GAJABAHU AND THE GAJABAHU SYNCHRONISM

An inquiry into the relationship between myth and history

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It is a well known fact that ancient literary works and chronicles are full of material of a patently mythological character. Sometimes it is easy to distinguish the mythical from the historical, but at other times this becomes extremely difficult, particularly if the events mentioned have some kind of historical core or base. Matters become even more complicated when the mythic events or personages mentioned in ancient literature, (and sometimes the literature itself), are closely involved with regional or national patriotism so that scholars are tempted to reify myth as history in order to prove a point of national honour, or enhance the glory of the past. In Ceylon, fortunately for us, in addition to the traditions recorded in the chronicles, there exists a rich tradition of myth and ritual sung or performed in well known religious ceremonies. It is therefore possible to control the data found in the literary works with that of myth, so as to throw some light regarding the historicity or the mythical nature of the events or personages mentioned in these sources. In this paper we will be mostly concerned with one such personage — Gajabahu — an important Sinhalese King appearing in historical chronicles and literary works as well as in the contemporary Sinhalese ritual tradition.

My interest in Gajabahu emerged from my research on the Pattini Cult. The rituals associated with the goddess Pattini are performed in the Sinhalese low country in a large scale ceremony known as the *gammaḍuva* ("village hall"). There are also *devāles* for this goddess in almost every part of the country, and during annual *devāle* celebrations, myths of the goddess are sung, and

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rituals are performed in her honour. One such ritual is the famous "water-cutting ritual," which, according to myth, commemorates the cleaving of the ocean by Gajabahu. This episode is recounted in the *Gajabā Katāva* ("the story of Gajabahu"), one of the ritual texts sung in the Pattini rituals of the *gammaḍuva.*

In the course of my research, I realized that an analysis of Gajabahu, from a non-historical and anthropological point of view, may help us to clear some of the ambiguities and contradictions that centre on this figure, both regarding his role in Sinhalese culture and history, and also in relation to the Tamil Sangam Epic, the *Silappadikāram.* The problem as far as the *Silappadikāram* is concerned pertains to what is known as the "Gajabahu synchronism" i. e. the attempt to date the *Silappadikāram* on the basis of references to Gajabahu (Kayavāgu) of Ceylon found in that work. The Gajabahu synchronism relates to the reference in the *Silappadikārm* that Gajabahu (Kayavāgu) was present at the consecration ceremony of the Pattini temple inaugurated under the patronage of Senguttuvan. Since Gajabahu lived in the late second century, according to the *Mahāvaṃsa*, the "Gajabahu synchronism" has been of crucial importance for South Indian historical and literary chronology. Most scholars, of every persuasion, with a few exceptions, are inclined to accept the Gajabahu synchronism. Scholars of the more patriotic persuasion (for example, Dikshitar), admit it *in toto* i. e. they are convinced that King Gajabahu of Ceylon was not only present at Senguttuvan's capital for the ceremony, but also, that he introduced the Pattini Cult to Ceylon as the commentator's addendum in the *Silappadikāram* states. Several scholars of the tough minded sort accept it with reservations. They are impressed by the fact that the *Silappadikāram* refers to both Gajabahu and Senguttuvan as contemporaries. Though the *Silappadikāram* was written much later, they believe that the reference to the two kings was based on a valid historical tradition.

The importance of the Gajabahu synchronism for South Indian chronology could be illustrated by a few representative quotations from leading scholars.

(a) "This allusion to the King of Ceylon enables us to fix the date of Imaya Varman . . ."[1]

[1] V. Kanakasabhai, *The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago*, second edition, (Tirunelveli, 1954).

(b) "The synchronism of Senguttuvan with Gajabahu I of Ceylon is the sheet anchor of the chronology of early Tamil literature."[1]

(c) Dikshitar after reviewing the "evidence" confidently affirms: "Thus the Gajabahu synchronism is explained and the date of the composition of the *Silappadikāram* settled once and for all."[2]

(d) Kamil Zvelebil, the famous Czech scholar of Tamil says that "the majority of historians agree with the so-called Gajabahu synchronism, that is the conception according to which the Ceylonese King Gajabahu I (171-193 A.D.) was a contemporary of the Cera monarch, Senguttuvan."[3]

(e) Nilakanta Sastri says that "it is not unlikely that the legend preserved the memory of a historically correct synchronism".[4] Paranavitana also gives assent to this view.[5]

In the following pages we shall demonstrate that the Gajabahu synchronism is worthless for purposes of historical chronology, since the Gajabahu of the *Silappadikāram* is a mythical, not a historical personage. This consideration will also take us to an analysis of the Gajabahu myth.

The Gajabahu Synchronism

In the *Silappadikāram* proper the reference to Gajabahu of Ceylon is as follows:

"The monarch of the world circumambulated the shrine thrice and stood offering his respects. In front of him the Arya Kings released from prison, kings removed from the central jail, the Kongu ruler of Kudagu, the King of Malva and Kayavāgu (Gajabahu), the King of sea-girt Ceylon, prayed reverentially to the deity thus: 'Please grace our countries just as you have done this auspicious day, a fete-day at Imayavaramban's sacrifice.' Then a voice from the welkin issued forth: 'I have granted the boon' ".[6]

[1] S. Natesan, "The Sangam Age in Tamilnad", *History of Ceylon*, Vol. I, C. H. Ray, Editor-in-chief. (Colombo: University of Ceylon Press, 1959) 206-207.

[2] V. R. R. Dikshitar, *Silappadikāram*, (Oxford, 1939).

[3] Kamil Zvelebil, "Tamil Poetry Two Thousand Years Ago", *Tamil Culture*, (1963) X, 19-30.

[4] K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *History of South India*, second edition, (Oxford, 1958) 112.

[5] S Paranavitana, "Lambakanna Dynasty: Vasabha to Mahasena", *History of Ceylon*, Vol. I, 179-191.

[6] Dikshitar, *Silappadikāram*, 342-343.

Scholars like Vaiyapuri Pillai have noted that this account merely mentions that Gajabahu was present at the ceremony. The reference to his having introduced the Pattini Cult to Ceylon occurs in *Uraiperukatturai*, which was added to the *padikam* by an early editor.[1] This account actually seems to contradict the former. It states that famine devastated the Pandyan Kingdom after Pattini destroyed Madura so that the successor to the late King "propitiated the Lady of Chastity by sacrificing a thousand goldsmiths, and celebrated a festival when there was a downpour causing fertility to the land. . . . On hearing this Gajabahu of Ceylon encircled by sea, built a shrine for the Lady of Chastity where daily sacrifices were performed. Thinking that she would remove this distress (of his land), he also instituted annual festivals commencing with the month of Adi; then the rains came to stay and increased the fertility of the land so as to produce unfailing crops. . . . "[2]

Thus this part of the story merely states that Gajabahu introduced and instituted the Pattini Cult in Ceylon. These contradictions, in combination with other reasons, have led Vaiyapuri Pillai to deny the validity of the Gajabahu synchronism, as well as the account of his presence in the court of Senguttuvan. He considers these later interpolations.[3] While agreeing with Vaiyapuri Pillai let us submit the Gajabahu episode to a further scrutiny employing an anthropological analysis of the episode.

The arguments advanced by the more dogmatic scholars are briefly as follows: Gajabahu of Ceylon is mentioned in the *Silappadikāram*; there were two Gajabahus mentioned in Ceylon chronicles, one in the 2nd and the other in the 12th century; the twelfth century is palpably too late a date; ergo Gajabahu of the *Silappadikāram* is Gajabahu I who reigned in the second century. That things are much more complicated is apparent from a critical examination of the Ceylonese chronicles. The earliest reference to Gajabahu I appears in the *Dīpavaṃsa* compiled by Ceylonese monks about the middle of the fourth century. There is a brief, succinct account which states that Gajabahu was the son of Vankanasikatissa. "Tissa's son Gajabahukagamini caused a great thūpa to be built in the delightful Abhayarama. This royal chief constructed a pond called Gamini, according to the wish of the mother; this

[1] Ibid., p. 6.
[2] Ibid., p.6.
[3] S. Vaiyapuri Pillai, *History of Tamil Language and Literature*, (Madras: New Century Book House, 1956) 144.

lord ordered the ārāma called Rammaka to be built. He ruled twenty two years over the Island,"[1] The *Mahāvaṃsa*, compiled in the 5th century is only slightly more detailed. Several references to pious deeds omitted in the earlier account are included here.[2] There are no references here to the Pattini Cult, or to Gajabahu's visit to South India. These references are found in *Rājaratnākara*, a sixteenth century work and the *Rājāvaliya* written probably in the seventeenth century. Both these are written in Sinhalese as against the Pali of the early chronicles. The latter text mentions that Gajabahu did go to South India and brought back Buddha relics and the anklets of the Goddess Pattini. Before we consider these latter accounts let us examine the implications of the *Dīpavaṃsa* and *Mahāvaṃsa* accounts of Gajabahu.

