is the theory that *Ezhavas* are immigrants from Ceylon. For, it is most improbable that a section of the people constituting nearly 25 per cent of the Malayalee Hindu population should have come from outside during the last 2,000 years without leaving behind them any trace or their having come and settled here. (*Ezhavas* are supposed to have brought Buddhism from Ceylon. Hence they could not have come here before the beginning of the Christian Era.) And yet historians accept the theory with no other evidence than the extremely farfetched interpretation of certain words like *Ilava* and *Thenkai*."

15,000 of them arrived in Ceylon between the two world wars. In Colombo and other important urban centers, they worked in the ports, railways, mills and factories, and even as domestic servants. In rural areas their vocation was predominantly toddy tapping. Although the *ezhavas* are associated with Buddhism in Kerala, a large proportion of those who migrated to Ceylon were Hindus. Caste oppression in Kerala was one of the reasons which brought them to Ceylon, which also would seem to have dissuaded them from migrating back. Those who stayed back converted to Buddhism and became quickly assimilated with the Sinhalese.⁴⁰

Malayalee Class Structure

The class-structure of the Malayalees can be graphically expressed as a pyramid with a tail thin apex and a broad base. This was quite dissimilar to, for example, the trader-merchant groups like the Chetties or Bohras, whose near-homogeneity in socio-economic class terms was clearly evident. Malayalee migrants came from practically all class backgrounds except those who had little or nothing to gain, namely, the big land-holders and the wealthy, long-established merchants of Kerala.

Excluding the main plantation crops, Ceylon's external trade was largely in the hands of non-Sinhalese merchant groups. A few Malayalee traders, among them a fair proportion of Muslims, were able to prosper through very successful and clever capitalist ventures. They occupied the very apex of the class pyramid and some had managed by the 1930's to diversify their business interests and

⁴⁰ It has proven difficult to obtain verifiable empirical data as to the proportion of *Ezhava* who became assimilated and those who went back to Kerala. Among the few incidental facts known about this category of Malayalee is that they constituted a large proportion of the workers at the Wellawatte Weaving Mills, and that the area around the Mills was popularly known as 'Little Kerala' at that time.

acquire fairly extensive land holdings.⁴¹ Muslim Malayalees showed a considerable entrepreneurial aptitude in small-scale manufacturing and in managing restaurants.⁴²

Then there was a middle-class composed of a fair number of doctors, teachers and clerks who lived dominantly in the urban areas. Although small in number, they played a disproportionate role in the political and cultural activities of the community. Below them come the vast bulk of the Malayalees, who belonged to the working class and were employed in the urban and rural areas as semi-skilled workers and labourers.⁴³

⁴¹ Among this elite were two very successful Muslim Malayalee businessmen, T P Kunhimoosa and P.B.Umbichi. Kunhimoose was from Malapuram in Kerala, and Umbichi was from Calicut. Kunhimoose is reputed to have been the first Indian to own a tea plantation and factory in Ceylon. Jawaharlal Nehru and his daughter Indira are said to have visited this tea factory at Kadugannwa when they toured Ceylon in the 1930's. P.B.Umbichi became a dry fish merchant and in the 1930 's came to monopolise the entire dry fish import trade from the Maldives. While he is supposed to have been illiterate, he contributed generously to the development of Zahira College Colombo.Both these businessmen liquidated their assets and returned to India in the 1940's.

⁴² During the period in which Kunhimoose and Umbichi were gaining prominence within the Malayalee community, Muslim Malayalees in fairly large numbers migrated to Ceylon from Malapuram district in Kerala. They manufactured and retailed biscuits, a variety of sweet meats, beedies, joss sticks, etc. It is also reputed that about 75% of the small eating houses in Colombo were owned by Muslim Malayalees at that time.

⁴³ At present little is empirically known about the vocational differentiation of this, the working class segment of the Malayalees of Sri Lanka. It is known that in the south-western coconut belt, a large number of them were employed as toddy-tappers. What seems to be clear is that at the height of the community's existence in Ceylon this segment constituted the broad base of the Malayalee 'class pyramid' and were numerically by far the greatest in number.

