

Inscriptional Evidence bearing on the Nature of Religious Endowment in Ancient Ceylon

(Continued from the previous issue).

PART II.

The Second Phase.

TO assign the next class of religious endowments, where the change in this outlook is seen, to any one period is at best arbitrary, for inscriptional records of these endowments are found throughout from the 1st C. B.C. onwards. But it may broadly be stated that between the 1st C. B.C. and 4th C. A.D. the essential aspects of this changing policy became evident, as is seen in a number of stone inscriptions.

The chief cause for this change was economic. *viz.* how best to maintain a growing body of 'non-wage earners' essential and useful to the community, without unduly taxing the resources of the country. The solution was helped by a fortunate coincidence, for the period from the time of Devanampiyatissa (247 B.C.) to that of Mahasena (334 A.D.) saw an unprecedented development in the exploitation of the country's economic resources, when owing to the active interest the Kings took in rice cultivation and irrigation, Ceylon almost attained economic self-sufficiency. Even during four recorded famines, in the reigns of Duṭṭugemunu (101-77 B.C.), Valagambhi (43-17 B.C.), Kuḍḍanāga (248-249 A.D.) and Siri Sangabo (307-309 A.D.) could not stop this progress.

The new policy in religious endowments first by kings, and then by the rest of the country, was to endow the Sangha with 'sources of revenue' from which the monastic establishments could maintain themselves, as far as was possible, unhindered by State interference. The endowment of such and meritorious public service by ancient Sinhalese kings was by this means one of alienating sources of revenue, and hence so far as the State was concerned it was no new departure from existing public policy. But so far as the Sangha was concerned this acquisition of property was certainly not in conformity with its early life of self-denial, and so it carried with it consequences of a far-reaching nature.

In an agricultural society as in ancient Ceylon, the primary sources of revenue were the paddy fields, and their tanks or the water-rates derived from them, and irrigation canals. To give an exhaustive catalogue of such endowments is beside the point, but the brief list given below of such grants

realising the general universality of the practice. These grants were made by kings,¹ princes,² ministers³ and their sons,⁴ high officials of the State,⁵ nobles,⁶ and even villagers.⁷

In most cases when lands or villages were granted thus to the Sangha the boundaries were recorded in the grant itself, and boundary stones were set up under the guidance of the donees.⁹ The Nāgirikanda Rock Inscription¹⁰ is quoted as an example.

"Hail! by King Maha Kumaratasa Apaya were caused to be purchased and granted as donations to the Bamanagiriya Monastery the tank (and) wet lands of Cugariya, the tank (and) wet lands of Cugariya, the tank (and) wet lands of Kabuba (and) the wet lands (and) the tank of Kaṭācanakaputa. Of these four tanks (and) wet lands the water share has been remitted, and the proprietors' share granted to the bhikkhu community at the Bamanagiriya Monastery for their four requisities.¹¹ There have been made the possession of the community of monks. Of the following tanks which belong to himself, namely, Pavaa tank, Nelessa tank, Gagaa tank and Kaṭā tank—of the above mentioned tanks—the water share and the overlord's share have been given to the bhikkhu community at the Bamanagiriya Monastery. These are the wet lands belonging to the community of which the dues on account of the two tanks have been remitted."

Grants made by kings to the Sangha carried with them certain immunities, especially from the fiscal and judicial claims of both the central and local governments.

Thus in the Mannar Kachcheri Pillar inscription of the 9th C. (E.Z. Vol. 1, p. 6) we read:

"Whereas it was ordered (as follows) by a (decree) of unanimous assent in connexion with the lands included within the four boundaries of the three villages named Pepodatuda, Kumbalhala and Tumpokon, situated in the Kuḍa Kadavukā (division) of the Northern Coast belonging to the meditation hall named Bahaduransen of the Great Monastery we two of us, (namely) Pilavit Mayind and Kolabā Sivu) commissioned by Pandirad Dāpula (enact thus) in pursuance of the said decree (passed) by the unanimous assent (of the Council).

Ep. Summary. C.J. of Sc. Sec. G. Vol. 11., Nos. 700. (1st C. A.D.); 368, 424

594, 445 (6th C.); 451, (8th C.); 598? 710, (14th C.); 717, (16th C.)

Ibid. Nos. 524, (4th C.); 489, (6th C.); 676, (7th C.); 436, 14th C.)

Ibid. Nos. 379, 380, (2nd C.); 440, (5th C.)

Ibid. Nos. 548, (4th C. A.D.)

Ibid. Nos. 384, (5th C.). Grant by the Chief Secretary.