The *Dīpavaṃsa* and *Mahāvaṃsa* composed as they are in the fourth and fifth centuries are close to the events of Gajabahu I's reign. Moreover, the compilers of the two chronicles used pre-existent accounts kept by monks in Buddhist temples. It is therefore surprising that Gajabahu's visit to India finds no reference here. Some writers (Dikshitar, Gulasekeram) argue that the lack of reference to this incident is due to Buddhist compilers who did not wish to be associated with a non-Buddhist cult like that of Pattini. This argument seems to me highly improbable for both chronicles are replete with references to so-called "non-Buddhist" practices and beliefs. Actually, according to popular Sinhalese tradition, Pattini is not a Hindu but a Buddhist deity and an aspirant to future Buddhahood. Morever, according to Sinhalese tradition, as embodied in the later accounts, Gajabahu also brought back with him Buddha relics. It is even more surprising therefore that no reference was made to Gajabahu's visit in the early accounts. Hence we shall draw certain *tentative* generalizations, which will be spelled out in detail later.

(a) The *Mahāvaṃsa* and *Dīpavaṃsa* make no reference to Gajabahu's visit to South India, because Gajabahu I of the chronicles made no such visit.

(b) The likelihood is that the Pattini Cult was not prevalent in Ceylon at the time of the composition of these chronicles. Nowhere in them is there a reference to the Goddess Pattini. Since the

[1] B. C. Law (Ed.), *Dīpavaṃsa*, *The Ceylon Historical Journal*, (Colombo, 1958) Vol. 7.
[2] Wilhelm Geiger (trans.), *Mahāvaṃsa*, (Colombo: Government Printer, 1911) 254-255.

later Sinhalese chronicles do mention Pattini one could tentatively conclude that the cult was introduced to Ceylon some time after the 5th century but before the 16th.

These conclusions will be spelled out in more detail in the analysis of the later Sinhalese accounts.

Let us now consider the sixteenth and seventeenth century Sinhalese accounts of the Gajabahu episode. The Sinhalese accounts in the two chronicles are basically the same, but since the *Rājāvaliya* is the more detailed one let us consider it.

"Gajaba, son of king Bapa Vannassi, succeeded to the throne. One night, when walking in the city, he heard a widow weeping because the king of Soli had carried away her children. He said within himself, 'Some wrong has been done in this city' and having marked the door of her house with chalk, returned to his palace. In the morning he called his ministers and inquired of them what (they knew of any) acts of justice or injustice in the city. Thereupon they replied, 'O great king, it is like a wedding house.' The king, being wroth with his ministers, sent for the woman, the door of whose house he had marked with chalk, and asked her (why she wept). The poor woman replied, 'I wept because among the 12,000 persons taken captive by the Soli king were my two sons.' On hearing these words the king expressed anger against his royal father, and, saying 'I will go tomorrow to the Soli country,' assembled an army and went to Yapapatuna, thinking 'I will (myself) bring back the people forcibly carried off by the king of Soli,' and having declared it openly, he dismissed the army. Taking the giant Nila with him he went and struck the sea with an iron mace, divided the waters in twain, and going quietly on arrival at the Soli capital, struck terror into the king of Soli, and seated himself on the throne like king Sak; whilst the giant Nila seized the elephants in the city and killed them by striking one against another.

The ministers informed the king of Soli of the devastation of the city thus being made. Thereupon he inquired of Gajaba, 'Is the Sinhalese host come to destroy this city?'. Gajaba replied, 'I have a little boy who accompanied me; there is no army', and caused the giant Nila to be brought and made to stand by his side. Thereupon the king of Soli asked 'Why has your Majesty come alone without an army?' Gajaba replied, 'I have come in order to take back the 12,000 persons whom your royal

father brought here as prisoners in the time of my father.' To this the king of Soli saying, 'A king of our family it was who, in time past, went to the city of the gods and gained victory in the war with the Asuras,' refused to send for and deliver the men. Then Gajaba grew wroth and said, "Forthwith restore my 12,000 people, giving 12,000 more besides them; else will I destroy this city and reduce it to ashes.' Having said this, he squeezed out water from sand and showed it; squeezed water from his iron mace and showed that. Having in this way intimidated the king of Soli he received the original number supplemented by an equal number of men, as interest, making 24,000 persons in all. He also took away the jewelled anklets of goddess Pattini and the insignia of the gods of the four devalas', and also the bowl-relic which had been carried off in the time of king Valagamba; and admonishing the king not to act thus in future, departed.

On his arrival he landed the captives; sent each captive who owned ancestral property to his inherited estate, and caused the supernumerary captives to be distributed over and to settle in these countries, viz., Alutkuruwa, Sarasiya pattuwa, Yatinuwara, Udunuwara, Tumpane, Hewaheta, Pansiya pattuwa, Egoda Tiha, and Megoda Tiha. This king reigned 24 years, and went to the world of the gods."[1]

On reading this version the reader will note that it agrees with the *Silappadikāram* only in one respect — that Gajabahu visited South India and was associated with the Pattini Cult. It contradicts or omits details in the *Silappadikāram.* In the *Rājāvaliya* the reference is to Gajabahu having visited Cola (Soli), not Cera where Senguttuvan reigned. It is unlikely that he ever went to Cera (assuming for argument's sake that this account has some historicity) for he brought back the anklets of the Goddess Pattini *from Cola.* If this is correct the Pattini Cult must have been already fully institutionalized in Cola in the second century. Thus the *Silappadikāram* account which says that it was *started* in Cera by Senguttuvan is, according to the Sinhalese accounts, wrong. Gajabahu is presented in a role subservient to Senguttuvan in the *Silappadikāram.* In the *Rājaratnākara* and the *Rājāvaliya* he is presented as a grandiose hero. He brings back the insignia of the Gods of the four *devāles*, the bowl relic of the Buddha and 12,000 Tamil prisoners. There is no reference to his having introduced

[1] B. Gunasekara (trans.), *The Rājāvaliya*, (Colombo: Government Printer, 1911) 47-48.

the Pattini Cult to Ceylon. On the contrary the assumption in these two accounts is that the Pattini Cult was already in existence in Ceylon, hence the importance of bringing back with him the anklets of that deity. Moreover, we shall show presently, that Sinhalese sources state clearly elsewhere that Gajabahu did *not* introduce the cult. We will therefore have to dismiss the preposterous claims of some scholars who, like Natesan, say that 'the introduction of the Pattini Cult to Ceylon by Gajabahu I is confirmed by the *Rājāvaliya*, the Ceylon chronicle."[1]

Even a cursory glance at the Gajabahu story suggests that the account has no historical veracity. The highly improbable ignorance of the King regarding the fact that 12,000 prisoners were taken captive in his father's reign till reminded of this by an old widow, the cleaving of the ocean in two and other miraculous events show that this is hardly historical, though it may be based on some historical event whose nature we are in no position to infer. The account, however, is almost in point-by-point agreement with the Gajabahu myth sung in watercutting rituals. The inference is irresistible: the Gajabahu story is not a historical episode at all, but a mythical one associated with watercutting (and probably other customs) and incorporated into the two Sinhalese chronicles. Thus the reason why the earlier *Mahāvaṃsa* account does not mention the episode is that it simply did not take place historically. This is not only true of the Gajabahu episode but of others as well. Another famous origin myth—that of the *pūna yāgaya* (ritual of the *pūna* pot) as well as the Kandyan *kohomba kankāriya* — deals with the illness of King Panduvasudeva, Vijaya's nephew. The *Mahāvaṃsa* is singularly silent about this episode, whereas the *Rājāvaliya* restates almost *in toto* the mythic version of the episode. Once again the conclusion is that the myth evolved after the 5th century but before the 16th and is based on ritual data. But for some scholars these seem incontrovertible historical facts. The Professor of History of the University of Madras writing on South Indian colonization in Ceylon asserts: "One of the early references to such settlements is heard of in connection with the reign of Panduvasudeva. It is said that for the purpose of curing the illness of the King, certain Brahmins were brought from South India and they were settled in the capital."[2]

[1] Natesan, "The Sangam Age in Tamilnad", *History of Ceylon*, Vol. I, 212.
[2] K. K. Pillay, *South India and Ceylon*, (Madras: University of Madras Press, 1963) 136.

