

"THE PEOPLE OF THE LION"

ETHNIC IDENTITY, IDEOLOGY AND HISTORICAL REVISIONISM IN CONTEMPORARY SRI LANKA*

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The question of group ideology among the Sinhala people has engaged the attention of scholars in recent times. How did the Sinhala identity originate? What were its transformations in the course of history? What factors influenced it through time and change? Only a few original studies have been made in this field. Among them R. A. L. H. Gunawardana's "The People of the Lion: The Sinhala Identity and Ideology in History and Historiography"¹ stands out as a detailed exposition on the subject and it has become an important point of reference in this regard. The present study is an attempt to evaluate some of Gunawardana's conclusions in the light of historical sources and other studies on the subject.

Gunawardana argues that the Sinhala identity in the very early stages was only the identity of the ruling dynasty of Anuradhapura. At a second stage it was extended to cover the dominant social strata in society, deliberately excluding "the service castes" and the common agriculturists, thus assuming a class-character. He believes that it was only at a third stage, as reflected in the *Dharmapradīpikāva* of the 12th century, that the Sinhala identity encompassed all the Sinhala-speaking people in the island.

For Gunawardana the Vijaya myth represents the embodiment of a state ideology which sought to unite the dominant elements in society and to bring them under a common bond of allegiance to the ruling house. Chronicles such as the *Mahāvamsa* served as media for the propagation of this myth. But during

*This paper has an unusual origin. I had submitted a monograph on the Sinhala language and the development of nationalism in modern Sri Lanka to a publisher abroad. His "reader" had commented that I seemed to have either ignored Gunawardana's article in my work or to have taken a totally different view from him on the themes of his paper. In the course of my response I had to explain why I rejected many of Gunawardana's conclusions in his essay. My criticisms were so many and so far reaching in rejecting his views that I thought it best to write an independent critique of these. Hence this essay.

I take this opportunity to thank the friends and colleagues of mine who have helped me with critical comments and observations. They are too many to be named here. The views expressed here are, however, entirely mine.

1. In the *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* Vol. 1 & 2, (1979) pp. 1 - 36.

the early stages there were tensions within the dominant social group, as reflected by four different versions of the "colonization myth".

According to Gunawardana, the period after the 12th century up to about mid 19th century was characterized by a cosmopolitan culture, where the Sinhala ideology, although it existed among certain sections of literati (such as the authors of *Pāḷavaliya* and the *Cūlayamsa*), was not propagated by the state. Nor did it possess a specific class-character as during the preceding period. Thus, the anti-Tamil invective found in works such as the *Kirala Sandēsayā* and the *Vadiga Hatana* at the tail end of Sinhala kingship (1815), does not reflect an ideological current which existed in Kandyan society at the time.

Gunawardana argues that the Sinhala identity underwent a radical transformation and began to assume its current form in the 19th century under the influence of intrinsically racist linguistic theories which originated in Europe. The most influential figure in this field was the great German Indologist, Max Muller. According to Gunawardana, scholars in late 19th century Sri Lanka took up Max Muller's theories and injected a racist content into Sinhala nationalist thinking. Gunawardana believes James de Alwis as the most significant embodiment of this transformation, and he contrasts de Alwis's "hesitant" presentation on the origin of the Sinhala language in the *Sīdat Sangarāva* (1852) with his strident assertion of the Aryan theory in a later work, the "On the Origin of the Sinhalese Language" (1866).

Like most revisionists, Gunawardana has many original and interesting things to say. But, as with many revisionists, the question that needs to be posed is whether the theories propounded could be sustained on the basis of the evidence available.

I

The use of the term "Sinhala" has been discussed at length by Gunawardana. Firstly, he refers to three words, *Kaboja*, *Milaka* and *Dameḍa* found in the earliest inscriptions in Sri Lanka, which seem to denote group-identities. He is keen to point out that "the term *Sinhala* is conspicuous by its absence" - inferring thereby that the Sinhala identity had not emerged by the time of these inscriptions, i.e. circa 3rd cent. B.C. to 1st cent. A.C. He also points out that the earliest occurrence of the term *Sinhala* (Pali: *Sihala*) is in the *Dīpavamsa* (4th-5th cent.) and that there too it occurs only once. Also, he wants to draw attention to the fact that, even in the *Mahāvamsa* (assigned to the 6th cent., but, according to Gunawardana, possibly of a later date) it occurs only twice. With regard to the terms *Kaboja* and *Milaka*, he believes that they were possibly "tribal groups", and the term *Dameḍa*, according to him, means "Tamil". He adds: "Whether the term was used in this period to denote a tribal, linguistic or some other group deserves careful investigation". We are not told why the same should not apply to the other two terms - *Kaboja* and *Milaka*. Indeed Paranavitana, who first drew our attention to

these teams, listed three others, *Muridi*, *Meraya* and *Jhavaka*, and argued that they referred to "ethnic groups".² He gave reasons for thinking so.³ Gunawardana does not give us any reasons why Paranavitana's interpretation should be rejected.

When we come to the term *Sinhala* we have two problems. One concerns the numerical aspect raised by Gunawardana. He has highlighted the fact that the word is absent in the earliest inscriptions in the island. Here we must remember the fact that Paranavitana himself had made this observation in the *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon* and given a plausible explanation for this, viz. "for the very good reason that there was no need to distinguish any person by referring to him as such when the people as a whole were entitled to that name".⁴ Gunawardana seems to have overlooked this. In fact the very absence of the term *Sinhala* can be used as an argument to show that only the "out-groups" *Kaboja*, *Milaka* and *Dameḍa* – were distinguished by specific reference to their group-identities, and that the identity of the "in-group", *Sinhala*, was taken for granted. (This, we may add here, further strengthens Paranavitana's opinion that these were "ethnic" labels). It should interest us to know that Paranavitana had identified *Kaboja* as *Kāboja* – a group of people in the Rajori region to the south of Kashmir.⁵ *Milaka*, according to him, was derived from *mlechcha*, and referred to the autochthonous inhabitants of the island,⁶ *Dameḍa* meant "Tamil";⁷ *Muridi* was from Skt. *Murunda*, *Meraya* from Skt. *Moriya*, and *Jhavaka* from Skt. *Jhavaḥa*.⁸ In this context Paranavitana was keen to point out that "where a donor named in an inscription belonged to an ethnic group other than Sinhalese, we find the ethnic name associated with his personal name".⁹

Gunawardana would have helped his readers greatly if he had only given them an indication of how many published inscriptions of the period 3rd century B.C. up to the 1st century A.C. there are. Let me supply the answer. It is a very substantial number – one thousand two hundred and thirty four in all. Only a person conversant with this very specialised field would know this. We can see the problem in its correct perspective if we ask how often, or in how many inscriptions the words *Kaboja*, *Milaka*, *Dameḍa*, *Muridi*, *Meraya*, and *Jhavaka* occur. The answer is very illuminating. *Kaboja* occurs in only five of these. *Milaka* in two and *Dameḍa* in four. *Muridi*, *Meraya* and *Jhavaka* each occurs only once.¹⁰ Had Gunawardana revealed this, as he should have done, the flimsiness of his argument would have been immediately obvious to the reader. The vast majority

2. S. Paranavitana, *Inscriptions of Ceylon*, Vol. 1, Colombo, Dept. of Archaeology (1970) p. lxxix.

3. See the discussion below.

4. UCHC Vol. I, pt. i (1959) Chapter VI "The Aryan Settlements : The Sinhalese", p. 67.

5. *Inscriptions of Ceylon* Vol. 1, p. xci.

6. "Used without any stigma of inferiority", *op.cit.*, p. xci.

7. *op.cit.*, p. xc.

8. *op.cit.*, pp. xci – xcii.

9. *op.cit.*, p. lxxxix.

10. *op.cit.*, pp. lxxxix – xcii.

of the donors referred to in the inscriptions were Sinhala ethnics, and, as Parana-
vitana pointed out years ago, there was no need to proclaim their identity.¹¹
That was taken for granted. On the very few occasions when somebody who was
not a Sinhalese made a donation, the distinct "ethnic" identity of the donor was
indicated in the inscriptions

The second problem with the term *Sinhala* is its meaning. Gunawardana himself
has provided us with references to the occurrence of the term and its derivatives
in Chinese, Javanese and South Indian sources, even going as far back as the 1st
or the 2nd century of the Christian era. We know that there are so many Indian
sources, northern as well as southern, including the epic *Mahābhārata*, where the
people of this island are called *Sinhala*.¹² As Parana-
vitana has pointed out, "it is
by the name 'Sinhala' or its dialectical forms, that this island and its people
are generally referred to in classical Sanskrit literature"¹³ The question is, what
did it mean? Did it refer to the people of the island in general? Gunawardana
does not think so; not at least until a clear reference to that effect in the
Dharmapradīpikāva in the 12th century.

He believes that only a specific group among the island population, namely,
the royal family of Anuradhapura, was referred to by this term initially. At a
second stage, he thinks, the term's reference was extended to cover the notables –
"the most influential and powerful families in the kingdom". Gunawardana finds
this dominant social stratum being referred to as *Māhajana* in the Vijaya myth.
We infer from his conclusions that this period where the term *Sinhala* assumed
a caste/class character spanned a very long stretch of time. In fact during the whole
of the Anuradhapura period the term *Sinhala* seems to have been used with this
caste/class connotation, if we are to go by his conclusion.

To support his contention that the term *Sinhala* referred initially to the royal
family of Anuradhapura, Gunawardana cites evidence from the *Cūlavamsa*, where even
as late as mid 10th century the term *Sihalavamsa* was used as a referent to the royal
family. Let me quote the relevant extract from Gunawardana's article:

After describing the matrimonial alliance that Mahinda IV formed with Kalinga
and his elevation of members of his lineage to high positions in the Kingdom the
Cūlavamsa states that he thereby strengthened the Sinhala lineage (*Sihalavamsam*)

Gunawardana's conclusion, following on this, is that obviously the term was being
used here to denote the dynasty.

11. UCHC, Vol. I, pt. i, (1959) p. 67.

12. *The Mahabharata of Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa*, tr. into English by Pratap Chandra Roy, Calcutta,
Baharata Press, (1899) pp. 61, 100, 155, 503,. The epic is believed to have assumed the present
shape by about the fourth century A.D. See Krishna Chaitanaya, *A New History of Sanskrit
Literature*, London, Asia Publishing House (1962) pp. 200-1.

13. UCHC Vol. I, pt. i, p. 82.

I find it difficult to agree with him. Since he has left out certain pertinent facts, let us get the complete story on this episode direct from the *Cūlavamsa* :

*vijjamānēpi lankāyam khattiyānaṃ narādhipō
Kālingachakkavattissā vamsē jātam kumārīkā*

*ānāpetvāna tam ageamaḥēsim attanōvakā
tassa puttā duvē jātā dhīta ēkā manōrama*

*ādipāde akā puttē dhītaram vōparajinim
iti sīhala vamsaṃ ca paṭṭhapēsī sa bhūpatī*
(ed. H. Sumangala and Batuvantudave, 1977, (54 : 9-11)

“Although there were *ksatriyas* in Lanka, the Lord of men brought and made his chief queen a princess born in the lineage of Kalinga Chakravarti. And she begot two sons and one beautiful daughter. He appointed the sons as Adipadas and the daughter as Deputy Queen. The Sinhala lineage too was thus made secure by the Lord of the Earth.”