E.Z. Vol. 1., No. 14. Nos. 606, and 607, (6th C.); 705, (9th C.); 622, (13th C.).

Ibid. (1st and 2nd C.); 512, 515, 675, 401, 425, 494, 500, 557, 657; 389, 390, (7th C.); 363, 435, (9th C.); 576, 12th C.); 679 (13th C.); 369, (16th C.); (17th C.).

Ep. Summary.—Donors Unknown.

E.Z., Vol. 11, No. 5.; E.Z., Vol. III, Nos. 13, 19 and E.Z., Vol. III, p. 146; Ep. Summary Nos. 649, 599 will give evidence of such practice.

E.Z., Vol. IV, part III, p. 123.

Catu pratyaya.—*Viz.* robes, food dwellings and medicaments.

To these villages, royal officers and pujovādāra¹² shall not enter. Those in the archery department, the Melāssi,¹³ headmen in charge of districts,¹⁴ and of provincial guards, and those of the paid services shall not enter. Carts, oxen, labourers, im-
of cooked and raw rice, and periodical gifts of milk and oil should not be taken.
perenāttuvam¹⁷ shall not enter. The ferrymen residing in these villages should
take a valin (oars) of (or from) the tenants. Sadāladam¹⁸ shall not enter. Officers
in charge of kabbāli¹⁹ shall not enter. Officers in charge of Mahapaṭu (Mahati)
shall not enter. Those who reside at the Nāvehera shall not enter. Having forbidden
the entry of the aforesaid persons, we, two of us, have given to these village
immunities (sanctioned) by the Council."

(For further types of immunities granted see the list below).

These grants were made generally to the Sangha as a body.²⁰ Several inscriptions, especially of the later times, indicate individual owners

12. Irrigation Officers? E.Z., Vol. III, p. 110.

13. Occurring in other forms as.—Melaṭṭi, melatti, melāṭṭi and melākṣi. collected of dues paid to king or feudal overlord in recognition of his proprietorship over the
E.Z., Vol. III, pp. 110, 111.

14. Ratladdan and pasladdan = keeper of district record books—according to
Wickremasinghe, E.Z., Vol. III, p. 111.

15. Revenue Officers?

16. Scribes?

17. This term is usually found with another, viz. Ulavādu—both meaning royal
officers of the inner and the outer retinue of the kings. E.Z., Vol. III, p. 145. Perem
is also interpreted as meaning 'former inhabitants'.

18. Officers in charge of witnesses in ancient law courts, or appointed to look after
the affairs in connection with foreign merchants. E.Z., Vol. III, p. 113.

19. Allotments—e.g., Demela Kabālla. E.Z., Vol. III, No. 10 ll 31-32. A further
list of such officers, &c., who were prohibited from entering these donated lands are
Magiva pegiva (or Mangdiv and piyadiv or mang-giva piyagiva) meaning tramps
vagrants? and royal messengers or whip crackers, servants, goldsmiths, chief artisans
of the royal household, foot soldiers, field dwellers, those who come after committing assault
(for shelter) those who live by highway robbery, field serfs, and Kudasalās, or officers
in charge of royal conveyances. Further privileges attached to such sanctuaries are

- (1) Gifts; toll-dues (Sut-vat); the secondary and principal turns of farm
labour exacted from peasants at regular intervals (Suvar and Mahā
or turns; and farm labour shall not be appropriated;
- (2) Those that come after committing murder shall not be arrested in the
villages by royal officers. They shall be arrested only after they have
been ejected by the villagers;
- (3) Guardians (Balat) at Tusaya or Soliya shall not throw or set ropes
noose to catch cattle;
- (4) Trees and shrubs, especially tal and mī shall not be cut down;
- (5) The supply of water which according to previous custom was being brought
to the village from the river shall not be hindered;
- (6) No double fines shall be exacted;
- (7) Hel Kuli or Demel Kuli shall not be taken as belonging by proprietary
E.Z., Vol. IV, p. 54.

20. According to Vinaya rules; see E.Z., Vol. I, No. 7. Page 100.

able property by monks,²¹ with explicit reference to hereditary
in the pupillary succession.²² But the more prevailing practice
the grants were held as the common property of the Sangha.

The making of these grants was usually accompanied by ceremonial and
not only to enhance the religious significance of the donations, but
to take the place of legal sanctions, so that the grants might not be
rescinded later by any capricious party. Such ceremony was of three types.