To sum up what we have said so far. The Gajabahu episode in the *Rājāvaliya* and *Rājaratnākara* is probably derived from the origin myth of the water-cutting ceremony or from similar myths and has nothing to do with the historical Gajabahu of the *Mahāvaṃsa* who lived in the 2nd century. The myth, which associates Gajabahu with the Pattini Cult in a manner opposed to the *Silappadikāram* account, evolved after the 5th century A. D. The *ritual* of water-cutting is probably older than the *myth* of origin. For example, even in Ceylon water-cutting is also associated with festivities involving Skanda (Kataragama), Ganesh and Siva; here different myths of origin are involved. The probability is that the Gajabahu episode was used to explain the origin of water-cutting after the Pattini Cult became the dominant fertility cult in Sinhalese Ceylon. The Gajabahu story itself may have been current before then i. e. before the Pattini Cult became dominant. Indeed Gajabahu is a typical Sinhalese culture hero figure who like Vijaya, Panduvasudeva, and Malala Rajjuruvo of the Sinhalese ritual tradition was the 'originator' of various ritual and religious customs and institutions of the Sinhalese. If there was any historicity in these figures they have been completely transformed in the myth making process. Further analysis of the Gajabahu episode as depicted in the two Sinhalese chronicles and in our myths will make this process of mythicization clearer.

An important difference exists between the *Rājāvaliya* account and the myth of Gajabahu of the water-cutting ritual. The *Rājāvaliya* states that the 12,000 captives brought to Ceylon by Gajabahu were settled in the following regions: Alutkuruva, Sarasiya Pattuva, Yatinuvara, Udunuvara, Tumpane, Hevahata, Pansiya Pattuva, Egoda Tiha, Megoda Tiha. The water cutting ritual ignores this detail. A historical literalism in the analysis of the episode would mean that Gajabahu I who lived in the 2nd century waged a war in the Cola country-brought back many prisoners, and settled most of them in certain parts of the Sinhalese hill country. By contrast the Cola King who lived in Gajabahu's father's reign put his Sinhalese captives to work in damming the Kaveri, a useful irrigation enterprise. It was singularly foolish of Gajabahu not to have used this human labour for similar construction purposes, for the hill country and the coastal regions where his captives were settled were, in the second century, a remote, inaccessible and inhospitable region, "a home of rebels and lost causes."[1] An anthropological analysis,

[1] G. C. Mendis. The quotation is from Dr. Mendis (personal communication).

treating this episode as a myth, yields a different set of conclusions. This version of the Gajabahu story is what I call a "colonization myth" functionally similar to the Moses myth of the Bible. As an origin myth it explains the existence of South Indian settlers in parts of Kandyan Provinces and coastal regions. These settlers may have come for various reasons—through waves of conquest, peaceful immigration, or 'introduced' by the Sinhalese kings themselves. The myth like other myths of this genre, is an explanation of the existence of these groups probably justifying their "anomalous status", to use Malinowski's words,in the Sinhalese social structure. Even now there are communities of low subcastes of the Goigama (farmer) caste in the Kandyan areas (e. g. near Ampitiya I have come across one such village) who claim their origin from this source. Their position is slightly inferior to the majority of *Goigama* castes: their inferiority as well as their origin, are explained in terms of the identical myth. The myth served as a useful mechanism for incorporating immigrant populations into the Sinhalese social structure till recent times. In the Sinhalese low country there are castes of Karava, Salagama and Demala Gattara (lit. Tamil *gotra*) who claim to have descended from those captives thus providing a mythical charter, in Malinowski's sense, for these groups.[1]

The earliest reference to 'Gajabahu's colonization is in the 16th century *Rājaratnākara*, which only states that the captives were settled in Alut Kuruva, near Negombo. A *kaḍaimpota* (an account of geographical boundaries), quoted by Bell, has another account of Gajabahu's colonization of Alut Kuruva.

"In olden times, after the Rawana War, from Kuru Rata there came to this Island a queen, a royal prince, a rich nobleman, and a learned prime minister, with their retinue, and by order of King Rama dwelt in a place called on that account Kuru Rata. In the year of our great Lord Gautama Buddha, Gajabahu who came from Kuru Rata, settled people in the (second Kuru Rata), calling it Parana-Kuru-Rata. In another place he sent 1,000 persons, and gave it to them calling it Alut Kuruwa."[2]

Alut Kuruwa is today populated by the Karava or Fisher caste, who in their myths trace their ancestry to the Kauravas (Kuru)

[1] B. Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion*, (New York: Doubleday, 1955) 101.
[2] C. H. P. Bell, *Report on the Kegalle District* (Colombo: Government Printer, 1904) 2.

of the Mahābhārata war. The major waves of Karava immigration to Ceylon occurred in the 15th century and after.[1] The Gajabahu myth, in its *Rājaratnākara* version, probably explains and justifies the existence of these and similar South Indian groups. The *Kaḍaimpota* version has actually converted Gajabahu to a Karava hero, whose home was not Ceylon but India. Furthermore he is a contemporary of the Buddha. No further eviednce is required to illustrate the mythic character of Gajabahu.

The viability of the Gajabahu myth as a mythical charter for incorporating immigrant groups into the Sinhalese social structure continued till recent times. The Demala Gattara caste of the Sinhalese low country who were recent immigrants to Ceylon also trace their ancestry to Gajabahu's captives. The Salagama (*Hāli, Caliya* originally weavers, later cinnamon peelers) who were earlier immigrants also have similar myths. The Portuguese historian of Ceylon, Father de Queyroz writing in the seventeenth century about the exploits of the Sinhalese says: ". . .and once they captured 12,000 foreigners with whom they peopled the country of Dolosdaz-Corla and from these, they say, are descended the Chaleaz who are obliged to get the cinnamon."[2] Dolos-das-Korale is in the Matara District where once again there are groups of the Salagama caste.

Thus the Gajabahu myth has been a continually viable one, justifying and explaining the existence of South Indian settlers in Ceylon. But at what period did this version of the myth arise? Two references in the Sinhalese chronicles give us important clues. Firstly, the areas where the captives were settled were in the Kandyan region and the coastal areas. These regions came into prominence in the 14th century and after, particularly with the founding of the Gampola Kingdom. The movement to the Kandyan areas was consequent to disastrous invasions by the Colas (10 century) and later of Magha (13th century), which ruined the magnificient civilizations of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa. It is most likely that *this version* of the colonization myth evolved after the 14th century. Moreover, these place names were hardly known in the 2nd century. Secondly, the *Rājāvaliya* version mentions that Gajabahu brought back with him the insignia of the gods of the Four Devales. The "Four Devales" refer to the

[1] M. D. Raghavan, *The Karava of Ceylon*, (Colombo: K. V. G. de Silva, 1961).
[2] Father Fernando de Queyroz, *The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, (Colombo: Government Printer, 1930) Book 1. 15.

temples for the four deities — Skandha (Kataragama), Pattini, Nata, Vishnu in Kandy. The "Four Devales" came into prominence in the reign of Kirti Sri Rajasinha in 1775 A. D. though it existed at the time the *Rājāvaliya* was composed i. e. the 17th century.[1] The *Mahāvaṃsa* and *Cūlavaṃsa* make no mention of the Four Devales. The probability is strong that the concept of the Four Devales also evolved after the 14th century in Kandyan times. We can therefore roughly place this version of the Gajabahu myth between the 14th and 17th centuries.