The reference here is to Mahinda IV (956-972). He is known as the first Sinhala king to have contracted a matrimonial alliance with the Kalinga kingdom. The results of this move, most probably a political alliance as an extension of the Sinhala-Pandya front against Cola, were far-reaching. It led to the establishment of a Kalinga faction in the Sinhalese royal family.¹⁴ Sena V (972-982), one son of the above marriage, brought the country to chaos. The *Cūlavamsa* records how “the Damilas plundered the whole country like devils” during his reign.¹⁵ Mahinda V (982-1029), another son of the same marriage, claimed to have descended from the Kalinga dynasty.¹⁶ As recorded by the *Cūlavamsa*, his was an inglorious reign. He himself was addicted to intoxicating drinks and behaved “like a wild beast gone mad” when drunk.¹⁷ He was the unfortunate ruler with whom ended the long line of Anuradhapura kings. He himself was captured by the Cola armies along with the queen and the royal treasures, and he died a captive of the Cola king.¹⁸

When one considers these background factors, it seems very unlikely that the author of the *Cūlavamsa* saw in the Kalinga marriage alliance a strengthening of the Sinhala royal family. The meaning of the word *Sinhalavamsam* in the above account has to be derived from the context in which it occurs. It is stated beforehand that this marriage with Kalinga was contracted *in spite of the availability of Ksatriya maidens in Lanka*. Thus, the author of the *Cūlavamsa* is keen to point out that the Sinhala lineage had not suffered as a result. It is eagerly reported that the security of the *Sinhalavamsa* had been guaranteed. The reference is thus to *Sinhalavamsa* as distinct from the foreign *vamsas*. Note the conjunctive particle *ca* after *Sinhalavamsa*. It is the ethnic affiliation of the royal line that is emphasized, not its exclusivism from the general populace, as suggested by Gunawardana. Indeed, as I shall presently

14. Sirima Wickremasinghe. *The Kalinga Period of Ceylon History: 1186 - 1235 A.D.*, M. A. Thesis, University of Ceylon (1956) unpublished, pp. 7-8.

15. *Cūlavamsa*, tr. by Wilhelm Geiger, Colombo, Govt. Press (1953) 54 : 66

16. *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, Vol. IV, pp. 61-2.

17. *Cūlavamsa*, 54 : 71.

18. *Cūlavamsa*, 55 : 15-19, 33.

show, there is irrefutable evidence to support the exact opposite of Gunawardana's view. The Sinhala identity was considered as encompassing all the Sinhala-speaking inhabitants of the island long before Mahinda IV came to the Anuradhapura throne.

According to Gunawardana, evidence for the broad-based Sinhala identity, encompassing all the Sinhala-speaking people of the island, appears only by the 12th century. To support this view he refers to a passage in the *Dharmapradīpikāva* where he says "the view of dynasty > island > inhabitants > their language sequence indicates this stage in the evolution of the Sinhala identity". Gunawardana is either ignorant of, or completely ignores, other Sinhala sources which would place this convergence long before the 12th century.

Firstly, I would like to cite a passage from the *Dhampīa Atuvā Gūtapadaya*, written by King Kassapa V (914 - 923).¹⁹ This reputed work bears unmistakable testimony to the fact that, by the time of its compilation, the Sinhala identity in its widest implications was an accepted fact. Kassapa paraphrases the Pali word *dīpabhāsāya*, meaning "in the language of the island", as *helu basin*, which in Sinhala means "in the *helu* (Sinhala) language"

Next he proceeds to explain the origin of this term:

"How do (we) obtain (the term) in the *helu* language?. That is from the fact that the island people are *helu*. How does (the word) Helese (*helaha*) come about? King Sinhabahu having killed a lion was named Sihalā... Since prince Vijaya was his son, he (too) was named Sīhala... The others since they were his (Vijaya's) retinue (*pirivara*) (they too) came to be called Sīhala"²⁰

There is no mistaking here that "the island people" (*dīpa vāsin*) as a whole are identified as *helu* (Sinhala). The linguistic group is the same as the "ethnic" grouping. The reference is to all the island people and no sub-category, caste or class is excluded. This is irrefutable evidence that by the time of its writing the Sinhala identity encompassed all the inhabitants of the island, except of course the *Damila*, the Veddas and any others who were by definition ruled out. The *Dharmapradīpikāva*, quoted by Gunawardana, was recording the same tradition two centuries later.

Moreover, it is very likely that there were other works, Sinhala and Pali, extant in the tenth century, which had similar things to say on this subject. Possibly the author of the *Dhampīa Atuvā Gūtapadaya* was repeating something found in earlier works as well. Judging from the *Vamsatthappakūsini*, the commentary to the *Mahāvamsa*, written during the eighth or the ninth century, there were many such historical works extant at the time. For example, the *Uttara Vihāra Mahāvamsa*, the *Vinayaṭṭhakathā*, the *Dīpavamsaṭṭhakathā*, the *Simākathā*, the *Cetiyaṅvamsaṭṭhakathā*, the

19. There is general agreement on the authorship of the *Dhampīa Atuvā Gūtapadaya*. See D. E. Hettiarachchi (ed.), *Dhampīa Atuvā Gūtapadaya*, Colombo, Sri Lanka, University Press Board, (1974), p. xviii; P. B. Sannasgala, *Sinhala Sahitya Vamsayā*, Colombo, Lake House (1960) p. 65, G. E. Godakumbura, *Sinhalese Literature*, Colombo, Apothecaries, (1955) p. 31.

20. Hettiarachchi ed. p. 6.

Mahā Bōdhivaṃsakathā, the *Sumēdhakathā* and the *Sahassavatthu Aṭṭhakathā*, all of which contained historical material.²¹ In any case, we know for certain that the author of the *Vamsaṭṭhappakāsini*, who used “Lanka”, “*Tanbapanni*” as well as “*Sihaladipa*” in referring to this island, uses the word “*Sihaladipa*” in a crucial passage in the “*Dhātu Nidhāna Pariccēda*” (The Chapter Dealing with the Enshrining of the Relics in the Mahathupa). Here the Buddha, prophesying the construction of the Mahathupa, is recorded as telling one of his devotees,

*Tvāṃ Nanda anāgatē mayi parinibbutē Sihaladīpē Duṭṭhagāmini namā raññā karāpita Maha Thūpassa parahatthagataṃ Nāgabhavanato mama sārīrikam dōnappamānaṃ dhātum āharitvā dassasi*²²

“In the future, when I have attained Parinibbana, when in the Sihaladipa the king named Dutthagamini builds the Mahathupa, my relics amounting to about a *drona*, which are meant for it, will be in others’ hands; and you, Nanda will bring them forth from the Naga Bhavana”.

It is very significant that the author of the *Vamsaṭṭhappakāsini* imputes the use of the word “*Sihaladipa*” to Buddha himself. It can be taken as a clear indication of the coalescing of the Sinhala ethnic identity with the Buddhist religious identity.

Be that as it may, Gunawardana’s contention that even by the time of Mahinda IV (956–972) “there is still no evidence to suggest that the service castes were now being considered members of the group” is baseless, since the *Dhampīā Atuvā Gātapadaya* was written several decades previously by king Kassapa V (914–923) and we have word from the head of state himself that the *hela* group included all *dīpavasin*.

As suggested earlier, Kassapa no doubt was putting on record a fact which had been well established in his time. Hence, the question may be posed “How old are these identifications, *Sihala* (*Hela*) and *Sihala bhāsā* (*Helu basa*)”? The available evidence would appear to suggest that the earliest reference to “the Sinhala language” is in early 5th century. Buddhaghosa, the famous Indian scholar, who translated the Sinhala commentaries to Pali, refers to *Sihaladvīpa* as well as to *Sihalabhasa*. Referring to the Buddhist commentaries he says that they were

“brought to *Sihaladīpa* by Maha Mahinda (who was) endowed with self-mastery, and were made to remain in the *Sihala bhāsā* for the benefit of the inhabitants of the island”.²³

It is generally agreed that Buddhaghosa worked in Anuradhapura during the reign of Mahanama (406–428).²⁴ Apart from identifying the language as *Sihala bhāsā*, he pays tribute to it, calling it *manōramā bhāsā* “a delightful language”.²⁵

21. See G. P. Malalasekera (ed.), *Vamsaṭṭhappakāsini*, London OUP (1935), pp. lvi–lxxii.

22. *op.cit.* p. 563.

23. See the prologues of *Sumangalavilasini* (ed.) Dharmakīrti Sri Dhammananda, Colombo (1923); *Pāpāncasudani* ed. Dharmakīrti Sri Dhammananda, Colombo (1933); *Sarathappakāsini*, (ed.) Widurupola Piyatissa, Colombo (1924).

24. For the date of Buddhaghosa see G. P. Malalasekera, *The Pali Literature of Ceylon*, London RASGB (1928), p. 76; B. C. Law, *A History of Pali Literature*, London, Kegan-Paul (1933) p. 389.

25. See the eighth verse in the prologue of the work cited in. fn. 23.

Thus we may say that the identity of the Sinhala language was acknowledged by the fifth century. This is corroborated by linguistic evidence. We note that by the time the earliest inscriptions appear, i.e. circa 3rd cen. B.C. to 1st cen. A.C., the "Sinhala Prakrit", as the earliest form of the language is called, has certain individual features, making it distinct from the Indian Prakrits, deviating much more from the norm of Sanskrit than any of them.²⁶ By about the third or the fourth century these peculiarities are more marked, leading to what language historians call "Proto-Sinhalese".²⁷ As the history of Sinhala literature indicates, there were many books written in it by the fifth century. We hear of a *Sihalaṭṭhakathā Mahāvamsa*, *Maha Aṭṭhakathā*, *Maha Paccariya Aṭṭhakatha*, *Kurundi Aṭṭhakatha*, *Sihala Dhammapadaṭṭhakatha*, a Sinhala translation of the Buddhist *Sūtras*, a Sinhala *Dalada Vamsa* and a Sinhala treatise on medicine. In fact Adikaram lists no less than twenty eight works, mainly in Sinhala, which served as sources for Buddhaghosa.²⁸ Thus we see that by the fifth century Sinhala had emerged as a distinct language. The language could have served as a basis for a distinct ethnic identity. It is in that context that the statement in the *Dīpavamsa* that the island was called *Sihala* "on account of the lion"²⁹ becomes significant as being suggestive of that identity. Furthermore, the fact that even people of a kingdom as far away as that of the Guptas in North India referred to the island as *Simhala*³⁰ indicates how well established this identity was by the fifth century.

Gunawardana's opinion that at a certain stage the Sinhala identity encompassed only the dominant stratum in the island society, thus assuming a class character, is also open to doubt. To support his view Gunawardana uses two arguments: (a) that there was at this stage a dominant social class who were known as *Mahājana* and (b) that the *Mahāvamsa* and its commentary, the *Vamsaṭṭhappakāsinī*, "specifically exclude" the lower social strata from the group denoted by the term *Sinhala*. These two assertions need careful examination with reference to the sources in question.

Gunawardana tells us that the word *Mahājana* "in the ancient texts did not carry the meaning that its phonetic equivalent *Mahajanayū* conveys today, but denoted "great men". By "great men" he means a "ruling class." He proceeds to assert that "while the great men of non-*ksatriya* status may force the ruling family to govern

26. See K. R. Norman, "The Role of Pali in Early Sinhalese Buddhism" in Heinz Bechert (ed.) *Buddhism in Ceylon and Studies on Religious Syncretism in Buddhist Countries*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck and Rupert (1978) pp. 28-47, esp. pp. 30-31. Norman has a different view about the phrase *manoramā bhāsa*. But I agree with N. A. Jayawickrama, *The Inception of Discipline and the Vinaya Nidana*, Sacred Books of the Buddhists, Vol. XXI, London, Luzac & Co. (1962) p. xx.
27. D. B. Jayatilaka, *The Sinhalese Dictionary* Colombo, Govt. Press (1937). pp. ix.
28. E. W. Adikaram, *Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, Colombo, Gunasena (1953) p. 78; D. E. Hettiarachchi, "Sinhalese Literature", in *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon*, Colombo, Ceylon, University Press (1959) p. 394; P. B. Sannasgala, *op-cit.* p. 35-6.
29. *Dīpavamsa*, ed. H. Oldenberg, London, Williams and Norgate (1879) ch. 9, v. 12.
30. The Allahabad Inscription of Samudragupta, J. F. Fleet, *Inscriptions of Early Gupta Kings and their Successors, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* Vol. III, Varanasi, Indological Book House (1963) p. 8.

justly without harassing them they may not aspire to kingship". Next he cites different versions of the "colonization myth" to arrive at the conclusion that "the discrepancies between different versions of the myth, reflecting probably their different social origins, points to the tensions within the dominant social group and the problems of political power in the country at the time".

This contrived picture of ancient Sri Lankan society seems to rest on one crucial factor: the interpretation given to the word *mahajana* as it appears "in the ancient texts". What these texts are has not been specified, nor have we been given reasons for attaching the meaning "great men", connoting social dominance, to the word. In any case, the two most important texts, the *Mahāvamsa* and the *Vamsatthappakāsini*, do not seem to be of any avail in this interpretation. For example, note how the *Mahāvamsa* records the arrival of the Madura princess and her retinue of ladies meant to be brides for Vijaya and his followers, along with a group of "craftsmen and a thousand families of the eighteen guilds".