The Anti-Malayalee Campaign

The economic depression of 1929-32 adversely affected the status of the Malayalees. Although the working class unity forged within the labour movement from the 1890's onwards ensured that ethnic hostility was largely secondary to class solidarity, instances of ethnic tension had emerged prior to the economic crisis. In 1910, railway workers agitated against the employment of Indians leading to complaints to the Railway Commission of 1913, alleging discrimination against Sinhalese and Burghers.⁴⁴

As the economic depression worsened, urban unemployment increased in the Ceylonese export-dependent economy. With the decline of the tea and rubber export sectors of the economy, the crisis was transmitted to all the other sectors, namely, ports, railways, general transport services and wholesale and retail trades. It was in this context that a racist campaign emerged within the labour movement. Says Jayawardena, "It is not unusual in times of economic stress for the majority group in a society to turn against the minorities and blame them for existing hardships. In Ceylon, one of the direct consequences of the economic depression was an increase in communal tension among the working class."⁴⁵

The Ceylon Labour Union (CLU) led by A.E.Goonesinha was prominent in carrying out this campaign, and the Malayalees were the main target. Ironically, during the 1920's, when the CLU's strength was growing through successful trade union action, it drew most of its support from the daily paid workers of the railways, government factories and the harbour. These establishment had a high proportion of Indians in their workforce but "during these years of relative economic prosperity there was little racial tension, and both Indian and Sinhalese urban workers were drawn together into joint trade-union activity".⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Jayawardena, 1984.

⁴⁵ Jayawardena, 1972.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

However, as the economic conditions worsened, and the labour movement itself came upon difficult times with the hardening of attitudes among employers, Goonesinha began a virulent campaign against the Malayalees. "For the first time, trade union leaders spearheaded an organized campaign against an ethnic component of the working class itself."⁴⁷

The anti-Malayalee campaign was ostensibly non-violent. "We should boycott all dealings with the Malayalees, without involving ourselves in any confrontations with them. In fact this is a struggle that can be done in keeping with non-violent tactics. We should think of ways in which we can make our struggle triumph through non-violent means, through a 'dharma yuddha' (holy war)"⁴⁸, said a newspaper article. Sinhalese were appealed upon to evict Malayalee tenants, shun Malayalee restaurants, refrain from employing them, and to generally discourage their employment in Ceylon in every possible manner.

This rising campaign of ethnically motivated antagonism soon resulted in physical violence against individual Malayalees. In areas of Colombo such as Wellawatte and Pettah, Malayalees were waylaid and assaulted by Sinhalese thugs, and "at the railway workshops the persistent friction between Sinhalese and Malayalee labour led to a case of murder, and some gangs of unemployed men began organized attacks on Indian workers in all parts of Colombo."

Political Organization

This ominous swell of ethnic hostility began to alarm leaders of the Malayalee community by the late 1920's. A delegation of

⁴⁷ Jayawardena, 1984: For more insights into this period, refer to complete article which deals exhaustively with the anti-Malayalee campaign, the socio-economic conditions underlying it, the role of Goonesinha, the CLU and its Sinhala language newspapers "*Viraya*" in this campaign. The article also throws some light on problem, areas related to the understanding of class consciousness and ethnic relations.

⁴⁸ *Viraya*, April 6, 1936. (The author is thankful to Dr. Kumari Jayawardena for making available a set of select translations).

influential Malayalees made representations to K.P.S. Menon, then Agent of the Government of India in Kandy. He advised them to unite and form an organization so as to collectively express their grievances to the proper authorities.