There is some further evidence which is of some importance. The *Rājaratnākara* written in the 16th century makes no mention of Gajabahu bringing back with him the anklets of Pattini or the insignia of the Four Gods. The rest of the episode however is recounted. The *Pūjāvaliya*, a thirteenth century Sinhalese text, has even less to say about Gajabahu:

> Waknaha Tissa's son Gajabahu "learning that during the reign of his royal father, people were sent from *Lanka* to work at *Kaveri*, sent for his ministers, and having made inquiries was highly displeased and took in his hand the iron mace made for him by his royal father. Accompanied by his warriors, with the iron mace in his right hand, to lift which fifty persons were required, circumambulating the sea from right to left, he struck it (with the mace); divided the waters in two by virtue of his meritorious deeds; went to the sea-coast of Soli without wetting his feet; displayed his power; took away twice as many persons as went to work at *Kaveri;* made a law that henceforth the inhabitants of *Lanka* shall not go to work at *Kaveri*; placed guards round the coast; issued a proclamation in *Lanka* by beat of tom-tom; celebrated his triumph; performed many meritorious deeds; reigned for twenty two years; and went to the divine world."[2]

The *Pūjāvaliya* account makes no mention of his association with the Pattini Cult, with the Four Devales or with settling down captives in specific places, or the number of captives involved. Moreover nowhere in the *Pūjāvaliya* or in any of the other literature of the 13th century, as far as I could gather, is there any reference to the Pattini Cult. The evolution of the myth, as it is found in the chronicles, could be presented in the following table.

[1] R. H. Aluwihare, *The Kandy Perahara*, second edition (Colombo: Gunasena, 1964)
[2] B. Gunasekara (trans.), *A Contribution to the History of Ceylon, Translated from "Pujavaliya"* (Colombo: Government Printer: 1895), 21-22.

	Cleaves Ocean	Brings captives	Settles them	Brings Buddha relics	Brings insignia of Four Devales	Brings anklets of Pattini	Builds specific tanks & temples
Dīpavaṃsa (4th century)	–	–	–	–	–	–	+
Mahāvaṃsa (5th century)	–	–	–	–	–	–	+
Pūjāvaliya (13th century)	+	+	–	–	–	–	–
Rājaratnākara (16th century)	+	+	+	+	–	–	–
Rājāvaliya (17th or 18th century)	+	+	+	+	+	+	–

Does this mean that the cult was not dominant enough to be recorded in the *Mahāvaṃsa* and *Dīpavaṃsa*? There are probably many important incidents that have occurred in Ceylon's history which find no mention in the *Mahāvaṃsa* or *Dīpavaṃsa*; thus the absence of reference in the *Mahāvaṃsa* to a certain historical event is no real proof of its non-occurrence. But note that these two early chronicles actually mention Gajabahu; the "miraculous" exploits of Gajabahu are however not mentioned though these chronicles are full of "miracle" particularly when it comes to religious matters. It is therefore reasonable to assume that these works which contain enough "miracle" would not hesitate to record grandiose events regarding heroic figures if these events were current information at periods in which they were written. There is then a remarkable evolution of the Gajabahu story from the matter-of-fact historic accounts in the *Dīpavāṃsa* and *Mahāvaṃsa* to the elaborate myth of the *Rājāvaliya*. The mythic elements are present in the 13th century *Pūjāvaliya*, and absent in the 5th century. In the latter three accounts factual references to the construction of buildings and tanks are omitted. During this period the Gajabahu of history has been transformed into the Gajabahu of myth. The *Pūjāvaliya* version commences the myth-making process by reference to the cleaving of the ocean and the bringing back of captives.

We noted that the contemporary water-cutting ritual celebrated the cleaving of the ocean by Gajabahu and that this origin myth or a similar one was incorporated into the *Rājāvaliya*, in all likelihood. It is now obvious that this myth is also included in the

earlier *Pūjāvaliya, but without any association with Pattini.* The conclusions we can derive are the following: (a) The water-cutting ritual is even today not only associated with Pattini but also with Kataragama, Siva and Ganesh. (b) In all probability it is a rite antecedent to the Pattini Cult. (c) In the Pattini Cult in Ceylon water-cutting is associated with Gajabahu, but the only substantive connection between the two myths in terms of their content is that Gajabahu brought back with him the anklets of the deity. (d) The *Pūjāvaliya* account makes no reference to these anklets or to Pattini. (e) It therefore looks as if the Gajabahu myth was the origin myth of water-cutting even before the Pattini cult was dominant in Ceylon, or that it was a myth independent of the Pattini Cult. As a matter of fact there is some internal evidence in the *Pūjāvaliya* account to suggest that even this reference has to do with a ritual. Note that in this account Gajabahu circumambulated from right to left before he split the ocean with his mace. Such circumambulation rites are performed as a prelude to any propitious ritual even today and it is conceivable that this episode also refers to a ritual. Incidentally, clockwise circumambulation (right to left movement) is viewed as propitious, and anti-clockwise circumambulation (left to right movement) is unpropitious, or inferior. Unhappily there is some controversy regarding the problem of Gajabahu's circumambulation of the ocean. The word for circumambulation is *pradakṣina*; whereas all recent editions of the *Pūjāvaliya* give the word as *dakṣinakoṭa. Dakṣina* could best be translated as gift or offering, and *dakṣinakoṭa* could read as "having made a gift or offering." However Gunasekara who translated this section of the *Pūjāvaliya* in 1895, also published the Sinhalese edition in 1893.[1] His version which is the result of the collation of several palm-leaf manuscripts has *pradakṣina-koṭa*, 'having circumambulated'. Scholars whom I consulted agreed with "dakṣinakoṭa" as the correct word; the reason they gave was that it was an impossible feat for Gajabahu to have circumambulated the ocean! My own view is that *pradakṣina-koṭa* ("circumambulated") is the correct interpretation, and *dakṣina-koṭa* is simply a result of a literal interpretation of this episode by editors. The final solution to this problem must await the collation of old palm leaf manuscripts of the *Pūjāvaliya.*

Thus we state on the basis of the preceding argument that the Gajabahu myth originated about the 13th century, and this myth

[1] B. Gunasekara (ed.) *Pūjāvaliyen uputāgannālada laṅkākatāva*, (Colombo: Government Printer, 1893), 21.

was not associated with the Pattini cult. It is probable that this lack of association between the "Gajabahu Cult" and the Pattini cult continued through to the 15th century for the *Rājaratnākara* also has no reference to Pattini. However according to this account Gajabahu brought back with him Buddha's almsbowl taken to South India in the time of Valagamba (29–17 B.C.). What is the mythic significance of this inclusion? According to the *Mahāvaṃsa* Tamil chiefs from South India captured the revered bowl relic and took it to India.[1] The *Cūlavaṃsa* which continues the *Mahāvaṃsa* narration states that in King Upatissa's reign (352–409 A. D.) the stone bowl was used by the king himself for a rainmaking ritual[2]. No reference to the bowl having been brought back is however given in the *Mahāvaṃsa*. A strange *lacuna*, and a not very comforting one for mass religiosity.

Yet, what about the *stone* bowl in Upatissa's reign? The *Mahāvamsa* in the early references does not mention that the bowl was of stone[3] and its unlikely that the Buddha used a bowl made out of this particular mineral. The conclusion is again irresistible. The bowl relic was, next to the tooth relic, the major object of mass adoration and also associated with Sovereignty. It was taken to South India and lost in Valagamba's reign. Yet mass religiosity cannot brook this loss, and a stone bowl was substituted. (This course of events, incidentally, is identical with that of the history of the tooth relic which suffered similar viccissitudes but always managed to get back to Ceylon). But there is a serious lacuna here for if the bowl relic was lost in the 2nd century B. C. and yet existed in the 5th century A. D. and thereafter, who recovered it and how? Gajabahu, of course. Thus by the 16th century when the *Rājaratnākara* was written Gajabahu the culture hero was credited with this great achievement. Thus this version of the Gajabahu myth accounts for the presence of the stone bowl in Ceylon.

In the *Rājāvaliya* account of the 18th or 19th century two more elements are added to the Gajabahu myth: Gajabahu brings back the insignia of the gods of the Four Devales and the anklets of the Goddess Pattini. What are the Four Devales, and who are its Gods? The Four Devales are the temples of the Four Gods

[1] Wilhelm Geiger (trans.) *Mahāvaṃsa*, (Colombo: Government Press, 1934) 232-233.

[2] Wilhelm Geiger (trans.) *Cūlavaṃsa*, (Colombo: Government Printer, 1953) 19.

[3] Geiger, *Mahāvaṃsa*, 117-137.

(*hatara deiyo*)—Nata, Vishnu, Pattini and Kataragama located near the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy. One of the four gods is Pattini; thus Gajabahu brings the insignia of Pattini (one of the Four Gods) and her anklets, *which are her insignia*! These contradictions which arise from a literalist interpretation of the episode are resolved if we approach it once again as a myth.