*sabbō s'ōtari nāvāhi Mahātittihē mahājanō
tenēva paṭṭhanam tan hi Mahātittihan ti vuccati*

(*The Mahāvamsa*, ed. Wilhelm Geiger Ch. VII, verse 58)

"All this multitude of people disembarked at Mahatittha; for that reason is that landing place known as Mahatittha".

This is elaborated and reiterated in the *Vamsatthappakāsini* as follows :

*sabbo s'ōtari nāvāhi tō sō mahājanō Pandurājēna visaṭṭhō
nāvāyō āruyā samuddam āruyihī, sō sabbō mahājanō tēna
mahajanssa uttinnakaran'eva paṭṭhanam Mahatittam ti vuccati ti attho*
(*The Vamsatthappakāsini*, ed. G. P. Malasekera, pp. 263-4)

"That multitude of people (*mahājana*), having been released by King Pandu, got on to ships and entered the ocean. All those *mahājana* in those ships in which they were travelling arrived at Mahātitttha. It is because of the arrival of those *mahājana* that the port came to be called 'Mahātitttha' in accordance with the meaning."

Clearly the reference in both texts is to "the multitude of people and not to a segment of it. The group consisted of, as mentioned before, the would-be queen of Vijaya and an unspecified number of brides for his seven hundred strong retinue, as well as several thousands of others. Assuming that the brides amounted to only seven hundred and one, they would have been a clear minority among several thousand others. If we adopt Gunawardana's interpretation of the word *mahājana*, we have to assume that the group of craftsmen and a thousand families of the eighteen guilds, the preponderant majority of the group, were considered invisible because of their "low" social status. Without recourse to such a contrivance we can take the description as it is. The *mahājana* would have referred to the group as a whole, and "thousand" perhaps was

a round number which denoted the tremendous impact the arrival of this large group would have made on the minds of the observers for them to have named the port itself by this incident.

Secondly, presenting his own view about the social stratification in early Sri Lankan society, Gunawardana claims that "both the *Mahāvamsa* and its commentary specifically exclude a substantial section of the population of the island from the social group denoted by the term (*Sihala*)". In order to arrive at this conclusion he juxtaposes two sets of statements from the *Mahāvamsa* and its commentary, *Vamsatthappakāsinī*. This is how his argument goes: The *Mahāvamsa* speaks of the coming of a thousand families "of the service castes sent by the king of Madura"; but it specified that the Sinhala group are the descendants of "the seven hundred who formed Vijaya's retinue"; and, this exclusion of "the service castes" is further emphasized in the *Vamsatthappakāsinī*.

There are two aspects of Gunawardana's contention which need comment. It is not clear why he used the label "service castes" for the thousand families who came from Madura. In anthropological literature "service castes" are those who "serve" the higher social order, "washermen", "drummers", "potters", etc.³¹ The *Mahāvamsa* reference, however, is to "eighteen *sēni*". Judging from the interpretation obtainable from comparable Indian sources, *sēni* (Skt. *srēni*) are identified as 'guilds', principally of merchants. Thus, Ellawala has suggested that *sēni* in this context would have been "merchant guilds (*vaiśya*)"³² Ellawala also states that at a later stage *srēni* became guilds of workmen such as carpenters and artisans, and that at yet another stage it denoted "people who followed occupation of less social recognitions"³³ But, judging from the period when the incident occurred, he prefers to identify *sēni* in the *Mahāvamsa* as guilds of merchants. It could also possibly be, as suggested by Walpola Rahula, that the thousand families were people engaged in different arts and crafts and that they arrived in the island because there was an urgent need for their services as the early settlers were mainly agriculturists.³⁴ In any case, the question we are concerned with is: were the craftsmen and the thousand families of eighteen guilds considered as belonging to "service castes" of low social status? Gunawardana has not been able to provide any convincing evidence of that. No doubt that identifying them as a "low" social category, who were discriminated against, helps in painting the pictures of a dominant ideology perpetrating a caste/class system of oppression, which "deliberately left out a considerable section of the linguistic group including craftsmen-agriculturists and others who performed 'low' service functions", as suggested by Gunawardana.

31. For example see Nur Yalman, "The Flexibility of the Caste Principle in a Kandyan Community" in Edmund Leach ed. *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon, and North-West Pakistan*, Cambridge, CUP (1960) pp. 78-112. esp. pp. 82-7.

32. H. Ellawala *Social History of Early Ceylon*, Colombo Dept. of Cultural Affairs (1969) pp. 28-29.

33. *op. cit.* p. 29.

34. Walpola Rahula *History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, Colombo, Gunasena (1966) p. 24.

No doubt too, many social scientists of the twentieth century will feel quite happy with such an early classic example of *homo hierarchicus* in operation. But it is extremely doubtful whether facts, as available in the chronicles, permit us to reach such a conclusion as the one Gunawardana would wish us to reach. Furthermore, as I shall point out later, inscriptional evidence from early Sri Lanka (circa 3rd cen. B. C. to 1st cen. A. C.) bear clear testimony to the fact that some craftsmen were far from being an oppressed social category.

Apart from the unwarranted use of the label "service castes" for the people in question, there is another crucial flaw in Gunawardana's argument. In the *Mahāvamsa* the arrival of these people is mentioned in verse 57 of Chapter VII. But the "exclusion" about which Gunawardana complains occurs with verse 42, i.e. fifteen verses previously. Let us have a look at the two verses in question :

King Sinhabahu since he had slain the lion (was called) Sinhala, and, by reason of the ties between him and them, all those (followers of Vijaya) were also called Sinhala - (verse no. 42.)

(The King sent his daughter and other maidens) ... and craftsmen and a thousand families of the eighteen guilds, entrusted with a letter to the conqueror Vijaya - (verse no. 57)

The *Vamsattahappakāsini* gives a long commentary on verse no. 42, stating that beginning with Vijaya and his *parivāra* "their sons, grandsons, great grandsons, etc. up to the present day" are included in the Sinhala fold. But it remains silent on verse no. 57, which refers to the craftsmen and the thousand families of the eighteen guilds. Hence, if we agree with Gunawardana, we have to believe that the authors of both *Mahāvamsa* and *Vamsattahappakāsini* "excluded" beforehand a group, whom they were expecting to mention later. That, I should say, is reading too much into the texts. If any exclusion was intended, the author of *Vamsattahappakāsini*, which is the later text, and which was intended to give explanations and comments, could have done so quite explicitly, right at verse no. 57, where the group to be "excluded" is referred to. But, as I mentioned earlier, the author has no comment to make about this episode.

Perhaps we need an explanation about this awkward situation found in the *Mahāvamsa* and its commentary. It seem to reflect a problem faced by the ancient historians: that of explaining the origins and kin connections of the diverse population groups in the island and categorizing them. Apart from the group that could be categorized broadly as descended from the *parivāra* of Vijaya, which included their imported wives and their progenies through generations, and the easily explainable Veddas (by recourse to the Vijaya-Kuveni legend), there would have been others whose origins would have been obscure. Yet, their presence had to be explained. (Recent immigrants would have posed no problems.) It is probably this dilemma that is reflected in the *Vamsattahappakāsini*, when firstly it has to elaborate on a straight fact that the Sihalas were those directly connected with (*sambandhū*) the prince named Sihala

(i.e. Vijaya). We should note in this connection that the author of the *Vamsatthappakāsini* gives the widest possible interpretation to the cryptic statement of the *Mahāvamsa*. Later, when it comes to talking about the artisans and "the thousand families" who arrived subsequently from a different region of India, he is in difficulty. Possibly he was not decided whether to include them or exclude them from the Sinhala group. If he had any intention of asserting the "purity" / "supremacy" of the Sinhala group, he would have specifically excluded the artisans and the thousand families of the *seni* when referring to them. There is no motive of wilful exclusion that we can see here. In fact we can well argue that his silence here is an indication that he was not unwilling to accept these people as belonging to the Sinhala fold.

The question may now arise whether we do not have any indication about social gradations in early Sri Lankan society. For this we need not go searching among later immigrants, because we have evidence from the Vijaya legend itself. Although specific details about the social composition of Vijaya's seven hundred followers are hard to come by, there are scattered references in the *Mahāvamsa* and its commentary which would support the view that it was a socially mixed gathering, consisting of people from different social strata. For example, in the description of the founding of the villages, the *Mahāvamsa* says:

Here and there did Vijaya's ministers found villages. Anurādhagāma was built by a man of that name near the Kadamba river; and the chaplain Upatissa built Upatissagāma on the Gambhīra river, to the north of Anurādhagāma. Three other ministers built, each for himself, Ujjēni, Uruvēlā and the city Vijita (Chapter VII, verses 43-45).

The *Vamsatthappakāsini* commenting on the above, refers to Anurādha as *mahāmacca* (the chief minister) while the others are referred to as *amacca* like in the *Mahāvamsa*. We also learn that Upatissa was a *purōhita*, obviously of the Brahmin caste.

Secondly, we get a glimpse of the social gradations in the midst of the seven hundred followers of Vijaya at the selection of the Madura maidens to be distributed among them:

When Vijaya had offered hospitality and bestowed honours on the envoys he bestowed the maidens, according to their rank, upon the ministers and retainers (*Mahāvamsa* Ch. VII, verse 70).

Obviously, there was a ranking involved; and we learn more about the ranking from the commentry:

*jātādihi tēsam tāsam yathānuviccakaṃ nātā va kaññāyo
amaccēnan ca janassa ca adāsi* (*Vamsatthappakāsini*, p. 266)

The king gave the damsels away to the ministers and other men only after ascertaining their suitability to one another according to caste etc.

I have translated Pali *jāti* as "caste". It can also mean "ranking by birth", an ascriptive status, meaning something similar. Note the emphatic particle *va*, which lays stress on the fact that before deciding on each couple the relative "birth" (caste) ranking of the people was ascertained. So there were social gradations, based on *jāti* among both Vijaya's *parivāra* and Madura maidens to be taken into account

Thirdly, we obtain a glimpse of the social gradations, this time among the Madura maidens, in the manner in which they were brought together to be sent to Lanka :

The king of Madura took council with the ministers, and since he was minded to send his daughter (to Lanka) he, having first received also daughters of others for the ministers (of Vijaya), nigh upon a hundred maidens, proclaimed with beat of drums 'those men here willing to let a daughter depart for Lanka shall provide their daughters with a double store of clothing and place them at the doors of their houses' (*Mahāvamsa*, Ch. VII, verses 52 - 4).

If we go by this description, there were about a hundred high ranking people (ministers) among Vijaya's retinue, who were provided with brides of equal status. The others probably were a mixed group of different social gradations, which is signified by the selection process mentioned in verse no. 70 of the *Mahāvamsa* and the corresponding section of the commentary we quoted earlier.

As mentioned in verses 52 - 54 quoted above, there was a selection in Madura according to rank, and this is again reiterated in verse no. 56, where we are told that before dispatching them to Lanka the king had all the maidens "fitted out according to their rank". One can well argue that only a class distinction is reflected in the whole episode - the ministers on the one hand the ordinary folk on the other (*amacca/jana*). But the reference to *jāti* carries the distinction to the ascriptive area,

In any case the problem with Gunawardana's argument is that he starts with the premise that the seven hundred strong *parivāra* of Vijaya were a socially uniform group, who *en masse* and immediately assumed the dominant position in the island society. Then he picks up the cause of the later immigrants, the artisans and the worker communities, and assumes that they were relegated to a low social status and that the dominant group did not want the latter to be included in the Sinhala fold. To prove this he juxtaposes a positive statement in the *Mahāvamsa* (VII : 42), which described who the Sinhala were, with a later neutral statement recording the arrival of artisans and worker groups. He hopes thereby to establish that the imagined "low" social category has been wilfully excluded from the Sinhala fold. It is another example of ideology seeking supporting evidence, and, finding such evidence difficult to come by, relying on very flimsy and ambiguous, if not dubious, data.