The gift of the land was made by the donor ceremoniously pouring
water from a vase into the hands of the donee, on the site of the land
donated, saying "This (land) do I give to the brotherhood."²³

The granting of the immunities was made with great ceremony.
The Royal Order granting such privileges was entered in the
various registers by the secretaries, and the officers were nominated
to proceed to the village concerned. There in the midst of an
assembly consisting of various officials and chiefs²⁴ the order was
delivered, while the immunities were engraved on a rock, or pillar,²⁵
and set up on the land donated.²⁶

The symbols of the Sun and Moon were engraved on the inscriptions
suggesting that the grant was made for all time. As a further
safeguard, imprecations²⁷ were recorded in the inscriptions. How
far these served their purpose would depend on the degree of
superstitious fear present in the people.

These various ceremonial acts²⁸ had no legal validity; the only docu-
ment that had any semblance to a 'title-deed' were the inscriptions

'Puggalasantaka' gifts.—Vide E.Z., Vol. I, No. 6.

E.Z., Vol. IV, No. 25. The Mihintale R. inscription (Vol. I, No. 7), states "The
dwelling in the Vihara shall by no means possess the fields, orchards in any place
connected with the ātvehera . . . They shall not allow their dependents to exercise suprema-
cy in any place connected with ātvehera."

MV. Ch. XV, 24; E.Z., Vol. III, No. 12.—Kings always used golden vases for
ceremony.

Ek tun samiya. E.Z., Vol. IV, p. 185.

Attam kannu.

In South India, it is recorded, vide Tinivālangadu plates:—On the arrival
of royal officers, the chief men of the district came out, received the royal order,
on their heads and accompanied by a she elephant circumnavigated the village.
Vol. IV, p. 185. This practice may have been prescribed in Ceylon too.

'May he be born as a dog or crow' was either recorded, or the idea suggested
by the figures of these animals. E.Z., IV, Plate 7. 'Those who violate this
law (upon themselves) the sins committed by (all) the inhabitants of the land.'
Vol. III, No. 9.

In medieval society the effect of either the King's word or customary ritual was
a vital factor in compelling obedience.

The inscriptions speak of records being kept in the registers of the various secre-
taries. E.Z., Vol. IV, p. 185. It may have been so but no documentary evidence of such
has been found so far.

themselves. They were also at the same time 'records for public information.'

The evidence regarding property-holding contained in these donation grants is unfortunately not conclusive, because in many instances it is contradictory.³⁰ This problem leads us to the examination of the tenure system of ancient Ceylon.

The grant of lands or villages with definite immunities and privileges attached thereto, shows that the donee was entitled only to a 'qualified ownership of the property given. A transference of property rights in such cases needs no codification of privileges attached to it, for full private ownership knows no such limitations.

The reason for this was two-fold. Firstly, ownership in land, as was understood then, was only a right to the produce of the land. This ownership was a communal ownership,³¹ and when kingship was established, this ownership vested in the king as he symbolized the 'sovereignty of the community and as a trustee of the rights of the community both collectively and individually, he held the land for the common benefit of all. Thus the king came to be regarded as the owner of the soil. In inscriptional records he called himself 'Lord of the soil of the island of Lanka.'³² He made this claim because he was 'bhūpati' (Lord of the earth) or bhupāla (protector of the Earth).³³ He laid his claim to the treasure trove, 'to forests and wildernesses, unreclaimed and untenanted by men, to mines of precious stones, metals and to pearl banks.'³⁴ When the Mahavihara monks in a body deserted the monastery for seven years as a protest against the king's patronage of the Vaitulyan heresy, he appropriated their lands³⁵ because 'ownerless land belonged to the King.'³⁷

Under such an arrangement land was regarded as indivisible,³⁸ and so definite stipulations made in the donations, against lease, mortgage, or transference of properties given, by the donees,³⁹ seems to be a safeguard of the ultimate privilege of the kings.

30. This may emphasize my earlier statement, how these inscriptions in following conventional classicisms would have created doubts with regard to the details they record.

31. Manifestations of early tribal tendencies.

32. E.Z., Vol. I, No. 8. P. 118.

33. Codrington's Ancient Land Tenure System. P. 5.

34. *Ibid.* p. 5. Kandyan Law.

35. Mahasena, 334-362, A.D.

36. M.V., XXXVII, 8-9.

37. So says Manu too.

38. When Visvakarman Bhanvan wanted to make a gift of some land to the official priest Kāśyapa, at the Sarvamedha Ceremony, the Earth protested at such act, saying "No mortal must give me away." Satapatha Brāhmaṇa.

39. E.Z., Vol. I, No. 7. P. 100.

On the other hand, when lands were donated to the Sangha by persons other than kings,⁴⁰ it is not clear whether these lands belonged to them as private property, or whether they held the same from the king as feudal property, or whether they held the same from the king as feudal property, or whether they held the same from the king as feudal property, or whether they held the same from the king as feudal property. The latter seems to be more probable.