It was under this impetus that the Ceylon Malayalee Mahajana Sabha (CMMS) was formed in 1930. K.C.R. Vaidiya⁴⁹ was elected its first president and by 1932 it had 44 branch organisations⁵⁰ and at the peak of its popularity it had over 6,000 members.⁵¹ Its activities were mainly political and cultural, which served to bring together Malayalees from diverse religious backgrounds. Articulating problems common to all, the CMMS acted as a political pressure group. "There is agitation in the country, holding the Malayalees responsible for the prevailing unemployment. Certain regulations

⁴⁹ K C R Vaidiya was prominent within the Malayalee community, and along with P R Kuruppu was part of the delegation which petitioned K P S Menon. He was the building committee Chairman of the Sri Narayanaguru Memorial Malayalee Hall. (His Holiness Sri Narayanguru came to Ceylon in the 1920's and was instrumental in setting up the Vijnana Sabha, a community development voluntary organization for Malayalees. The Sri Narayanaguru Samajams were very popular in Kerala at that time, working actively against caste discrimination and toward. . 'brotherhood of all mankind'. Although it's the centre of hardly any community activity today, it still stands in Grandpass Colombo, a symbol of the former vitality and strength of the community. Those living near the Hall, a familiar landmark in old Colombo, call it the *Kochchi palliya* or Cochin temple, to this day.)

⁵⁰ A K Nair, 1933.

⁵¹ Abstracted from an interview with Mrs.C I I Abraham and Mr.T N Bhaskaran, Sep.14, 1984. (Mrs.Abraham was the last President of the Ceylon Malayalee Mahajana Sabha till it became defunct in To elaborate further, "Kandyan dance, in contrast with devil-dancing is not indigenous, although in its present form, it is now a Sinhalese accomplishment. Originally, nearly 2000 years ago, it came from South India and was introduced by Indian Scholars and missionaries and later encouraged by the conquerors who followed in their wake. Basically, the dance was what we know today in India as *Kathakali*. As such it was naturally a part of Hindu religious life." 1954).

which presently discriminate against the Malayalees must be taken up with the Government”, wrote P. R. Kuruppu.

The CMMS actively sponsored Malayalee culture, and regularly hosted exponents of the magnificent *kathakali*⁵² dance from Kerala. In 1940, the 10th anniversary celebrations of the CMMS was held on a grand scale, with the participation of many *kathakali* dances and political leaders from Kerala, an event still remembered by some members of the community.⁵³

Although the CMMS played a crucial role in bringing the community together, not much of its programme of work and internal political processes are available for research as most of its records and publications have been mislaid or destroyed.⁵⁴

Some other organizations which existed at the time were the Ceylon Malabar Muslim Association, Malabar Catholic Central association and the Christian Missionary Society Malayalee Missions.⁵⁵ The

⁵² Raghavan, 1969: The similarities between the Kandyan dance and Kathakali result from them both being of the *tandava* dance type. “Among these common features, is the ‘whirl’. Highly developed as the ‘whirl’ is in Kandyan dances, it is a feature nevertheless present in practically all the dances in the cult of the gods. The ‘whirl’ is primary and fundamental in the cult of the gods, as practised today in far distant parts of India, particularly in the land of Kerala in the ceremonial worship of the gods.

⁵³ To elaborate further, “Kandyan dance, in contrast with devil-dancing is not indigenous, although in its present form, it is now a Sinhalese accomplishment. Originally, nearly 2000 years ago, it came from South India and was introduced by Indian Scholars and missionaries and later encouraged by the conquerors who followed in their wake. Basically, the dance was what we know today in India as *Kathakali*. As such it was naturally a part of Hindu religious life.”

⁵⁴ Mrs. Abraham recalled with indignation that the last secretary of the CMMS had been “a rascal of a communist on the run from Kerala.” He had suddenly decamped around 1953-54, and all records and publications in his possession had been lost. He was a Malayalee of education and had therefore been elected to the post of Secretary. However, it is known to the author that some records and files of the CMMS and the Kerala Samajam were disposed-off as late as the early 1980’s.

⁵⁵ Kuruppu, 1934.

Ceylon Pentecostal Mission was begun by pastor Paul, who was a Malayalee.

Malayalees in Ceylon were in regular touch with Kerala.⁵⁶ Traditional family ties and cultural links could be nourished easily from across the waters, with Kerala just a two-day journey away by ship. In this fashion and through radical publications the vigorous left-wing currents active in the Kerala polity were communicated to sections of Ceylonese Malayalees. Left-wing activists from Kerala were of immense help to the LSSP in unionizing Malayalee workers in Colombo. The LSSP in turn adopted a principled stance on behalf of the Malayalees in the face of Goonesinha's anti-Malayalee campaign.