The Four Devales are typically associated with Kandyan Kingship, for victory in war and for success in secular undertakings. Though the Four Devales may have existed earlier, they came into prominence in the time of Kirti Sri Rajasinha (1747-1782 A. D.). Kirti Sri Rajasinha also inaugurated the procession or *perahara* of the Temple of the Tooth with the four *devales* participating in it.[1] One origin myth of the *perahara* (there are others) states that it was inaugurated to celebrate the victory of Gajabahu in Cola. Thus the significance of the insignia of the Four Gods is obvious : it is linked to the inauguration of the *perahara* by Gajabahu. What about the separate reference to Pattini's anklets? The likelihood is that by the time the *Rājāvaliya* was composed the Pattini Cult had come into prominence and the water-cutting ritual was associated with other rites performed during annual Pattini rituals, as it is done even today in the *gammaḍuva* rituals for Pattini. If so the Gajabahu myth of water-cutting had to be linked with Pattini. This was done through that final version of the myth which stated that Gajabahu brought back with him the anklets of the deity.

We are not yet done with the Gajabahu myth. Gajabahu we noted is the culture hero to whom are attributed several deeds of cultural significance for the Sinhalese. The earliest extant form of the myth is the 13th century. It was clearly absent in the fifth. The question is at what period between the 5th and 13th centuries could the myth have evolved? A psychological interpretation of the content of the myth may give us a clue. Gajabahu is the hero leading his people from captivity in the Tamil Kingdom. He is like Moses of the Bible; he cleaves the river with a rod and parts the seas. Gajabahu is accompanied by Nilamaha Yodaya, who appears as a demon Kalu Kumaraya in other Sinhalese myths.[2] He brings back 12,000

[1] Aluwihare, 2-3.

[2] Paul Wirz, *Exorcism and the Art of Healing in Ceylon,* (Leiden: Brill 1954) 34-39

Colas in addition to the 12,000 Sinhalese. The number is explained by Spellman in his essay on the ritual significance of the number twelve in Indian culture. Spellman also quotes a Jain myth, strikingly similar to the Gajabahu one, where an ascetic predicting a twelve year famine led 12,000 of his people to a more fruitful land.[1] Gajabahu is the great hero, performing miraculous deeds, vanquishing the detested Tamils. The tone and contents of the myth are highly "nativistic", though not millenarian. It seems a wish fulfilment than a reality, a boost for the self esteem of a group subject to serious vicissitudes of fortune. The mythic fantasy is, we suggest, the opposite of reality. The question that arises then is, what period between the 4th and 13th centuries was conducive to the formation of this myth? The intervening historical events provide the answer.

The low point in Sinhalese fortunes commenced in the late 10th century with systematic South Indian invasions, unlike the more sporadic incursions of the earlier periods. Ceylon was a principality of Cola till 1070 when the Sinhalese chieftain Kirti raised the standard of revolt successfully and assumed the Crown as Vijayabahu I (1059–1114 A. D.). After Vijayabahu there was a temporary resurgence of Sinhalese civilization culminating in the reign of Parakrama Bahu the Great. The old capital of Anuradhapura had to be moved to Polonaruva as a result of the Cola invasions, and under Parakrama Bahu I Sinhalese civilization reached new heights. But the respite was temporary. In 1214 Magha of Kalinga landed in Ceylon with a large army and wrought utter destruction. The *Cūlavaṃsa* gives a detailed account of the destruction caused by Magha. The *Pūjāvaliya* written soon after Magha's invasion also mentions the tragedy of the Sinhalese. Both accounts mention the number of Kerala troops as 24,000 a figure which we pointed out cannot be taken literally. The *Rājāvaliya* gives the number as 20,000 in its brief account of the conquest which is quoted below:

> As moral duties were not practised by the inhabitants of Lanka, and the guardian deities of Lanka regarded them not, their sins were visited upon them and unjust deeds became prevalent. The king of Kalinga landed on the island of Lanka with an army of 20,000 ablebodied men, fortified himself, took the city

[1] John W. Spellman, "The Symbolic Significance of the Number Twelve in Ancient India", *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXII, No. 1, (1962) 79-88.

> of Polonnaruwa, seized King Parakrama Pandi, plucked out his eyes, destroyed the religion and the people, and broke into Ruwanvali and the other dagabas. He caused the Tamils to take and destroy the shrines which resembled the embodied fame of many faithful kings, the pinnacles which were like their crowns, and the precious stones which were as their hearts, and the relics which were like their lives. He wrought confusion in castes by reducing to servitude people of high birth in Lanka, raising people of low birth and holding them in high esteem. He reduced to poverty people of rank; caused the people of Lanka to embrace a false faith; seized those who were observant of morals, and mutilated them, cutting off hands, feet etc., in order to ascertain where they had concealed their wealth; turned Lanka into a house on fire; settled Tamils in every village; and reigned 19 years in the commission of deeds of violence.[1]

While Magha was holding sway over the old capitals of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva, a Sinhalese Vijayabahu III established a Sinhalese Kingdom in Dambadeni (the Dambadeniya dynasty) to the south of the Old Kingdom. He was succeeded by Parakrama Bahu II, his son (1236–1271). His period was one of intense literary and cultural activity, though he also could not reunite the whole of Ceylon under his dominion. The *Pūjāvaliya*, which gives the first written account of the Gajabahu episode, was written during this period.

The socio-historical ethos of the time was conducive to the development of a nativistic myth. The late 10th and 11th centuries saw a serious decline in Sinhalese fortunes with the Cola conquest; there was a rapid rise to new heights of glory in the 12th century; and then in the early 13th it sank to the lowest yet in the history of the Island. If we are right that the fantasy in the myth is the opposite of the reality, the period of the depredations of Magha was probably the time when the myth evolved. We noted that while Magha was ruling in the old kingdom, Vijayabahu III established the Dambadeniya dynasty—the myth may have evolved in this region. If so the *Pūjāvaliya* written soon after merely committed to writing an existent myth.

When we compare the Gajabahu myth and the Magha account, we realize again that the former is a myth which is the opposite

[1] B. Gunasekara (trans. and ed.), *Rājāvaliya*, (Colombo: Government Printer, 1900) 61-62.

of the later 'reality'; Magha invades Ceylon with 24,000 (or 20,000) Kerala troops; Gajabahu brings back 24,000. Magha plunders and terrorizes the Sinhalese, killing their King; Gajabahu terrorizes the Colas; Magha populates Sinhalese villages with Tamil *conquerors*; Gajabahu does it with Tamil *captives*. Even more important than these polarities are the social psychological functions of the myth which are to boost the self esteem of the peoples whose 'morale' had sunk low in an era of troubles. We note that these heroic exploits are foisted on Gajabahu who as a result was transformed from a historical into a mythological figure. Unlike millenerian myths the heroic exploits mentioned are projected into a glorious past, rather than a paradisal future. Both types of myths however express a 'fantasy' which is contrasted with the current reality. If so the danger in a literalist interpretation of the myth is obvious. As a typical example of such a literalist interpretation we shall quote from one eminent scholar.

> "In the reign of the next king a small army of Colias invaded Ceylon and carried off much booty and a considerable number of prisoners. This insult was avenged by his son and successor, Gajabahu (the Elephant-armed), who invaded Tanjore with a large army. The king of Tanjore, intimidated by the sudden attack, acceded to all demands without a single act of hostility. It was the first expedition of the Sinhalese outside their island home, and their success brought about several important and interesting results. Twelve thousand Colian prisoners accompanied Gajabahu on his return home, and they were settled in various parts of the country, where they quite soon became part of the permanent population. Their descendants are scattered in many districts even at the present time, and their language has influenced Sinhalese speech in no small measure. A large number of Colian words found their way even into the literary dialect of the Sinhalese. The king of Cola also presented Gajabahu with the jewelled anklets of the Hindu goddess Pattini and the insignia of four Hindu deities, Vishnu, Kartikeya, Natha and Pattini. The cult of these gods and goddesses was thus introduced into the island; an extensive literature and folklore grew up around these names; special families dedicated themselves to their service, and observances and ceremonies connected with these deities continue to this day. A large

number of books dealing with the cult of Pattini are still available."[1]

What light does the preceding analysis of the Gajabahu myth throw on the *Silappadikāram* and the chronology of the early South Indian history? One thing is clear : in so far as the Gajabahu of the Pattini Cult is not the historic Gajabahu who lived in the 2nd century, the 'Gajabahu synchronism' has to be abandoned once and for all. Secondly, since the Gajabahu myth probably evolved in the period 10–13th century, a late date for the *Silappadikāram* is more in consonance with the Sinhalese evidence. However there are several problems yet unsolved, for even the most cautious Indian scholars place the *Silappadikāram* not later than the 9th century.