What degree private ownership of land prevailed in ancient Ceylon cannot be precisely determined with the data available⁴¹. The king certainly owned private land and property,⁴² which he would have acquired by conquest, and in late medieval times the feudal demesne of the king would have assumed a status of private ownership, especially when the king's political power was on the wane. But whether such a claim could be made by the nobles, and other land-holders at such an early age is highly doubtful.

The ultimate result of these various endowments was that the Sangha could make claims on the lands donated in two ways.

They began to own⁴⁴ the gifts of private lands given by kings, (and by nobles?) The Sangha, by entrusting their management to lay stewards,⁴⁵ who were responsible to the entire Buddhist community enjoying the endowment,⁴⁶ worked them by means of slaves and serfs,⁴⁷ and the produce went to supply the wants of the monastery. The reference to *brahmadāya* grants⁴⁸ may refer

See page 7, foot-notes, Number 2-8.

That early Aryan Society in Ancient India knew of private ownership of land is proved by many scholars. *Vide* The Land System in South India by K. M. Gupta.

Gabaḍāgam.

Nindagam.

This word is used in the restricted sense of ownership as described above.

Parivahaṇa. 'Vinaya rules prohibited them from attending to the work of agriculture or the administration of Vihara land.' G. C. Mendis. Early History of Ceylon, P. 66.

E.Z., Vol. I, No. 7. P. 101. Mihintale Tablets of Mahinda IV.

"We have epigraphic evidence to prove that slaves were owned by the Buddhists in Ceylon in 2nd C. A.D., and also in later times, though the practice was not in accordance with the spirit of Buddhism." Paranavitana. E.Z., Vol. IV, part 3. P. 132; references to the presence of slavery in Buddhist Monasteries in ancient times are:—E.Z., Vol. IV, part III, No. 16; Part III, p. 161, Part III, No. 17, (7th and 8th C.); Inscriptions of Kassapa I, (526-552, A.D.) at Vessagiriya; and the Galapāta inscription, (12th C.) E.Z., Vol. IV, part III. The last is the only inscription that gives evidence of temple slaves. These slaves could buy their manumissions, *i.e.*, E.Z., Vol. IV, No. 17.

"A full gift."—Pali Dictionary, Rhys Davids, p. 116; Ref. Ins., No. 407. Epigraphic Inscriptions, C.J. of Sc., Sec. G., Vol. II.

to such endowments. These lands usually paid a 'tributary tax to the king, for we come across several inscriptions recording such grants which were made 'after the remission of taxes therefrom.'⁴⁹

- II. They also came to own the overlord's share of the land, or especially of villages, which the kings and the nobles made over to the Sangha. From these lands the Sangha received either service⁵⁰ of the tenants inhabiting them, or the produce of certain kinds or both. These lands were also administered by lay wardens and they paid no tax to the king.⁵¹

On prima facie evidence the position of the Sangha with regard to property holdings seems to be, first, that of a tenant, and, second, that of an overlord. The positions appear contradictory, but they were really not. As long as ownership of land was understood to mean only a right to the produce of the land, the property-holdings of the Sangha under the category made them as much owners of land as anybody else. The difference was not one of 'title to the land, but of benefits which the Sangha gathered therefrom. The one gave them produce, the other, service.'⁵²

The inevitable result of these accumulating endowments⁵³ was that the Sangha came to be one of the largest land holders in the country. The wealth of the country lay in its land, and this was realised partly on its produce and partly in the form of labour. As an example of this growth of property holdings by the Sangha, the case of the monastic establishment at Mihintale may be shown. Says Müller. "The wihare at Mihintale had a large property of its own which reached to the South as far as Mineri and to the North as far as Padiwala free from taxation, and exercised a sort of sovereignty over the district in the same way as even at the present time the whole of the district of Bura belongs to the Katragam Temple. The inhabitants were bound to do a certain amount of work for the temple as cooking, collecting flowers, painting, and received in return a quantity of raw rice or a piece of cultivable land in the grounds of the temple."⁵⁴

49. Ins., No. 490, 515, 638 in Ep. Summary. C.J. of Sc. See G., Vol. II.

50. The Service could be commuted, with a payment in land or cash.

51. The term Devalagam should be applied to these lands.

52. Not always a hard and fast rule.

53. Grants were made for perpetuity. We come across no eviction of the Sangha from these holdings, even when schisms had developed in the Sangha, and a few kings had become sectarian patrons, for this was an act of sin. Instead, kings regranted old grants when the validity of the grant is in doubt. *Vide*. E.Z., Vol. III, p. 166. Moreover, the country enjoyed political peace. The few Tamil invasions were mere raids which in no way upset the traditional endowments. They only plundered the wealth of the villages.