If we examine the earliest Sinhalese inscriptions, i.e. those belonging to the period 3rd cen. B.C. to 1st cen. A.C., we find a picture quite contrary to what Gunawardana

wishes us to see. There are many instances of people who have to be categorized as "craftsmen" appearing on par with kings, princes, chiefs and merchants as donors of caves to the Buddhist monkhood. Thus for example, copper-smiths, (*tabakara*), iron-smiths (*kabara*), workers in ivory (*daṭṭika*) and weavers (*pehekara*), who reveal their identity while donating caves³⁵. These inscriptions were carved during the very period in which Gunawardana sees the craftsmen being relegated to a low social position. But we see no stigma of inferiority being attached to their professions. And we cannot for certain apply the modern label "service castes", with its connotations of labour exploitation and social discrimination, to these groups.

Thus, Gunawardana's exercise appears very much like an attempt to see in ancient Sri Lanka some modern conceptualizations about ethnicist perceptions and social hierarchies. Indeed such an exercise fits neatly into the ideological requirements of *Ethnicity and Class Conflict in Sri Lanka*, which presume to see in the Sinhala national psyche an inherent propensity for harassment of minority groups.³⁶ Fortunately or unfortunately, historical sources do not support these typifications.

To come back to our problem, the fact that the *Mahāvamsa* and the *Vamsatthappakāsini* most positively include the seven hundred followers of Vijaya, belonging to different social strata, in the Sinhala fold goes against Gunawardana's contention that the Sinhala identity at that stage was exclusivist, been confined to a "higher" social stratum.

Two other assertions of Gunawardana with regard to the Vijaya myth are : (a) that it embodies a political definition of the Sinhala identity, wherein the ruling house is taken as Sinhala *par excellence*, and (b) that it embodies a state ideology which sought to unite the dominant elements in society. How tenable are these assertions ?

These views of his on state ideology derive directly from his opinions about the exclusivist *Sinhala vamsa* and the *mahājana* theory which we discussed earlier. Seen in the light of the insubstantial evidence which he provides in support of those two ideas, the state ideology theory too is open to doubt. We need to repeat the point that the very basis upon which Gunawardana's theories are constructed is extremely brittle.

Gunawardana believes there was a pressing need for uniting the dominant social group in its loyalty to the royal house because there were tensions within. The proof for these tensions is found in the different versions of the "colonization myth", namely

35. See Paranavitana (1970) pp. xcvi - xcvi.

36. Kumari Jayawardena, *Ethnic and Class Conflicts in Sri Lanka*, (Colombo, Centre for Social Analysis (1985) which concentrates on how Sinhala chauvinism affected other ethnic groups.

the *Dīpavamsa* version, the *Mahāvamsa* version the *Divyāvadāna* version, Hiueng Tsang I version and Hiueng Tsang II version.

While it is interesting to compare and contrast these different versions, we must not forget that our task here is to ascertain the beliefs of the island people. As far as they were concerned, there were only two versions which should be taken as reflecting their thinking - the *Dīpavamsa* version and the *Mahāvamsa* version. When we examine the core element in these two versions, we see no discrepancy between them - only that certain details are found in one which are not found in the other. And the account in the *Vamsathappakāsini*, the commentary of the *Mahāvamsa*, adds further details. As such we cannot make much out of the "discrepancies found in these three texts regarding the Vijaya story.

As for the *Divyāvadāna* story, the question arises whether we should take this "colonization myth" found in Indian sources as reflecting beliefs and perceptions of the people of Sri Lanka. Hence its validity as a reflection of ideological tensions within the island society is open to doubt. As for the Hiueng Tsang versions, they have even less credibility than this. Can we give the two "colonization myths" recorded by Hiueng Tsang the same validity as that in the *Mahāvamsa*? This Chinese traveller never came to Sri Lanka, and his knowledge about the island was gathered from others in India. The two stories found in his writings appear to be distorted versions of the *Mahāvamsa* story and the *Divyāvadāna* story rather than two different myths which existed independently. Seen in this light Gunawardana, in attempting to see tensions within Sri Lankan society on the basis of differing "colonization myths", is reading too much into very little.

Gunawardana also asserts that "at no period do they (i.e. the Sinhala identity and the Buddhist identity) appear to have coincided exactly to denote the self-same group of people". To support this view he has three arguments: (1) When Dutthagamini fought Elara, there appear to have been Sinhalese who took the side of Elara. (2) In the 5th century, when Tamils occupied the throne of Lanka for some time, some of these Tamil rulers appear to have been Buddhists and were evidently supported by some Sinhalese. (3) Even during the 10 century, when Kassapa V propagated the idea that the Sinhala royal line belonged to the same royal line as the Buddha, although "nearly all the Sinhalese were Buddhist, there is still no evidence to suggest that the service castes were being considered members of the Sinhala group".

It is obvious that Gunawardana confuses issues. An identity may be related to reality. But it is not reality itself. It is a mental construct by a people. The fact that some Sinhalese sided with Tamil invaders means that, as far as these people were concerned, the Sinhala and the Buddhist identities were not strong enough to prevent them throwing in their lot, for some reason or the other, with the aliens. And the fact that there were Tamil Buddhists reminds us of the reality that Buddhism was no ethnic monopoly of the Sinhalese. The third argument falls flat in the light of the untenability of Gunawardana's portrayal of the social stratification in the early Anuradhapura period.

We must also remember that the instances cited by Gunawardana were random and isolated ones, which would not have made a qualitative impact on the overall definition of the situation which as Obeyesekere has pointed out, was "Sinhalese as defenders of Sasana versus Tamils as opposers of Sasana."³⁷ Myths, as Gunawardana himself would agree, are often not in accordance with the facts of history. Yet, they can have tremendous potency. Thus, as far as the Sinhalese are concerned, their historical role was that of the defenders of the Sasana, and, as pointed out by Obeyesekere, they could be mobilized by their rulers to fight the foreign invaders by appealing to the identity of interests between ethnicity and religion.

One of the critical flaws in Gunawardana's paper is his failure to deal with the vicissitudes of the Sinhala ethnic identity over a period of thirteen centuries from the sixth century A.D. to the eighteenth.³⁸ He provides no information on this long period of Sri Lanka's complex history, which saw dynastic changes, the rise and fall of kingdoms and capital cities, and a whole series of destructive invasions. It saw long periods of Sinhala resistance, survival and recovery. We are provided with no clues as to the fate of the concept of Sinhala identity during this long period of time. I do not intend to fill that gap through this present essay, but to move on to the second phase in Gunawardana's analysis of the emergence of Sinhala identity, where he leaps from the 6th century A.D. to the day of the Kandyan kingdom in the 18th century.

In a paper entitled "Sinhala-Buddhist identity and the Nayakkar Dynasty in the Politics of the Kandyan Kingdom: 1739 - 1815" published in 1979^{38a}, I identified signs of what could be typified as "a Sinhala-Buddhist ideology" affecting the plots and conspiracies against the Nayakkar rulers during the last phase of the Kandyan kingdom. The evidence I adduced to support my view was derived from a variety of sources. Namely,

- (a) *Kirala Sandēsaya*, written immediately after the dethronement of Sri Vikrama Rajasinghe in 1815.
- (b) *Vadiga Haṭana Hevat Ahalēpola Varnaṇava*, written between 1815 and 1817.
- (c) *Mandārapura Puvata*, Part III, written during the reign of Kirti Sri Rajasinghe (1747 - 1781).

37. Gananath Obeyesekere, "The Vicissitudes of the Sinhala Buddhist Identity Through time and Change" in George De Vos and Lola Romanucci-Ross, ed., *Ethnic Identity, Cultural Communities and Change*, Palo Alto, Mayfield (1975) pp. 231-58.

38. Micheal Roberts, "Sri Lanka: Ethnic Conflict and Political Crisis, a review article on K.M. de Silva, *Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-Ethnic Societies: Sri Lanka, 1885-1985*", *Ethnic Studies Report*, Vol. VI, No. 1 (1988) pp. 40-62.

38a. In Micheal Roberts ed., *Collective Identities, Nationalisms and Protest in Modern Sri Lanka*, Colombo, Marga, (1979) pp. 99-128.

- (d) *Sāsanavatīrṇa Varṇanāva*, a history of Buddhism written during mid-nineteenth century.
- (e) An unpublished *Rājavallīya*, again written during the 19th century. (In 1815, according to one authority, and in 1869 according to another).
- (f) A Dutch document written in 1761, which reports the banishment of the Sangaraja *bhikkhu* Saranankara, for his compliance in the conspiracy against the king in the previous year.
- (g) An Account by De La Nerolle, one time a "gentleman-in-waiting" of the Kandyan king, who later settled in Dutch territory.
- (h) A letter of 1762 addressed to the Dissava of the Three and Four Korales by the Dutch authorities in Colombo.
- (i) The *memoir* of Jan Schreuder, the Dutch Governor in Colombo at the time of the conspiracy of 1760.

The most explicit anti-Nayakkar documents we have from this period are the *Kirala Sandēsaya* and the *Vaḍiga Haṭana*. The fact that both of them appear after the king had been removed explains why such forthright sentiments did not find expression earlier.

I should digress here to point out that these two poems are not the work of *one* author, as Gunawardana believes. As I have clearly stated on p. 101 of my earlier paper, the author of *Kirala Sandēsaya* was *bhikku* Kitalagama Devamitta, and the author of *Vaḍiga Haṭana* was Vāligala Kavisundara Mudali.

Both the *Kirala Sandēsaya* and the *Vaḍiga Haṭana* support the claim of the former First Adigar Ahalepola to the throne of Kandy. Judging from precedents, this is an unusual incident in Kandyan politics. In the paper referred to earlier I have pointed out that there were two previous instances when the claims of Sinhala ethnics were advocated as against the Nayakkars to the Kandyan throne. On both such occasions the Sinhala ethnics thus sponsored had *some* claim to *ksatriya* status. On the other hand, in the case of Ahalepola, he had none. Yet his name was eagerly sponsored by people such as *bhikkhu* Kitalagama and Vāligala Mudali, who belonged to the literary elite. It is clear that in their mind at least the *ksatriya* criterion was secondary to the ethnic factor. When we look back to 1739 at the death of Narendrasinghe, the last King of Sinhala ethnicity (when the question of a successor came up), and to 1760 (when there was a conspiracy to remove Kirti Sri Rajasinghe, the second Nayakkār ruler, from the throne) there were people among the Kandyan elite who also placed great weight on the ethnic factor. Thus, in 1739 some sponsored the cause of Unambuve Bandara and in 1760 some wanted to make Paṭṭiye Bandara the King. But the fact that they did not persist in their viewpoint and the fact that they eventually reconciled themselves to the situations that developed later would have been due to the peculiar nature of court politics. What we note in any case is that there was a strand of opinion which supported a Sinhala ethnic who, even though he did not *fully qualify* as a *ksatriya*, was regarded preferable to a *ksatriya* Nayakkar as the king of Kandy.

With regard to the *Kirala Sandēsaya* the *Vadiga Hatana*, the most striking feature of their contents is the condemnation of the Nayakkars as a group. While Sri Vikrama is castigated as a person, no pain is spared to condemn and vilify the *demalu* who were “destroying” the land of the Sinhalese.

In verse no. 18 of *Vadiga Hatana* the author calls Sri Vikrama “a villainous”, wicked, heretical eunuch of a Tamil” (නපුංසක දිටු අරිටු මියදිටු කුදිටු දෙමළෙක්). Before coming to that there are four references to *demalu* :

දෙමළ කදෝ කිමි හැරියෙය වනසා (5)

“(Ahalepola, the sun) destroyed the Tamil fireflies.”

දෙමළ සපුන් හැම වැනසිය නොතබා (7)

“(Ahalepola) destroyed all Tamil snakes not sparing a single one.”

දෙමළන් උඹුන් බිය මන් සපුරා (10)

“(Ahalepola filled the minds of Tamil snakes with fear.”

දුරපන් කරමින් දෙමළන් අදුරු (11)

“(Ahalepola) dispelled the Tamil darkness (in Lanka)”

Similarly, bhikku Kitalagama in his *Kirala Sandēsaya* chastises the king's relations as follows :

තසමින් ගම් නියමගම් රට දන මඩුළු
බෙහෙවින් රැස්ව සියයෝ දිටුතර දෙමළු (43)

“The most obstinate Tamils were gathered in large numbers, plundering all the hamlets, villages, districts and provinces.”

How the Buddha Sasana suffered in their hands is also highlighted:

මෙලෙසින් පසිඳු ලක්දිව සාසනය මැඩ
බෙහෙවින් කරන අනදර දක දෙමළ ජඩ (47)

“(Ahalepola) having seen the the immense ill-treatment effected by the scoundrel Tamils in ruining the reputed Sasana of Lanka.”