"At a time when the move to boycott all dealings with the Malayalees is proceeding as peacefully as possible, we can see that several Samasamajist Sinhala lunatics are trying to go against this trend. We have heard that the Samasamajists like N.M.Perera, Colvin R.de Silva, Dr.S.A.Wickremasinghe and some others have been making various baseless allegations against this campaign in various places. Speaking at an Indian institute the other day, Dr.Wickremasinghe boasted of the way in which they had helped a group of Malayalees who were thrown out of their jobs at the Aluthkade Oil Mills. Is not the attempt made by these folks to keep the Malayalees here an insult to the entire Sinhala race", said an editorial in the *Viraya* newspaper.⁵⁷

Later, after the CP emerged from within the LSSP as a result of a schism in 1940, it too had many Malayalees as party supporters because of its strong stand in the face of Goonesinghe's Ceylon Labour Union. "An official of the labour department, describing the success of the communists in mobilizing the Malayalees said, Malayalee labour, buffeted hither and thither by racial animosity

⁵⁶ A T.R.P. (Temporary Residence Permit) scheme was legislated by the post-independence government in 1948. This meant that Malayalese (and other cultural minorities with Indian links too) who visited India had to apply anew and obtain a T.R.P. to return to Sri Lanka.

⁵⁷ *Viraya* newspaper, 1936.

and steel employers, found a platform in this new party to ventilate their grievances.”⁵⁸ The solid and consistent support given by Malayalees to the CP’s trade union arm was both cause and effect of the CP’s support for the Malayalee working class in its struggle. The CP’s Malayalam newspaper *Nava Sakthi* agitated consistently for working class unity.

Many Malayalam language newspapers were published in Ceylon at that time. They were: *Azad Hind* (1947-48), *Ceylon Malayali* (1926-35), *Dharmabhadan* (1936-47), *Lanka Deepam* (1928-35), *Lanka Kesari* (1926), *Malayali* (1925-30), *Malayali Mitran* (1936), *Nava Sakthi* (1941, 1943-50), *Prabbodakan* (1932), *Samathwavadi* (1932-37), *Sinhala Keralan* (1935), *Tholilali* (1941-42), *Thozhilali* (1938-39), *Veera Keralam* (1936) and *Visvabharathy* (1935-37).

Many of these newspapers had strong pro-working class left-wing orientations. As can be noted, a majority of them flourished between the 1920s and the 1940s, a period of intense political activity with the depression, boycott campaign, independence movement, the escalation of global tensions and the outbreak of war defining the broad contours of the times.

By the early 1950’s, especially after the passage of the 1948 Citizenship Act, it became clear that the community’s future in Ceylon was insecure, and many Malayalees returned to Kerala. Political divisions too were beginning to appear within Malayalee organizations and an incident which took place in 1959, although subsequent to the effective demise of the CMMC in 1954, illustrates the nature of these differences.

In 1959, the Central government of India dismissed the Communist controlled government in Kerala State. E.M.S.Nambudiripad’s Government had lasted barely two years from 1957 to 1959. Left-oriented Malayalees demonstrated in front of the Indian High Commission in Colombo and the High Commissioner is reputed to have summoned police to remove the demonstrators from his premises.

⁵⁸ Jayawardena, 1984.

This episode created a bitter controversy within the Malayalee community in Ceylon. While those who supported the direct action considered it a significant and valuable show of solidarity with the dismissed Kerala state government, their opponents considered it a hasty and ill- conceived action against the government of India. They were of the opinion that the demonstration was prejudicial to future relations between the Ceylon Malayalee community and the Indian government. In a way, this was symbolic of the schisms within the community too.

After the demise of the CMMS, two separate organizations, the *Kerala Vanitha Samajam* and the *Kerala Samajam*⁵⁹ came into being in 1958 and 1959 respectively. These functioned as community organizations, which brought the remnants of the community together during times like the important *Onam* festival. The focus of community activity of the working class Malayalees in Ceylon was the Sri Narayanaguru hall, though this too declined over the years.