If so the Gajabahu reference, like Ilango Adigal's kinship with Senguttuvan, must be later interpolations, a characteristic feature of early literature. Some writers have used the independent references to Gajabahu in the *Silappadikāram* and the Sinhalese chronicles as proof of the historical authenticity of the protagonist (e. g. Gulasekeram). For the anthropologist this should prove no problem for myths have circulated in the Indo-European orbit from the earliest times. The Gajabahu myth evolved in Ceylon and probably diffused to South India, since channels of intercommunication between the two countries existed. When myths get diffused they may be adapted to the socio-historical context of the recipient nation. Hence we see the difference in attitude to Gajabahu in the two countries. In Ceylon Gajabahu, is the grandiose hero who saved his people from servitude: we noted that the nativism of the myth was conducive to the ethos of the 10–13th centuries, for this was a period where South Indian invasions were intensest. What about the ethos in South India (especially Cola and Kerala i. e. Cera) from where the invasions sprang? The reverse of the Ceylon situation must surely be true. This factor is given expression in the Indian adaptation of Gajabahu, for in the *Silappadikāram* Gajabahu is not the hero of Sinhalese myth. He is subservient to Senguttuvan who is the grandiose hero in the Tamil epic, also performing improbable adventures. Thus the two different adaptations of Gajabahu are a fascinating example of a mythic figure adapted to suit divergent socio-historic conditions in two neighbouring countries.

[1] G. P. Malalasekera, *The Pali Literature of Ceylon*, (Colombo: Gunasena, 1958) 50.

It also explains the different roles of Gajabahu in relation to the Pattini Cult. In the Indian version he introduces the cult to Ceylon under the patronage of the Cera King; in the Sinhalese version he terrorizes the Cola King and brings back the anklets of the deity, a religious object of great veneration. Looking at the Sinhalese versions *in toto* Gajabahu's action here is strictly analogous to his action in respect of the prisoners. The Cola King captures 12,000 Sinhalese prisoners. Gajababu brings them back and in addition 12,000 more South Indian prisoners. A Tamil (Damila) captures the bowl relic in Valagamba's reign; Gajabahu brings this back *and in addition* brings back the anklets of Pattini and the insignia of the Four Devales. There is method in the organization of the myth, but this cannot be elucidated by a literal examination of the myth.

The *Silappadikāram*, we noted, states that Gajabahu introduced the Pattini Cult to Ceylon under the patronage of the King of Cera, Senguttuvan. The Sinhalese Gajabahu myth does not agree with this. What do the Sinhalese *ritual* sources say about the Pattini Cult in Ceylon? The text of the *madu upata* sung in Pattini rituals, gives us the answer: the Pattini Cult was introduced by Seraman Raju, which literally means "King of Cera"! The term Seraman ("Ceraman") appears in the Sangam literature as a prefix for several South Indian rulers.[1] A literalist may now argue on the basis of this that the Pattini Cult was introduced by a King of Cera, probably Senguttuvan. But this is as far fetched as the Gajabahu hypothesis as far as we are concerned. Seraman Raju, like the Kings of Pandi and Soli, in other Sinhalese rituals, is also a mythical figure. Consider his case as described in the myths. He had a headache as a result of a frog, (who carried an enmity towards the King from a previous birth) having entered his nose. He came to Ceylon (for some inexplicable reason) and had a ritual performed. Divinities like Viswakarma, the divine architect, and Sakra, King of Gods, came to his aid. This event occurring in mythical times is a prototype of the present *gammaḍuva* ritual. Thus no historicity can be attributed to this myth. However while it is true to say that the action of the episode is set in mythic times, the myth like any other was composed in historical times. One plausible historical inference we may make from this myth is that the Pattini cult was introduced by Cera (Kerala) colonists

[1] Vaiyapuri Pillai, 95-66, 110-159

from Malaladesa (Malabar?). In Sinhalese ritual the words like Malaladesa, Pandi and Soli, refer to South Indian people generally rather than a specific geographic region in South India. Hence the only cautious inference one can make is that the cult of Pattini was introduced to Ceylon by South Indian colonists, probably during the systematic invasions of the period 10–13th centuries.

Gajabahu and Karikala

One of the fascinating problems that emerge in the study of the Gajabahu myth is the reference in the *Pūjāvaliya* and *Rājāvaliya* to Sinhala people taken captive by the Cola king in the reign of Gajabahu's father to work at the river Kaveri. It was these people that Gajabahu (like Moses) went to rescue. The name of the Cola king is not mentioned but the reference is clearly to the great Cola king, Karikala, who according to Nilakanta Sastri reigned around the 2nd century A. D. about the time of the historical Gajabahu's father. Post 8th century Telegu and Tamil literary and epigraphic accounts state that one of the achievements of Karikala was the enlargement of the river. What are we to make of this synchronism? Does it enhance the historicity of these events, or does it reflect an interrelated corpus of myth common to South India and Ceylon? An examination of Karikala, both as a historical and a mythical figure will help elucidate this problem.

We are fortunate that Nilakanta Sastri in his scholarly work on *Cola History and Administration* has sifted the literary and epigraphical evidence to disentangle the historical facts about Karikala from the mythical accretions which developed much later. In fact the development of the Karikala story follows almost the same pattern as that of Gajabahu—from the factual accounts of contemporary or near contemporary sources to the improbable and grandiose accounts of later works.[1] Nilakanta Sastri sums up some of the facts of Karikala's reign from the early literature as follows:

"He inherited the throne of Cola as a boy; illegitimate attempts were made by his relatives, for a time successfully, to keep him out of his birthright; by his own ingenuity and strength, and with the assistance of friends and partisans from outside, among whom may have been the maternal uncle Irumbidarthalai, Karikala after

[1] K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *Studies in Cola History and Administration*, (Madras, 1932).

some years of confinement in a prison, effected his escape from it and succeeded in making himself king. An early accident from fire which maimed him in the leg for life seems to be rather well attested and to furnish the true explanation for his name"[1]

From the 8th century the Karikala of history gradually becomes converted into the Karikala of myth in Telegu and Tamil accounts. He is credited with several achievements two of which are relevant for our purposes here, viz. his construction of the flood banks of the Kaveri, and his conflict with the three-eyed king variously known as Trinetra Pallava or Trilocana Pallava ("Three-eyed Pallava"). The 7th or 8th century Mālēpādu plates of Punyakumāra (Telegu) mention that Karikala was the worker of many wonders "like that of controlling the daughter of Kaveri, overflowing her banks"[2]. The 10th and 11th century records known as the Tiruvālangādu plates of Rajēndra I, and the Leyden grant repeat this story, while the Kanyākumāri stone inscription adds a very important detail in its reference to kings who worked as slaves for Karikala. "(Karikala) who was as bright as the sun and who curbed the pride of the insubordinate, controlled the Kāvēri—which, by its excessive floods, caused the earth to be deprived of its produce—by means of a bund formed of earth thrown in baskets carried in hand by (enemy) kings."[3]

In the *Kalingattupparani* further exploits of Karikala are narrated and a probable reference to his having wiped out the third eye of an enemy; this reference is clearly made in the Ulās of Oṭṭakkūttan of the 12th century: "The Cola Karikala who took the eye of him who did not come to raise the Kaveri banks which took the earth carried on the heads (of subordinate kings)."[4] The same poet in his poem on Kulōttunga II makes it clear it was a third eye of one Mukhari that was lost, in all probability by sorcery based on imitative magic: "...we know of the wiping out of one eye traced on the picture so that the inimical Mukhari lost one of his three eyes."[5] The 14th century work the *Navocōlacarita*, a Telegu rendering of a Kannada work, expands this and introduces two further elements—the construction of a tank and a war waged

[1] Ibid., 44.
[2] Ibid., 27.
[3] Ibid., 28.
[4] Ibid., 30-31.
[5] Ibid., 32.

against insubordinate kings. Karikala decides "that he should raise the banks on either side of the river and dig a tank and earn for himself the religious merit thereof. So he sent his *samastas* (subordinate chiefs) from the various parts of the realm and all of them came up, with the exception of Bhāskara-Cōla and Mukkanti Cōla and others who held themselves back on account of their noble birth and other like reasons. The king undertook a *daṇḍayātrā* (expedition) against them, conquered them, and took them captives and compelled them to work on the construction of the banks of the Kaveri until the task was completed."[1] Though this work does not mention the three-eyed king, Telegu epigraphy of the 14th century states that the person who lost the third eye was a Pallava king.