The condemnation of “the Tamils” as a group is more pronounced in *Vadiga Hatana* :

අරිටු කෙළෙස් ගුණ නපුරු දහස් ඇති දෙමළු (109)

“Tamils with vile sinful qualities and evil intentions.”

ටට නොබලා සැඩී දෙමළ කැලෑ තැන තැන බලලා ගමබිම සවිලා (117)

“The wicked group of Tamils were residing in various places, having taken possession of lands and villages.”

විකරන් වෙස් ගත් ගුණ නැති යක් රකුසන් වැනි ලක ලන් දෙමළ (129)

“The Tamils who were in Lanka taking weird guises resembling demons and devils without any good in them.”

Vāligala sometimes make a direct reference to the fact that it was *the Sinhala people* who were being harassed by the Tamils :

නසා සිංහල රටුන් සේරම ගෙන දෙමළ (155)

“The Tamils taking over everything having destroyed the Sinhala people...”

Both Vāligala Mudali and *bhikkhu* Kitalagama hark back to history to invoke memories of the most famous Tamil war in antiquity – that of Duṭṭhagamini against Eāla. Vāligala compares Āhalepola’s entry to Kandy at the deposition of Sri Vikrama to the entry of Dutthagamini to Elāra’s stronghold, Vijithapura :

මෙලක පොරණ ගාමිණී රජු දස මහයෝ බලසෙන් ගෙන

නිසැකව සැඩී දෙමළන් උන් විජිතපුරට ගොස් වන් මෙන (86)

“Just like king Gāmini of ancient Lanka, who with his ten great generals and his powerful army unhesitatingly entered Vijitapura, where the wicked Tamils were...”

Interestingly, in Vāligala’s estimation the victory of Āhalepola was superior to that of Duṭṭhagamini. For, while it took king Gamini several years and months to vanquish the Tamils. Āhalepola was able to accomplish his feat within seven days (see verse 123). *Bhikkhu* Kitalagama also sees the parallel between Duṭṭhagamini and Āhalepola several times (see verses 48 and 49). Since it was Kitalagama’s intention to boost up the image of Āhalepola it is pointed out :

පොරණ ගැටුණු නරවර සැඩී දෙමළ

සුද

කරන සඳ වැදුන සැරයෙන් පමණ

කොද

නරන රාජතුරු පළ කළ මෙරණ

මැද

මරණ නොම දුනිය දෙමළකටත්

එකද (53)

“Āhalepola who displayed the mild qualities of the moon in the midst of the battle field used only a fraction of the force used by King Gāmini of yore in battling the wicked Tamils. H: (Āhalepola) did not cause the death of a single Tamil.”

This wide range of extracts from *Kirāla Sandēsayā* and the *Vadiga Hatana* are set out above in order to show that the resentment against Sri Vikrama was much more than personal: It was, in fact, an expression of a deep-rooted ethnic animosity. When reading Gunawardana’s summary of my paper, one gets the impression that the resentment against Sri Vikrama was merely personal. He selects a quotation which highlights the *personal animosity* and ignores the references in the extracts I have quoted in my paper, which illustrate the antipathy of the two poets to Sri Vikrama’s people – the *demalu* – as a group. This is an example of one of the crucial flaws in Gunawardana’s paper, his practice of selective reporting and quotation, to which I shall return later on in this present paper of mine.

As it should be clear now, there was by 1815 a strong hostility to the *demalu*, who, it appeared, had taken the upper hand in the Kandyan kingdom. Vāligala, as shown above, explicitly states that the *demalu* had destroyed the Sinhala people. At another

instance he says that Āhalepola was the saviour, as it were, of the Sinhala people.

වංග කුද්දිලි අකලංග ඉදමඵ මැන බංග කරපු යන ලෙස නොරඳු
සිංහල දන බල ඵංගලන්තෙ යන රංග දික්කුම් බල ගනිය සඳු (110)

“destroyed completely the powers of the crooked, wicked, ugly Tamils and made the power of the Sinhala people so victories even as to reach England.”

Ethnicist sentiments such as above found in the *Kirala Sandēsayā* and *Vadiga Haṭṭana*, I maintain, were not isolated, impromptu and singular. No doubt these two supporters of Āhalepola were making a great deal of effort to justify the despolement of Sri Vikrama. At the same time, in their minds Āhalepola was a hero who was engaged in a righteous war, fighting the *demalu*, the cause of much hardship to the Sinhala people and the Buddhist dispensation. Sri Vikrama had been deposed. Now the enthronement of Āhalepola appeared to them a matter of course. In any case, what concerns us here is not the political affiliations of Vāligala and Kitalagama. We are focusing attention on the ideological weaponry they were brandishing in support of their hero and patron.

One can cite many instances in the history of the Kandyan kingdom during the previous hundred years or so when the ethnic disjunction between the Sinhalese and the powerful bloc of Nayakkars came to the fore. I believe that Kitalagama's and Vāligala's ethnicist invective is an ideological follow-up of those previous incidents. In my previous paper I referred to three such incidents :

- (1) When Sri Vira Parakrama Narendrasinghe (1707-1739), the last king of Sinhala ethnicity, who had no son from his chief queen, designated his brother-in-law, a Nayakkar who had the *ksatriya* qualifications, to succeed him, a section of the aristocracy sponsored the cause of Unambuve Bandara, the king's son by a non-*ksatriya* lady.
- (2) A revolt by the Kandyan ministers in 1749 in resentment against the high-handed activities of Narenappa, the father of king Kirti Sri Rajasinghe, the second Nayakkar ruler in Kandy.
- (3) The conspiracy of 1760 in which some high-ranking officials of the court got together with some *bhikkhus* of the Malvatta temple and planned to do away with Kirti Sri who was branded a “heretical Tamil”

Here I need to meet the objections of Gunawardana to my claim that there was an ideological (i.e. Sinhala-Buddhist) consciousness behind these incidents. Gunawardana points out that on the question of ascension of Sri Vijaya, ritual status turned out to be the decisive criterion, and that “even the leading courtiers who supported Unambuve's claims later accepted office under the Nayakkar king.” The answer to that should be that there is nothing spectacular about this reconciliation in the eighteenth century Kandyan court, for, even at the tail-end of the twentieth century we find politicians doing the very same thing, even in democracies where protest and dissension have much freer scope.

Apart from that, it should interest us to know that Leuke, considered to be the leader of the faction sponsoring Unambuve, was given "special favours,"³⁹ and that there were patently deliberate attempts by the new king to keep him in good humour. Leuke was not only elevated to the very important post of Disava of the Three and Four Korales but also lavished a handsome *paraveni* land grant, to be enjoyed by him and his descendants. The *sannasa* making the land grant stated that Leuke "faithfully served the king from childhood", a fiction which was convenient for both parties to play their respective roles after the rapprochement. There are other interesting facts about Leuke, to which we shall return later.

Gunawardana summarily dismisses the evidence from *Sāsanāvāṭīrṇa Varṇanāva* on the grounds that it was written "in the reign of Queen Victoria when ... an altogether different intellectual milieu had come into being."

It is unfortunate that Gunawardana completely ignores the four contemporary documents I have cited and picks up the 19th century document alone, which very conveniently can be labelled "Victorian" – a word with many connotative advantageous to his position. We shall return to this typification of Victorian milieu later.

Two factors are crucial in determining the reliability of the account given in the *Sāsanāvāṭīrṇa Varṇanāva*. Firstly, we have to determine the date of its writing. On the penultimate page of the printed version we have the following statement, which is the only internal evidence available regarding its date :

තවද ඉන් පසු රාජධානි දෙකක් පසු උන නැතදී මිථ්‍යා දුෂ්ඨ ඵලප්පුකාර කුමාරිකාවක් හෙවත් මනෝසිකා කෙනෙක් ක්‍රිස්තියානි ආගමෙන් රජ ශ්‍රී විදිමින් එකල්හි බුඩ්ධාසනය වචන්තට රජපුරුවෝ නැත.⁴⁰

"After the lapse of two kingdoms since that time (i.e. time of Kirti Sri), a heretical European princess, in other words a queen, was enjoying the royal splendour by means of the Christian faith (and) at the time there was no monarch to sponsor the Buddhist dispensation"

What does the not so learned author of the *Sāsanāvāṭīrṇa Varṇanāva* mean by the word රාජධානි (kingdom) in this context? It would appear that he meant "regnal period", as we understand it today. If that is so, two reigns after Kirti Sri we come to the time of George III, the first British ruler of Sri Lanka. The capital was shifted to Colombo in 1815 and remained so till the late twentieth century. Since he is quite explicit about the fact that a queen was ruling, the possibility is that the reference is to Victoria (1837-1901). In any case we should take note of the author's ignorance about the British monarchs prior to her ascension. We know that after George III (1760-1820) there were the reigns of George IV (1820-1830) and of William IV (1830-1837) as well before we come to the reign of Victoria

39. L. S. Devaraja, *The Kandyan Kingdom, (1707-1780)* Colombo, Lake House (1972) p. 82. The following account is based on pp. 82-3

40. *Sāsanāvāṭīrṇavarṇanāva*, ed. C. E. Godakumbura, Moratuwa, Dodangoda & Co. (1956) p. 26.

In dismissing the evidence provided by the *Sāsanavatīrṇa Varnanāva* Gunawardana seems to suggest that its author, writing as he was during the reign of Victoria, was influenced by the "intellectual milieu" that had emerged at the time. Let us now examine what its characteristics were and its influence as described by Gunawardana.

After Sir William Jones pointed out (in 1786) the structural affinities between Sanskrit and the classical languages of Europe, Latin and Greek, many studies were done about the origin of these Indo-European or Aryan languages. Eventually, in the hands of some scholars, there emerged the notion of an Aryan race. Max Muller's writings popularised this idea, and, although he had misgivings about it later, it influenced many writers, in Europe as well as South Asia. According to Gunawardana, James de Alwis, who was "hesitant" in calling Sinhalese an Indo-Aryan language in his Introduction to the *Sidat Sangarava* in 1853, came out strongly with the Aryan theory in 1865/6 due to the influence of Max Muller. Gunawardana also seems to suggest that this new "climate of opinion" influenced the author of *Sāsanavatīrṇa Varnanāva* as well.

I wish to take up these two assumptions of Gunawardana separately. Let me turn first to the *Sāsanavatīrṇa Varnanāva*. When one reads the inelegant and highly colloquialised prose of this work, one has serious misgivings about the author's learning. There is no doubt about his knowledge of Buddhism and the life and times of Saranankara, however. The evidence suggests that he was a *bhikkhu*. But given the short-comings of his own intellectual background, it seems most unlikely that he was conversant with the works of Max Muller.

My contention is that the information about the plot of 1760, recorded in the *Sāsanavatīrṇa Varnanāva*, and which significantly does not appear in contemporary Sinhala writings, was kept alive in the oral tradition among the *bhikkhus*. Until after 1815 it would have been dangerous to put such information to writing - which explains the silence in Kandyan sources in spite of the abundance of writings at this time, some dealing with contemporary events.⁴¹

It is here that the other evidence I have adduced in my paper, especially from material compiled in Dutch territory, becomes useful. This evidence, which supports the account in the *Sāsanavatīrṇa Varnanāva*, has been completely ignored by Gunawardana. Apart from the evidence from writings done outside Kandy, which throw light on the specific events of 1760, evidence from Kandyan sources themselves can be adduced to support my general view about the ideological motivation behind the plot and conspiracies against the Nayakkar rulers.

As I have mentioned in my earlier paper too, we have to accept the limitations of contemporary records in this respect. Kandyan monarchy being what it was, we can

41. The *Rājōvada* (Advice to kings) written in the 18th century states that "since the words of kings are weapons their very frowning is capable of destroying people and takes effect immediately". N. Mudiyanse, "The Rajovada; Advice to Kings", *The Buddhist*, XVI, I (1974) p. 30. Another reason given by Devaraja is the reluctance of writer so tarnish the image of Saranankara. See Devaraja (1972) p. 109.

never expect direct reference to the ethnic (and sometimes religious) antipathy to the Nayakkars in contemporary Kandyan writings. Regarding the conspiracy of 1760, the only contemporary evidence explaining the ideological motivation is available from the four documents written in Dutch territory by foreigners. One possible objection to the three records left by the Dutchmen is that they were seeing in the Kandyan court what they were wishing to happen. But there is one document, the account given by De La Nerolle, a one-time *appuhāmy* (gentleman-in-waiting) to the king, to which we may not impute such a motive. In any case we have further evidence to prove that there was a long-standing strand of anti-Nayakkar feeling in Kandyan court circles, and this is from a Sinhala work written in Kandy itself. I believe that the evidence from these independent sources should be put together in coming to a conclusion on the question we are investigating.