54. Müller. A.I.C., p. 17-18. Ref., E.Z., Vol. I, p. 81-82 for an account of the growth of the monasteries from 3rd B.C.-9th A.D.

part that money played in the economy of the period is not sufficiently clear. The Mahāvamsa⁵⁵ mentions 'kahāpana' and herañña and reference is made here to a '100,' '1,000,' '10,000,' lac, and a koti (10 millions) as the recognized weights or sums. The commentators of the Buddhist literature explain these as names of pieces of money on which images or figures were stamped or marked.⁵⁶ The Pātimokkha refers to transactions in which silver are concerned, while the southern Buddhist literature refers to buying and selling by means of gold.' So does the Mahāvamsa describe⁵⁷ that Duṭṭhagemuṇu commanded that 800,000 gold pieces should be placed at the four gates of the City (Anurādhapura) in addition to a thousand pieces of garments and 'pitchers with ball-sugar, oil, sugar-dust and so on in order to pay the wages of the labourers who worked in building the city of Anurādhapura, while another reference in Mahāvamsa⁵⁸ describes how the same amount of 100,000 pieces of money over a ceremony at the Great Bodhi tree. Gold and silver, in addition to pearls and gems, were regarded as measures of wealth, but in the absence of a definite knowledge of the stock of silver available in the country at this time on the one hand and of the amount of metallic currency on the other, it is not possible to say to what extent they were used as a medium of exchange.

"We have no evidence," says Rhys Davids,⁵⁹ "in the Buddhist literature, that in Magadha before the time, or in Ceylon before the 5th Century, A.D., there were any coins proper, that is pieces of inscribed metal struck by Authority. On the other hand we have no statements, consistent with the existence of such coinage; and we have sufficient evidence that pieces of metal of certain weights, probably marked or stamped by the persons who made them, were used as a medium of exchange, and that some common forms of this money had acquired recognized names."⁶⁰

The second class of religious endowments reveals a sufficiently well-developed economic organisation, which was primarily based on an agrarian economy. The country was to a great degree self-sufficing, and the absence of luxury, in the upper classes especially, was not the exception but the rule.

The extensive growth of religious endowment throughout this period is the best index to this luxury.

It should not be forgotten that the Mahāvamsa is a work of the 5th C. A.D. The Pitakas mention 'Kahāpanas' and 'Pādas' as measures of value. The Mahāvamsa refers to a similar measure of value the Kappa--'a copper.' Kaccāyana's Pitakas mentions Kahāpana as 'the name of a weight.'

IV. Ch. XXVII, 21-23.

IV. XXVIII, 1-2.

Rhys Davids: 'On the Ancient Coins and Measures of Ceylon.'

Ibid. p. 13.

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This growing wealth certainly reflected itself in the Order of the Sangha for owing to the growing 'freedom from want' within its ranks, the result of the lavish endowments, we find members of the Sangha bestirring themselves in various ways, so that their use to society at large would be enhanced. The marked intellectual activity as evidenced by their writing down the Tripitaka in books⁶¹, in the works of Buddhaghosa,⁶² and even to a limited degree the growth of sectarian differences, shows how wealth was weaning the monks away from their early ascetic ideals.

But this is not to suggest that corruption had set in among the priests owing to their growing worldliness, though a stray reference to such a tendency itself could be cited. According to the Chronicler, the origin of the Abhaya fraternity,⁶³ was due to the growing tendency of worldliness among some of the monks at the Mahā Vihāra. In the same way cupidity in addition to the sectarian differences would have edged the thera Sanghamitta⁶⁴ to use King Mahasena to destroy the Mahā Vihāra.

But the Sangha had not forgotten still the behest of its Founder and in the 5th Century A.D. we find the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim, Fa-Hsien, visiting Ceylon, to take copies of the Buddhist scriptures. The time when 'wealth (would) accumulate, and men decay' so far as it manifested itself in the Sangha was yet to come. The third class of religious endowments was to accelerate this impending change.

W. M. A. WARNASURI

(To be concluded)

61. In the reign of Valagambā. 43-17 B.C.

62. In the reign of Mahānāma, 409-431 A.D.

63. MV. XXXIII, 95-99.

64. A monk from Kāvira, South India, who furthered the Vaitul, an heretical doctrine in Ceylon in the 4th C. A.D. *Vide.* Malalasekera, Pali Lit. of Ceylon. P. 57