Malayalees Today

The community was adversely affected by the communal riots of 1958, being drawn willy-nilly into the quagmire of the Sinhala-Tamil ethnic conflict. The nation-wide ethnic riots of July 1983 resulted in the loss of life and property of members of the community. Many who were able to do so, left the island.

The community numbers have declined rapidly over the decades to about 1,500 today. Yet, the community appears to be fairly well-knit, with its own network of cultural organizations. Mainly, there are three organizations for the Malayalees - the *Kerala Samajam*, *Malayala Kalalayam* and Narayana Guru Memorial Society. All the organizations hold annual *onam* celebrations. The *Kerala Samajam* has even conducted Malayalam classes in the mid-90s. In keeping with the general higher status of women in Kerala, Prabha Nair

⁵⁹ K N D Pillai, well-known Malayalee social worker was its general secretary. Dr A T Kovoov was its President till his death.

Nagalingam became the first woman president of the *Kerala Samajam* between the years 1993-95.

The Malayalees have generally proven to be fairly dynamic in modern-day Sri Lanka. Though they have not been very active politically, with A Kandappah being the only Malayalee to be named on the national list, the community has seen its fair share in government service. Prof. A. T. A. Kovoor, son of the Rationalist Dr A T Kovoor, is technical advisor to the President and is attached to the Institute of Fundamental Studies, Kandy. Dr. Vijayakumar is the chairman of the 6th session (2001-2003) of the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development. UNCSTD held in Geneva recently. He won the President's award for scientific research in 1993. Incidentally, Dr. Vijayakumar is the nephew of the renowned literateur Karoor Sivasankaran Pillai. N Madhusudhanan was the deputy director of the Irrigation department. Another Malayalee, Dr. K. Valsan was Asst. High Commissioner for Sri Lanka in Chennai, India, between 1989 and 1994.

The Malayalees have done fairly well in the arts. K. K. Achuthan was honoured by President Premadasa in 1982 for excellence in arts. His wife, the late Kamala Achuthan too was a well-known violin player. Their son Raveendran is carrying on their tradition and is the leading *mridangam* player in Sri Lanka.

Another notable achiever is N. Viswanathan Chandrasekharan, who received the post-graduate presentation award for the outstanding research communication in 1994. This was awarded by the Sri Lanka association for the Advancement of Sciences Fellowship, under the aegis of the International Programme in Sciences, University of Uppsala, Sweden.

Conclusion

As distinct from the rest of the cultural minorities, it is the Malayalees who have influenced, and assimilated with all major ethno-religious groups in Sri Lanka. While having merged with both the Tamil and Sinhalese over different time periods, a significant section of the non-Malay Muslim population is of Malayalee

extraction. The plantation labour force too has its own particular relationship with Kerala.

The Malayalees specially illustrate the irony of the ethnic strife convulsing present day Sri Lanka, which is based upon racial differences. The Malayalee experience shows that a significant proportion of the Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims are of common racial stock. What better basis to build up trust between the communities in this troubled isle?

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About the book:

There is this hoary chestnut about an old Parsi priest seeking permission from Indian King Jadhav Rana to settle his band of Zoroastrian followers in India many centuries ago. Trying to allay the King's concerns he mixes a spoonful of sugar in a bowl of milk and proffers it saying, "Just as the sugar has mixed into the milk and enhanced its taste, so will my community in the milk of your human kindness".

Interestingly, Parsis and the other cultural minority groups in Sri Lanka have done the same. These smaller communities have existed and grown in stature since the time Sri Lanka was called Ceylon. This book profiles five such communities of Parsis, Malays, Colombo Chetties, Malayalees and Portuguese & Dutch Burghers. As distinct from the Sinhalese and the Tamils, they are the other, lesser known face of Sri Lanka.

E. Vijayalakshmi is an Indian journalist who spent time in Sri Lanka in 2001-2002. She came away convinced that Sri Lanka's diversity is its best kept secret.

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