In my earlier paper I mentioned only three anti-Nayakkar outbursts that occurred in Kandy, and all of them were during the period of Nayakkar rule, 1739-1815. In order to recognize the under-current of anti-Nayakkar feelings in Kandyan circles during the era, we have to go a few years back, when we have the first signs of the Nayakkars creating problems for the Kandyans.

As recorded in the *Mandārapura Puvata*, compiled some time during the middle of Kirti Sri's reign,⁴² there was a serious rebellion against king Narendrasinghe due to his appointment of a "*vaḍiga* Tamil" to a high-ranking position in the court.

Narendrasinghe, the last ruler of Sinhala ethnicity, married two Nayakkar consorts and it appears that each of these marriages was followed by the influx to Kandy of a large number of *vaḍiga* kinsmen. Their exclusivism, "heathenism" (being Hindu), and the fact that they seemed to form a power block over the native aristocracy, would have provided considerable provocation to the Sinhala courtiers. To bring the crisis to a head the king in 1732 appointed a "*vaḍiga* Tamil" to the responsible post of Maha Gabada Nilame (Chief of the King's Stores):

... නේවා හැටින් දුළුබර දෙකුවර ද	වෙන
සිව්සිය පන්කු මතුරට පියස සම	ගින
මහදන බාර මහමැති පදවිය දෙ	මීන
සරුවන සියළු ගබඩා බාර කර	මීන
දෙමළකු වඩිග පෙළපත පත් කළ	බැවින (468-9)

"Since the king appointed a Tamil of the *vaḍiga* lineage to the post of the chief minister in charge of the Great Treasury, along with the custodianship of the provinces of Hevāhata, Dumbara, the two Nuwaras (Udunuwara and Yatinuwara), Hārispattu and Maturata, handing over to him all the precious stores..."

42. *Mandārapura Puvata*, a historical poem compiled in three stages by different authors: the first part during the reign of Rajasinghe II (1634-84), the second part during the reign of Vimaladharmasuriya II (1684-1706), and the third part during the reign of Kirti Sri Rajasinghe (1747-81). See the edition by Labugama Lankananda (1958) p. ix. The citations in the present study are from the third part.

A serious revolt ensued in protest against this appointment and the foreigner and his retinue were killed (verse 470). The king, unable to cope with the revolt himself, enlisted the support of the Dutch and crushed it with great violence. Hevāhāta and Maturata were burnt down. Two thousand men of rank were executed and their properties were confiscated (verses 471-477). After the king's anger subsided the senior ministers took counsel with him and told him :

ලක්දිව පැවැති තෙක් හිමි සඳිනි පින්	සර
පරදන ඇමති තනතුරු ලද මෙයින්	පෙර
නැත ඇසුමට වන් මෙම හැර කිසිම	වර (479)

“For all the time of the existence of the island of Lanka we have not even heard, except on this occasion, of foreign people(*para dana*) having obtained ministerial position”.

The rebellion of 1732, significantly, had the desired effect, “for never again, not even when a Nayakkar sat on the throne, do we hear of an administrative appointment being given to a Nayakkar, at least not in the higher ranks of the services.”⁴³

The above account is indicative of the fact that those South Indians had been a cause of vexation to the Kandyan elite for quite some time. We learn that it was Rajasinghe II (1635-1687) who started the practice of bringing Nayakkara ladies as royal consorts.⁴⁴ According to one source, he had two Nayakkar Queens.⁴⁵ His son and heir, Vimaladharmasuriya II (1687-1707), continued the same practice and had as his queen a Nayakkar princess.⁴⁶ Narendrasinghe (1707-1739), on his part following his father and grandfather, brought down two brides from Madura.⁴⁷ Of special interest here is the fact that the Madura family which was thus matrimonially linked to the Kandyan royal family at the time of Narendrasinghe was not one with much wealth or influence.⁴⁸ The result was that Kandy became “a far more congenial home than their own, for thither they flocked with their kith and kin.”⁴⁹ It is the resentment against the cumulative effect of this South Indian presence that is vividly reflected in the *Kirāḷa Sandēsa* and the *Vaḍiga Haḷana*. In fact the *Vaḍiga Haḷana* specifically refers to Sri Vikrama as having, “in fond concern for his diverse *demala* relations, who were starving, obtained many lands and villages” (verse 172). [Here we should take note of the fact that the predicament of the Nayakkar at home (in South India) was not unknown to some sections of the Kandyan elite.]

Let us return to 1732, when Narednrasinghe paved the way for the Nayakkar dynasty to occupy the throne of Kandy. In spite of the king's wish to have his

43. Devaraja *op. cit.*, p. 74.

44. Devaraja *op. cit.*, p. 28, relying on the *Culavamsa* and Robert Knox.

45. Devaraja *op. cit.*, p. 28.

46. *op. cit.*, p. 29.

47. *op. cit.*, pd. 31-2.

48. Even their *Ksatriya* status is open to doubt. See Devaraja *op. cit.*, pp. 33-4.

49. *op. cit.*, p. 34.

brother-in-law, the Nayakkara prince, as his successor, and in spite of receiving the sponsorship of the influential *bhikkhu*, Saranankara, there was a faction led by Leuke who put forward the claim of Unambuve, the son of the king by a Sinhala lady. We have to understand the position taken by Leuke and others in the context of the anti-*Vadiga* feeling that had been brewing in Kandy for some time and erupting in a serious revolt only seven years earlier.

Since we are talking about an ideology, it is important that we focus attention on certain significant facts about the people who figure as the leaders among those striving against the Nayakkars.

Leuke, the leader of the Unambuve faction in 1739 was an ex-*bhikkhu*, and was popularly known as *vihāre rālahāmy*⁵⁰ He was one of the few Pali scholars in early eighteenth century Kandy, and it was from him that the young *bhikkhu* Saranankara, who was later to lead a revival of Buddhism and literary activity, had his first lessons in Pali. Leuke was no great favourite of Narendrasinghe, and we learn that he served a prison sentence for an offence about which we have no clear information.⁵¹ But by 1732 he had been pardoned and he was holding the important post of *mohottāla* (secretary), definitely a position bestowed on him for his erudition. After Sri Vijaya ascended the throne in 1739, the king made a special effort to reconcile with Leuke,⁵² which is perhaps indicative of the respect he commanded and the influence he wielded in Kandyan society at that time. Leuke on his part "had the interests of his religion and country at heart" and never betrayed the trust placed in him by the king.⁵³ His erudition, seniority, and abiding interest in Buddhism was duly acknowledged. Thus we see him being appointed to a three-member tribunal which in 1745 sat in judgement over the anti-Buddhist activities of the Catholic priests in Kandy, who had been provided refuge from Dutch persecution by Narendrasinghe, and whose activities had caused much vexation among the Buddhists.⁵⁴ Leuke, being a Buddhist scholar himself, fully sympathised with Saranankara's revivalist endeavours, and he was one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the latter's attempt to revive the *upasampadā* (higher ordination). He was constantly in touch with Hollanders in Colombo on the matter of obtaining senior *bhikkhus* from Pegu for the ceremony, and it was in the course of these negotiations that a decision was reached to bring down *upasampanna bhikkhus* from Siam instead of Pegu.⁵⁵ Thus, Leuke stands out as a learned aristocrat who would have been conversant with the history of his people and the Buddhist *sāsana*. His commitment to a particular cause in 1739 has to be understood with this background in view.

50. The following account is based on Ven. Kotagana Vacissara *Saranankara Sangaraja Samaya*, Colombo, Ratnakara (1960) pp. 158-9, 261 and Devaraja, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

51. Devaraja, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

52. See the discussion above.

53. Devaraja, *op. cit.*, p. 83-53.

54. *op. cit.*, p. 93.

55. *op. cit.*, p. 89.

Leuke died in 1751. The two other members of the tribunal which convicted the Catholic priests in 1745, the second Adigar Samanakkody and *bhikkhu* Welivita Saranankara,⁵⁶ now elevated to the dignity of Sangharaja (the highest Buddhist dignitary in the island) were to figure prominently in the plot of 1760 to remove the next *vaḍiga* ruler from the throne of Kandy. This incident has been described in detail in my earlier paper.⁵⁷

Not only Saranankara, but the chief high prelate of the Malvatte Viharaya, Tibbotuvave Buddharakkhita too was involved in the conspiracy of 1760. Tibbotuvave was considered to be a brilliant pupil of Saranankara. Highly respected for his erudition and piety, he was selected over and above the other *bhikkhus*, some senior in age, to be appointed head of Malvatta and the Deputy Sangharaja.⁵⁸

Saranankara and Tibbotuvave rank among the foremost scholars in Sinhala, Pali and Sanskrit in eighteenth century Sri Lanka. Apart from being the initiator of the religious and cultural revival of the day, Saranankara was the author of nine books *Munigunālanakaya* (Pali), *Abhisambōdhi Alankāraya* (Pali), *Sārārtha Sangrahaya* (Sinhala), *Ratnatraya Praṇama Gāthā Sannaya* (Pali and Sinhala), *Bhēsajja Manjusā Sannaya* (Pali and Sinhala), *Satara Baṇavara Sannaya* (Pali and Sinhala), *Mahābōdhivamsa Sannaya* (Pali and Sinhala), *Rūpamālāva* (Pali) and *Pāli Sandēsaya* (Pali). He was also said to have been conversant in six languages.⁵⁹

Tibbotuvave was second only to his teacher in scholarly reputation. His writings were: *Srī Saddharmāvavāda Sangrahaya* (Sinhala), *Satipaṭṭhāna Sūtra Sannaya* (Pali and Sinhala), *Saddhammōpāyana Sannaya* (Pali and Sinhala), *Syāmōpasampadā Vata* (Sinhala), and his *magnum opus* was the fourth part of the *Mahāvamsa*, in which he narrated the history of the island from the time of Parakramabahu IV (1302-26) to the middle of Kirti Sri's reign. This Pali composition consisting of 500 verses is a testimony to his wide knowledge of historical material and his mastery over the Pal language.

Tibbotuvave died in 1773, having been restored to his position as Head of Malvatte. Saranankara, who also was restored, survived his pupil and died in 1778. It is towards the end of Tibbotuvave's life that the king entrusted him with the task of updating the *Mahāvamsa*. Here, politics being such, Tibbotuvave glorifies the king in most laudatory terms:

Dowered with faith and many other virtues, devoted to the Buddha, his doctrine and his order, collected, mindful of what is worth and of what is worthless, ever performing meritorious works, such as almsgiving and the like; distinguished by splendid virtues, piety, wisdom, mercy, shining over the island with faith in the

56. *op. cit.*, 93.

57. Dharmadasa (1979).

58. P. B. J. Hevavasam, *Matara Yugaya Sahityadharayan Ha Sahitya Nibandhana*, Colombo, Dept. of Cultural Affairs (1968), pp. 35-6; Vacissara, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

59. Vacissara, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

enlightened One living according to the good doctrine of the Sage, dowered with the ten powers, ever giving alms and performing other meritorious works unweariedly and full of zeal, mindful of what is worth and what is worthless, he ever acted in this way for the welfare of all men”
(*Cūlawamsa* Geiger’s translation, Ch. 99, verses 66–68).

This was the man who appeared to Tibbotuvave and other conspirators in 1760 as a “heretical Tamil” (*mityādrstī demalā*), with whom the *sāsana* could no longer be sustained.⁶⁰ To be fair by Tibbotuvave, Saranankara and the others, who would have held such an opinion at the time, we have to continue with the story and record what happened in the aftermath of the abortive conspiracy.