The reader should bear in mind the following features in the development of the Karikala myth.

(1) Karikala raises the banks of the Kaveri.

(2) Subordinate kings work like common labourers in the project. One account mentions the loads they carried on their heads.

(3) A three-eyed king—known as Mukari, or Trinetra Pallava, or Trilocana Pallava, defied Karikala who, probably through magic, wiped out the third eye of the former.

(4) The *Navacōlacarita* does not mention the three-eyed king; instead it refers to several subordinate kings who defied Karikala, and against whom Karikala waged successful war.

(5) The account also mentions the construction of a tank by Karikala, though it is by no means clear what relationship this has with the bunding of the Kaveri.

Let us now examine how these elements of the myth are related to the Gajabahu and other related myths of Ceylon.

The connection between the Gajabahu myth and that of Karikala is the reference in the *Pūjāvaliya* and the *Rājāvaliya* that Sinhala people were taken captive by the Cola king and put to work in the river Kaveri. The reference is clearly to the Karikala myth, though that myth in its South Indian forms, makes no mention of Sinhala captives.

[1] Ibib., 35-36.

The *Gajabā Katāva*, the Sinhalese ritual text mentioned earlier, explicitly states how the Sinhalese captives were forced to work in the Kaveri. The first part of the *Gajabā Katāva*, sometimes known as the *Ankoṭa Haṭana* ("The conflict of the short-horn") states that in the time of Gajabahu's father there lived a poor Sinhalese villager who owned a buffalo with a pair of short horns. This buffalo was forcibly used by other villagers for their ploughing. The owner complained to the king, but the king only heeded the counter-complaints of the other villagers and offered no redress to the owner of the short-horn buffalo. The latter therefore decided to go to Soli-rata (the country of Cola). The King of Soli is described thus in the following verse:

> The great King of Pandi possessing three eyes
> He (Soli) destroyed; he broke Pandi's might; he dammed the waters.
> "I have no other recourse but to seek his help",
> Thus he prepared to leave for the country of Soli.

Our Sinhalese exile ingratiated himself into Soli's confidence and persuaded the king to dam the waters of the Kaveri. The King of Soli sent messages to the rulers of the eighteen realms; they all came to work in the Kaveri. But try as they might the waters of the Kaveri river washed out the mud used for the construction. The exile now told the king that he would find the men to build the dam. With a large fleet and many soldiers he sailed for Ceylon and landed at Magama. He ordered the soldiers to capture Sinhalese villagers; they captured 12,000 Sinhalese all in one night and returned to Cola where they were employed as labourers in the Kaveri.

One could, I think, reasonably conjecture the manner in which the Gajabahu myth was linked up with Karikala. The Gajabahu myth in the form in which it is expressed in the *Pūjāvaliya* and *Rājāvaliya* is, we noted, a "colonization myth", providing a charter for the existence of South Indian peoples in Ceylon. According to the myth Gajabahu, like Moses, brings his people from captivity. How did the captivity theme appear in the myth? I think the answer is a simple one. Alien South Indian groups who were settled in Ceylon had in some ways to justify or legitimize their existence here. Thus a charter had to be provided for explaining the obvious fact that they were alien, and yet, at the same time show that they were *not* alien and really belonged to the country in which

they were naturalized. This is a problem for any immigrant group in a larger society. The theme of captivity provides a resolution to the problem of how immigrant groups could be alien and not alien at the same time, for the myth states that in fact they were originally Sinhalese settled in South India (Cola) after being dispossessed from their original home in Ceylon. Thus the myth provides a charter of legitimation for the immigrant group. The dominant Sinhalese among whom they were planted could however keep them as a group apart by activating the same myth, and stating that they were in fact aliens, Cola slaves captured by their great King Gajabahu. For, it should be noted that Gajabahu brought back with him two categories of people – the original Sinhalese captured by the Cola king in his father's reign, and an equal number of Colas as captives. The further question of how these original Sinhalese people were made captives is neatly resolved by linking the Gajabahu myth with the Karikala myth; for Karikala was preeminently the Gajabahu-type culture hero for South Indian peoples, performing improbable deeds, putting "captives" to work in the Kaveri. What Gajabahu is to Ceylon, Karikala is to South India. Indeed Karikala like Gajabahu is a kind of colonizer, for according to several versions of that myth, he was responsible for rebuilding the city of Kanchi and settling it with immigrants. It is therefore highly apposite that the Gajabahu and Karikala myths should be interlinked in this manner.

Karikala Lore in Sinhalese Ritual

The relation between the Gajabahu myth and that of Karikala does not exhaust the study of the Karikala traditions of Ceylon. There are two other Sinhalese mythical traditions, somewhat contradictory to the one described earlier, drawing upon the mythical lore contained in the South Indian Karikala traditions. These several accounts unmistakably suggest that the South Indian Karikala traditions were widespread even in Ceylon, and were adapted to the socio-economic conditions of the country into which they were diffused. We will deal firstly with Sinhalese myth and ritual which indirectly draw upon the Karikala lore of South India described by Nilakanta Sastri. The Sinhalese text that we will use is known as the *Pataha* ("tank") and is enacted dramatically in the *gammaḍuva* ceremony. Since I have analysed this ritual elsewhere, I will only present those aspects of the ritual which show their relationship to the Karikala myths.[1]

[1] G. Obeyesekere, "The Pataha Ritual: Genesis and Function," *Spolia Zeylanica* (Colombo: Government Press, 1965) Vol. 30, part II, 3–20.

The *Pataha* ritual is a dramatic enactment of the following myth. The King of Pandi is an evil, arrogant king, possessing three eyes one of which is located in the middle of his forehead. He had a most wonderful city built by the divine architect Visvakarma himself, resembling the city of the gods. The king, ruler of the eighteen realms was also a cruel tyrant. The songs state that —

No kind thought ever ripened in his mind,
His power however ripened from day to day.
His mind like a fearful demon's "ripened",
Like Warrior Ravana ripened his strength.

The King of Pandi feels that he should build a "tank", so that his city will resemble that of the god Sakra, who also had a large pond. He therefore ordered his ministers to build a tank for him. The king, however, in his arrogance ignored traditional custom—he started work on an inauspicious day and hour.

The work on the tank got started and people worked there like slaves. The king himself supervised the work:

Wearing robes worth a thousand gold pieces,
Brandishing his sword studded with a thousand gems
Like Ravana entering the field of battle
Comes the great Pandi king to the tank.
He grabs hold of idlers and beats out their brains.
He cuts their bodies and slaughters the lads . . . .

A wave of fear and discontent runs around the camp, and people complain thus:

O foolish king, in spite of his broad forehead
To please him we carry large baskets on our heads.
We suffer a thousand sorrows and misfortunes
Our heads are bald by carrying these baskets!

Now the king ordered the rulers of the eighteen realms to come and work in his tank. All came, except the King of Soli (Cola), and they were made to work like common labourers.

Even the kings who lived in the shade of goodness
Did'nt have a thing to eat the live-long day
They draw loads of earth and heap them on both sides
They suffer terribly like rounded-up cattle.

The King of Soli not only refused to come but insulted the King of Pandi's emissary by lopping off his nose and ear and feeding him with excrement. Yet in the ritual, Soli is presented as a just king, contrasted with the evil Pandi. Various stereotyped acts of justice attributed to many South Indian kings (including Elara of Ceylon) are also attributed to Soli. Soli's insult to Pandi aroused the latter's wrath. Pandi decided to wage war against Soli, and marched into the country of Soli with his army. Soli undeterred, blew his conch and his friend, the God Sakra who heard this, created a huge downpour that engulfed and destroyed Pandi's army. Pandi himself managed to escape back to Madura, where he cursed Soli. As a result of his curse the land of Soli was devastated by a drought, which brought in its wake pestilence and famine. Another myth, also enacted in the form of a ritual drama known as the *amba vidamana* ("shooting of the mango") describes how Sakra came down to earth and wiped out the third eye of Pandi, and ended the drought in the country of Soli.