According to the *Rājavaliya*, Samanakkodi Adigar and three other courtiers were beheaded, and the two prelates, Saranankara and Tibbotuvave, were imprisoned in two remote villages.⁶¹ As reported in the *Sāsanāvatiṛna Varṇanāva*, having punished the conspirators, the king relented and brought back Saranankara and Tibbotuvave from their places of imprisonment. He begged their forgiveness. “It is no fault of the venerable *bhikkhus*,” he said, “the fault is entirely mine. Who would have thought of killing me if I did not anoint myself with ash.” Having thus put the blame upon himself not only did he give up the practice of anointing himself with ash but even prohibited the use of soot in blackening the letters of ola manuscripts!⁶²

Crucial to my argument is the fact that Leuke, Saranankara and Tibbotuvave belonged to the literary elite and that they were aware of the historical role assigned to the Sinhaladvīpa as the island of destiny – the Dhammadvīpa – by the chronicles such as the *Dīpavamsa* and the *Mahāvamsa*,⁶³ edificatory works such as the *Pūjāvāliya* and other *vamsa* literature, such as the *Dhātuvamsaya* (The Chronicle of the Buddha’s Relics), the *Daṭṭhāvamsaya* (The Chronicle of the Tooth Relic), the *Mahābodhivamsa* (The Chronicle of the Great Bodhi Tree), the *Thūpavamsa* (The Chronicle of the Stupa) etc. The underlying theme of these compositions is the unique role the island and its people were destined to play in the preservation of the Buddha’s doctrine. For example, the *Dhātuvamsaya* states in a passage where the historical sequence has been reversed :

The Buddha placed his sacred footprint adorned with one hundred and eight auspicious signs, on top of Sumanagiri (mountain), as if placing a seal on the door of that treasury of the island of Lanka which was filled with the gems of (the Buddha’s) Body Relics, the eighty four thousand heaps of the doctrine and innumerable *bhikkhus* with eightfold achievements.
(ed. Munidasa Kumaratunga. 2483 B.E. p. II.)

60. For details see Dharmadasa (1979).

61. Devaraja *op. cit.*, p. 113

62. Godakumbura ed. (1956) pp. 25–6. In the preparation of ola manuscripts, the surface is cut into by an iron stylus and letters made visible by rubbing up on it with soot. As recorded in the *SV*, thereafter the rubbing was done with saffron.

63. For this aspect of the chronicles see Sirima Kiribamune, “The Dipavamsa in Ancient Sri Lankan Historiography,” *Sri Lanka Journal of Humanities*,³ V. 1 & 2, (1979) pp. 89–100.

The Kandyan literati of the eighteenth century, fresh with their revivalist zeal would have time and again read these passages and the history of "the people and the sasana" (*lōka sāsana*) would have been a live factor in their minds. For instance, we know for certain that Tibbotuvave consulted the *Pājāvaliya* (13th Century) before writing his *Srī Saddharmāvāvāda Sangrahaya*.⁶⁴ And the following passages could not have escaped his attention :

Since it is definite that the right branches of the Bodhi Trees, the precious Doctrine and the Dispensations of innumerable Buddhas will be established here, this island of Lanka decidedly belongs to the Buddhas. It is like a treasury filled by the Triple Gem. Therefore the sojourn of wrong believers in this island of Lanka will indeed not be permanent, just as the sojourn of the *Yakkhas* of yore here was not permanent. If a king of false beliefs (*mityāḍṛsti gat rājek*) was to rule here by force the fact that his dynasty will not take root is due to the special powers of the Buddhas themselves.

(ed. Walane Dhammandanda, 1916. pp. 656-7)

In Chapter XXXIV the author of the *Pūiāvaliya* describes the offerings received by the Buddha from one hundred and fifty three "Royal lords of Sinhala" (*Sinhalādhipi rajahu*).⁶⁵ In its course references are made to nine instances when the Tamils invaded the island. The word *demala* is specially used at each instance, even when referring to the Colas, and to the invasion of Magha of Kalinga.⁶⁶ In describing the reign of Magha, which was one of the longest periods of foreign occupation it is said :

(He) made Sri Lanka adopt false beliefs ... made Lanka like a house on fire ... (and) got it plundered by the Tamils and reigned forcibly for nineteen years (p. 690).

With such "lessons" from history it would have been surprising if Tibbotuvave and other revivalist scholars were not sensitive to the implications of a "heretica Tamil" occupying the throne of Sinhale.

I should mention here that Vāligala Kavisundara, whose anti-Tamil invective is unparalleled for this period was a pupil of Tibbotuvave.⁶⁷ Bhikkhu Kitalagama, the author of *Kirala Sandēsa*, about whose mentor we have no information seems to have belonged to the Malvatta fraternity. Following the practice usually adopted by *sandēsa* poets, he describes what would have been his own temple in the most copious terms. Thus, we have a long description of Malvatte (verses 87 to 107), where the Head of Malvatta at the time, Kobbekaduve Siri Nivasa (1811-19) also receives laudatory praise.

64. *Sri Saddharmāvavāda Sangrahaya*, ed. Ven. Weragoda Amaramoli, Colombo, Ratnakara (1956) p. 6.

65. Ed. Walane Dhammananda, Colombo. Jinalankara (1916) p. 676.

66. Thus "එළාර නම් දෙමළ රජෙක් ලක්දිව ලෝ සපුන් නසා ලක්දිව බැස;" p. 680 "සොළි රටින් දෙමළ සන් දෙනෙක් සන් සෙනෙක් ගෙන සන් නොවින් ලක්දිව බැස;" p. 685. "එකළ සොළි රටින් පසානු දහසක් දෙමළ නැවත ලක්දිවට බැස ලෝකසාසන නැසූන;" p. 690. "මාස නම් කළිතු රජ පුරිසිදහසක් දෙමළ බල සෙනෙ ගෙන ලක්දිව බැස ලෝකසාසන නසා . . ." p. 676.

67. Sannasgala. *op, cit.*, p. 459.

The ideological stances of Vāligala and Kitalagama therefore have to be understood in the context of the *gurukula* (lineage of teachers) tradition. These writers were not only influenced by their teachers and the ideological and intellectual milieu in which they received education and training, but were also affected by the ideological themes found in the literary and scholarly tradition coming down from antiquity in the *vamsa* literature (the *Dīpavamsa*, *Mahāvamsa*, etc.), and edifying writings such as the *Pūjavalīya*, which embodied the Sinhala *dāvīpa* and the Dhammadāvīpa concepts.

The fact that there was such a strand of opinion in Kandyan society did not mean that everybody subscribed to it. It appears to have been confined to a small section of the literati. Among the bulk of the population, on the other hand, the Nayakkar kings were "the divine lords who had come down in the lineage of Mahasammata" through Vijaya and the other illustrious rulers of Lanka. Hence the potency of the Nayakkar connection when several pretenders appeared, obtaining wide support during the post - 1815 period.

The question can be raised as to why the conspirators of 1760 selected a Thai prince to replace Kirti Sri - the implication being that there was no concern about the ethnic factor. But this question does not take into account the fact that there was a group who sponsored the name of Pattiye Bandara. Here I must say that Gunawardana's argument that "the leaders of the plot could not decide on a Sinhala noble to replace the Nayakkar king" is sidetracking the issue. We are concerned here with what happened in history and not what should have happened. The group who sponsored the cause of Pattiye Bandara possibly thought that the *ksatriya* factor was less important than the ethnic factor.

This view did not prevail because of the nature of court politics at the time: Furthermore, it appears from the evidence available that the choice of the Siamese prince was no mere matter of convenience. There were certain calculations behind it. We are informed that the conspiracy to bring down the Siamese prince took some time to take shape.⁶⁸ There were consultations with the Siamese *bhikkhus*, who were living in Malvatte and other temples; letters were sent to Siam; and the Siamese prince came down disguised as a *bhikkhu* for the specific purpose of ascending the throne of Kandy.⁶⁹

The Siamese *bhikkhus* by this time had made a strong impact on Kandyan society. In the first mission to Sri Lanka in 1753 twenty five Siamese *bhikkhus* arrived, along with five lay envoys, and officiated in the re-establishment of the *upasampada*.⁷⁰ They are said to have established twenty five "consecrated" *sīma* (buildings necessary for Buddhist ecclesiastical rites) in various parts of the kingdom and they stayed in

68. According to Devaraja "the plot had been brewing for a considerable time, perhaps for several years", *op. cit.*, p. 110.

69. Devaraja, *op. cit.*, p. 110; D. A. Kotalawala "New Light on the Life of Sangaraja Weliwita Saranankara," *Vidyodaya Journal of Arts, Sciences and Letters*, Vol. I (1968) pp. 53-57.

70. Vacissara, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-8.

the island for some time, visiting places of worship such as Anuradhapura and Mahiyangana.⁷¹ It is said that during this period seven hundred Sinhala *bhikkhus* including Saranankara and Tibbotuvave, received the Higher Ordination and that three thousand Sinhala youth entered the Order.⁷² Three years later, twelve other senior *bhikkhus* and nine novices arrived from Siam. According to available information, only few of those who came here returned home. They stayed in various temples, teaching the Sinhala *bhikkhus* the doctrine, meditation techniques as well as the Siamese and Cambodian languages. Also the Sinhala *bhikkhus* learnt from these Siamese mentors the style of *pirith* recitation.⁷³ Thus the relations between the two groups became so close that, according to one Buddhist historian, they "appeared to belong to one and the same country".⁷⁴

The plot to do away with the "heretical Tamil" and place a Siamese prince on the throne of Kandy was hatched at this time. It was with the third mission that the aspirant to the throne arrived in the island disguised as a *bhikkhu*.⁷⁵ Not only did the Siamese prince have *ksatriya* qualifications, but he also belonged to a nation which had become so very close to the Sinhala *bhikkhus*. Furthermore, coming from a country far away, he did not have a horde of parasitic kinsmen as well as the unsavory memories associated with the South Indians.

In concluding my arguments for the possible existence of a Sinhala-Buddhist opinion working against the Nayakkar rulers, I wish to reiterate a point I made in my earlier paper. In looking for this ideological motivation, we have to put together the information available in different sources and place them in the context of a long-standing tradition of antipathy to the South Indians – all *demalu* in the Sinhala conceptualization. Then, the fact that some sections of the Kandyan *elite* were motivated by an ethno-religious ideology would seem very much plausible.

III

Finally, we come to Gunawardana's typification of modern Sinhala nationalism as a construct heavily indebted to some ideologies propounded by nineteenth century Europeans. He finds this, in particular, with regard to the assumption that the Sinhalese are "Aryans" who are "superior" to the Tamils – labeled as 'Dravidians'. He traces the earliest stage of this influence to the writings of the nineteenth century Sinhala scholar, James de Alwis (1823-78). Gunawardana argues that De Alwis, at first held a "hesitant" view about the origin of the Sinhala language, but became very much emphatic about "the Aryan connection" later on due to the influence of Max Muller's theories on the Aryans.

71. Vacissara, *op. cit.*, pp. 149.

72. Vacissara, *op. cit.*, pp. 150.

73. Vacissara, *op. cit.*, p. 152-3.

74. Vacissara, *op. cit.*, 153.

75. *Ibid* and Devaraja (1972) p, 110.

To illustrate this change Gunawardana first quotes from De Alwis's Introduction to the *Sidat Sangarāva* (written in 1851 and published in 1852). This is Gunawardana's quotation.

To trace therefore the Singhalese to one of the Northern family of languages, and to call it a dialect of Sanskrit is apparently far more difficult than to assign to it an origin common with the Telingu, Tamil, and Malayalam in the Southern family . . . the Singhalese appears to us either a kindred language of Sanskrit, or one of the tongues . . . which falls under the head of the Southern class. Yet upon the whole we incline to the opinion that it is the former. ⁷⁶

According to Gunawardana this is a "hesitant presentation" which "reveals that his views were not clearly formed at this time". Anyone reading De Alwis's Introduction carefully cannot help feeling that Gunawardana has reached this conclusion through a process of selecting some of De Alwis's phrases and omitting others which do not fit Gunawardana's arguments in his essay. The fact of the matter is that De Alwis was not at all "hesitant" in typifying Sinhala as an Indo-Aryan language in the work used by Gunawardana. Let me explain.

The extract quoted by Gunawardana is from p. xivi of De Alwis's Introduction. In earlier pages of the same work De Alwis goes into great detail in setting out his views on the origin of the Sinhala language, which Gunawardana omits in his paper. From p. xi to p. xxi there is a long discussion on the coming of Vijaya, on who the original inhabitants of the island were and what languages the two groups - that is to say Vijaya and his band, and the indigenes - spoke. De Alwis's conclusion is that Lanka was inhabited by people speaking Sinhala before the advent of Vijaya, and that Vijaya himself spoke Pali or Sanskrit. As for the origin of the Sinhala language he believes that "the original inhabitants of Ceylon had derived their language (now denominated the Singhalese) from the same source whence the Sanskrit and the Pali have been derived".⁷⁷ He ventures to suggest that Lanka was settled by the original speakers of Sinhala at the same time the first speakers of Sanskrit and Pali settled in India.⁷⁸ From p. xxii to p. xxvi he expands his views on the original Sinhala language and its later enrichment by accessions from Sanskrit and Pali after "the invasion of this island by the Sinha race", i.e. Vijaya and his followers.⁷⁹ From p. xxvi to the top of p. xxviii he argues at length in an effort to prove that the word *elu* is synonymous with the word "Singhalese". In the second paragraph of page xxviii he poses the question "Is it (Sinhala) a dialect of the Sanskrit?", and the next seven pages are devoted to demonstrating that the Sinhala language, instead of being "a dialect" of

76, Gunawardana, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29, quoting from the Introduction to James De Alwis's *The Sidat Sangarava: A Grammar of the Singhalese Language*, Colombo, The Govt. Printer (1852) p. xlvi.

77. De Alwis, *op. cit.*, p. xxi.

78. *op. cit.*, p. xxi.

79. *op. cit.*, p. xxvi.

Sanskrit,⁸⁰ was in cognate relationship with it. Many arguments based on structural features of the two languages are advanced by De Alwis to support his conclusion that Sinhala and Sanskrit "are both cognate languages, derived from one and the same source, which is, now perhaps, irrecoverably lost".⁸¹ On the following page he reiterates his conclusion that the two languages "had a common origin". The phrases quoted by Gunawardana appear on the page that comes after.

The summary of De Alwis's views given above would make it clear that if Gunawardana only read the early part of De Alwis's Introduction, he would not have used the adjective "hesitant" to describe De Alwis's portrayal of the kin connections of the Sinhala language.

It is only after arriving at definite conclusions about the origin of Sinhala, which were backed by strong philological arguments, that De Alwis proceeded to pay attention to another opinion about its origin. Meticulous scholar that he was, he did not want to "omit to consider whether the Singhalese falls under the category of the Southern class of languages"⁸² i.e. the Dravidian family. About that, he proceeded to state, "the Singhalese is unquestionably an Indian dialect; and looking merely to the geographical position of Ceylon it is but natural to conclude that the Singhalese owe their origin to the inhabitants of South India, and that their language belongs to the Southern family of languages". Next he writes the sentence, "To trace therefore the Singhalese . . . Southern family", cited by Gunawardana. Opening a new paragraph he proceeds, "But in view of all the arguments *pro* and *con* the Singhalese appears to us to be either a kindred language of the Sanscrit, or one of those tongues . . . which falls under the head of the southern class. Yet upon the whole, we incline to the opinion, that it is the former." Giving further reasons to support this view he concludes the paragraph with the following sentence: ". . . the similarity in the general framework of the two languages (i.e. Sinhala and Sanskrit) . . . and above all the resemblances which the prepositions and the numerous particles present . . . are so palpable and striking, that we are compelled to assign them a common origin".⁸³

It would now be clear that Gunawardana has either failed to read De Alwis's Introduction as carefully as he should have or that he was resorting to selective quotation of extracts that would support his own arguments, while ignoring others which contradicted these. And it also should be clear that Gunawardana's selectivism has led to a drastic distortion of De Alwis's views on the origin of the Sinhala language and its place in the Indian linguistic area.

De Alwis had two tasks at hand. One was to establish that Sinhala was an Indo-European language; and, the second, his special contribution, was to show that

80. By "dialect" he meant a linguistic medium derived from another, a "daughter" language. See De Alwis, *op. cit.*, p. xxxix.

81. De Alwis, *op. cit.*, p. xliii.

82. *op. cit.*, p. xiv.

83. *op. cit.*, p. xlvi.

Sinhala, in genetic terms, was a "sister" rather than a "daughter" of Sanskrit. In fact his belief was that the relationship between Sinhala and Sanskrit is similar to that between Sanskrit and the reputed classical languages of Europe, Greek and Latin, to which the great orientalist Sir William Jones had drawn attention.⁸⁴

Admittedly, De Alwis's views cannot be sustained on the basis of later findings on these complex themes. I have summarized his arguments solely for the purpose of reporting what he believed in 1851 about the origin of the Sinhala language.

What appears to be the most striking feature of De Alwis's views on the matter is the strong stand he took with regard to the relationship between Sinhala and Sanskrit. Indeed, he elevated the Sinhala language to a loftier position than any other scholar ventured to do in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.⁸⁵ Raising the status of Sinhala from that of a "daughter" to a "sister" of Sanskrit, a language with "a wonderful structure more perfect than Greek, more copious than Latin and more explicitly refined than either",⁸⁶ was undoubtedly a feat of intense language loyalty. De Alwis believed that his own language was not only closely related to but also was on par with the reputed classical languages of Europe and Asia - Greek, Latin, Pali and Sanskrit.⁸⁷

"The utter absence of all traces of the Singhalese in India", he argued, "prove it to be a very ancient one".⁸⁸ The crux of his argument was that the time in which it was in use in the mainland was too far off for it to have retained any traces in the present. In further support of his argument he adduced the fact of "the existence in it of many characteristics common to all primitive languages";⁸⁹ the term "primitive" here meaning "original" or "early in date of appearance". And, this imputation of hoary antiquity to Sinhala was again part of De Alwis's intense language loyalty.⁹⁰

The belief that the Sinhala language was so close to and on par with those reputed classical languages had other implications. If the original inhabitants of the island

84. *op. cit.*, p. xlv.

85. i.e. Not until Munīdasa Cumaratunga came out with his "Helese" ideology in the 1930's. See K. N. O. Dharmadasa "The Ideological Pinnacle of Sinhalese Language Nationalism: The Career of Munīdasa Cumaratunga". *Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, viii, 2 (1978) published in 1981, pp. 1-16

86. These are the famous words of Sir William Jones which De Alwis quotes on p. xlv.

87. cf. "It is extremely humiliating for the nationalist to know that his tongue is not regarded as an independent language, but as a dialect of some other . . . It is psychologically rewarding on the other hand, to know that one's language . . . is closely related to a greatly respected tongue of antiquity". K Symmons - Symmonolewicz, *Nationalist Movements: A Comparative View*, Meadville, Pa. (1970) p. 41.

88. De Alwis *op. cit.*, p. xlvii.

89. *op. cit.*, p. xlvii. Emphasis as in original.

90. See De Alwis *op. cit.*, p. xlviii. Also compare "It is psychologically rewarding . . . (for the nationalist) to know that his language has retained some very ancient characteristics." Symmons - Symmonolewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

used Sinhala as their language, before "the invasion" of the "Sinha conquerors",⁹¹ i.e. Vijaya and party, the language would have had a longer history than ascribed to it on the authority of the *Mahāvamsa*. Thus viewing language as an index to civilization,⁹² De Alwis wanted to see in the *Sīdat Sangarāva*, the ancient grammatical treatise he was translating, and the rules of grammar embodied in it, an insight into the greatness of Sinhala civilization.

Considering its (the Sinhala language's) antiquity, and the comprehensiveness of its rules, which present the rudiments of a correct and well defined Oriental language, bearing close resemblance to Sanskrit, Greek, Pali and Latin, we obtain indubitable evidence of the early greatness, and the civilization of the Singhalese.⁹³

Scientifically untenable though such beliefs may be, what is of interest for our purpose is recognizing the nationalistic sentiment which prompted De Alwis in 1851 to view the Sinhala language as hallowed by an immemorial tradition and connected with a glorious civilization. Sinhala consciousness had prompted a Sinhala ethnic, a Christian at that and not a Buddhist, to express those ideas five years before the appearance of Caldwell's *Comprehensive Grammar of the Dravidian or the South Indian family of languages* (Madras, 1856) and ten years before Max Muller published *The Science of Language* (London, 1861). These are the two works which Gunawardana thinks influenced De Alwis and later scholars, who emphasized the distinctiveness of Sinhala Aryans from the Tamil Dravidians.

It should now be clear that De Alwis's later writings, including "On the Origin of the Sinhalese Language" (1865/6), where Gunawardana sees the influence of Muller and Caldwell, were mere elaborating on a theme which had been first expressed much earlier and indeed in the Introduction to the *Sīdat Sangarāva*, where Gunawardana saw only "hesitation". Of course De Alwis may have been influenced by Muller's writings later on, and as Gunawardana points out, the emphasis on the racial aspect of the Aryan theory found in the paper of 1865/6 could have been due to that influence. Be that as it may, my contention is that it is wrong to impute De Alwis's language nationalism solely to European sources. His inspiration came mostly from his own cultural heritage.⁹⁴ To prevent any misunderstanding I should mention here that in the

91. De Alwis, *op. cit.*, p. xviii.

92. In this De Alwis was using a notion derived from European scholars. He quotes Macaulay's *History of England*, in this respect: "Rude societies have language, and often copious and energetic language; but they have no scientific grammar; no definitions of nouns and verbs, no names for declensions moods, tenses and voices". (De Alwis, *op. cit.*, cclxxxi.) Needless to say, such views are untenable in the light of modern linguistic scholarship.

93. De Alwis, *op. cit.*, cclxxx. Such a belief, apparently, is of immense value for the nationalistic self-image. Thus for example, the idea that Rumanian was related to the "esteemed" Romance languages, Latin and French, provided a strong stimulus to the Rumanian people who not only took pride in this "connection" but also were encouraged to seek closer ties with the French people. See Symmons-Symmonolewicz *op. cit.*

94. I have dealt with this in detail in a forthcoming paper.

religio-cultural revival during the last decades of the nineteenth century there was a very obvious inspiration from western sources, particularly in moulding what was called the "Arya-Sinhala" identity. Gunawardana has cited several instances in this connection and I too have recognised that development in an earlier study.⁹⁵ No doubt these ideas gained wide currency in the years that followed and the Sinhala identity today is heavily influenced by the concepts thus elaborated. The question at hand is not that. It concerns the work of James De Alwis. As I have clearly demonstrated above, Gunawardana has both misunderstood and misinterpreted De Alwis's views in his attempt to construct the central theme of his paper "The People of the Lion: The Sinhala Identity and Ideology in History and Historiography".

In the final paragraph of his paper Gunawardana deplores the damage that ideology has inflicted on recent researches on the humanities and social sciences in Sri Lanka. He is critical of his fellow historians too in this regard. Let me quote the last sentence of his paper. It reads as follow: "The ability of these disciplines to grow out of the deformations derived from the impact of racialism and communalism would depend on the extent to which those engaged in research and teaching recognize the social function of their disciplines, and develop an awareness of the ideological underpinnings of research and other academic work". These are indeed laudable sentiments. No doubt he has made a great effort to live up to these in his essay. But he has failed to live up to other ideals of scholarship. As reiterated, he has been very selective in his choice of evidence, and he has ignored large masses of evidence if they did not suit his argument. The result is that he has merely scratched the surface of this very important subject in his essay. It now needs one or a few more exacting scholars to give us a more objective study of the emergence of the ethnic identity of the People of the Lion.

I wish to conclude this study with one of my own observations. The phenomenon we have discussed - the vision of the Sinhala identity embodied in the *Dīpavamsa* and in the *Mahāvamsa* and the commentary of the latter, the *Vamsathappakāsini*, the political activities in the cause of Sinhala ethnicity by some sections of the Kandyan *elite*, the strivings of James De Alwis with the Sinhala language as a nationalist focus - can be considered as periodic expressions of a continuous ideological tradition. Certain salient themes in it can be easily recognized, the most prominent being the Sinhala-dvipa concept. As could be expected of any ideologically motivated behaviour, the activities we examined were confined to an *elite* who at every stage were drawing inspiration from ideologues of yester-years.

95. Gunawardana, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32; K. N. O. Dharmadasa, *The Rise of Sinhala Language Nationalism: A Study in the Sociology of Language*, Monash University Ph.D. dissertation (unpublished) 1979, pp. 210-225.