It is obvious that the *Pataha* ritual practised by the Sinhalese draws on the same body of mythological lore from which the Karikala myths derive. The similarities are striking. There are references to the building of a tank (as in the *Navacōlacarita*), the employment of crowned kings and their suffering, and above all to the three-eyed king. Though some historians have tried to prove the historicity of these events, the Sinhalese data add greater cogency to Nilakanta Sastri's view that they are myths. Indeed it is also probable that these myths were originally enacted as ritual dramas, even in their South Indian home. The wiping out of the third eye of Mukhari (or Trinetra Pallava) strongly suggests a ritualistic act, analogous to the wiping out of the third eye of Pandi in Sinhalese ritual drama.

In the *Gajabā Katāva* the King of Cola constructs a dam; he destroys an enemy, the three-eyed king of Pandi (always presented as the embodiment of evil in Sinhalese myth). In the *Pataha* these two persons coalesce; the evil three-eyed King of Pandi (Trinetra Pallava of South Indian texts) builds a tank and he has a conflict with Soli, one of the rulers of the eighteen realms. All these myths derive from a common source. In the *Pataha* ritual they are adapted to serve different social ends, as I have demonstrated elsewhere.[1]

[1] Though it is not possible to date with accuracy when these myths diffused to Ceylon, it is nevertheless important that we can trace its origins in South

Sinhalese Myths of Karikala

In the preceding ritual Soli and Pandi are not historical figures but mythical beings acting out a grand conflict between good and evil. However there is another set of myths, related to the preceding one, in which the king of Soli is explicitly identified with Karikala. These myths are the following: *Kāveri Ganga Diya Helīma* ("the dropping of the waters of the Kaveri river"), *Karikāla Upata* ("the birth of Karikala"), *Ganga Bändīma* ("damming of the river"), *Diyakeli Katāva* ("story of the water sports"). All these, like the preceding myths we had described, are part of the cycle of myths associated with the Pattini Cult.

This set of Karikala myths takes off from the description of the drought in the Kingdom of Soli described in the *Pataha* ritual. *Kaveri Ganga Diya Helīma* describes how the gods had assembled in heaven to review the affairs of the world, and saw with concern the drought that ravaged the Kingdom of Soli. One god, Mā Muni ("the great sage"), decided to help Soli and went to the *anotatta vila*, the pond sacred to Sakra. However this pond was protected by a snake named Kali. When the sage asked permission from Kali for some water from this pond, the snake refused. Then the sage took the guise of a *gurulu* bird (the enemy of snakes), chased the cobra away, and collected some water from the pond, into a pot. The angry cobra complained to the gods, who decided to help the cobra. One of the gods took the form of a crow, and flew down to where the sage was bathing with the pot of water lying near him. The crow tried to open the lid of the pot and the sage who saw this clapped his hands to scare the crow away. The crow, frightened, spilled the water from the pot; this flowed out into the country of Soli and became the river Kāveri.

Karikāla Upata describes the birth of Karikala. A King of Soli went out hunting with his followers. They saw a pond in which there were fish. The king ordered the pond to be filled with mud (in order to kill the fish). This was done and all the

India from the 8-14 centuries It is likely that they also reached Ceylon during the systematic South Indian conquests of the 10-13 centuries. Since working on the Gajabahu myth I have revised some of my views on the *Pataha* ritual, specially regarding its antiquity However my general analysis of the Pataha ritual is unchanged. I believe that it is a ritual of protest by ordinary villagers against the utilization of forced services by Sinhalese kings to build public works like tanks. It is also likely that the Karikala myths of India served similar social functions.

fish died. As a result of this heinous sin, there occured a continuous shower of mud, which killed(?) the king and his followers and destroyed much of the realm. The queen who was pregnant however managed to escape and sought shelter with a Brahmin couple. The text describes the various stages of the pregnancy and the arrival of the time of delivery. The actual delivery had to be delayed because the time was astrologically dangerous. In order to delay the birth the legs of the queen were tied with a silk cloth and, at the astrologically propitious time, this cloth was untied. The text then goes to describe the growing up of the boy and an incident that led to his becoming king. The state elephant of Soli got intoxicated with alcohol and went on a rampage. The young prince brought the elephant under control and the elephant went down on its knees before him. The people who soon assembled there brought a seat which was placed on the back of the elephant and the prince sat on it. The mother of the prince then rubbed charcoal on his feet and he was led triumphantly into the city and was accepted as the King of Soli. Since he was smeared with charcoal he was named Karikala.

Ganga Bändīma describes the construction of the dam across the Kaveri by Karikala with the help of feudatory monarchs. Several attempts failed but at last they succeeded when they used *kumbal măṭi* ("potter's clay") and *tala tel* (sesame seed oil) for constructing the dam. *Diyakeli Katāva* describes the water sports held in order to celebrate the completion of the dam.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the evidence given above. Firstly, the Karikala myths of South India were also common to Ceylon and were associated with the corpus of the Pattini Cult. However the content of some of these myths seems to contradict the content of others. For example, according to the *Ankoṭa Haṭana*, Sinhalese captives were made to work on the Kaveri, whereas according to the *Ganga Bändīma* this was done by the feudatory monarchs of Karikala. Such contradictions are expectable when attempts are made to link up one body of mythology with another body of related myths. Secondly, the lore mentioned in South Indian Karikala myths (such as the blinding of the three-eyed king, and the king's use of feudatory monarchs to construct a tank) is found in a totally different context in Sinhalese myths, such as the *Pataha*. This suggests that the lore contained in the Karikala tradition was part of a larger mythological corpus common to both South India and Ceylon. Thirdly, the Sinhalese myths of Karikala draw much of their content from a body of lore in South India stretching

from about the period of the *Silappadikāram* to the 17th century. For example, the statement in the Sinhalese text that Karikala's birth was delayed by tying the legs of his mother with a silk cloth has its earliest echo in a 14th century annotation to the third century text *Pattupāṭṭu* which states that "Karikala's birth was delayed by unnatural means and that he was retained in his mother's womb until the auspicious moment came for him to be delivered".[1] The Sinhalese text *Diyakeli Katāva* seem to be derived from canto VI, II of the *Silappadikāram*. The earliest reference in South Indian literature to the elephant incident mentioned in the *Karikāla Upata* is found in a commentary to the sixth century text, *Palamoli*, and repeated in more detail in the *Sevvandippurānam*, a 17th century work.[2] This work also mentions the destruction of Uraiyur in a sandstorm, which is probably the "rain of mud" described in the *Karikāla Upata*. The Sinhalese evidence clearly indicates that the Karikala myths recorded in the later period of South Indian history did not constitute a disconnected series, but represented a viable continuing tradition.

The Gajabahu Myth in Social Action

In the preceding pages I have dealt with the following problems: the evolution of Gajabahu from a historical to a mythic figure; the lack of validity of the Gajabahu synchronism; the relationship between the two culture heros, Gajabahu and Karikala; and finally the link between Karikala myths and the Sinhalese text, the *Pataha*. In the course of the analysis I have discussed the functions of one version of the Gajabahu story as a colonization myth used to justify the existence of South Indian settlers, legitimize their presence and anomalous status and incorporate them into the larger Sinhalese society. Let me develop this theme further and illustrate how this myth is actually used by some contemporary social groups.

My first illustration is from the *Karava* fishermen of Negombo. There exist today bilingual fishermen in the area between Chilaw and Negombo, speaking both Sinhalese and Tamil. They are therefore groups who are "anomalous" in respect of the exclusively Sinhalese speaking fisherfolk, south of Negombo, and the exclusively Tamil speaking groups north of Chilaw. They are thus marginal groups sandwiched between two exclusive linguistic areas. South of them are predominantly Sinhalese-speaking fishermen belonging to three castes—the Karava, Durave and Goigama. From the point

[1] K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, 20-21.
[2] Ibid., 24, 36-37.

of view of the latter groups they have a problem in relation to the former—how is it that while these bilingual fisherman are like themselves in some respects, they are also so different? The Gajabahu myth is again used to justify the anomalous status of the bilingual groups living in close proximity to the Sinhalese: they are Cola (Soli) captives of Gajabahu settled by him in this region. When recent immigrants from South India become better assimilated into the Sinalese social structure—when they become exclusively Sinhala speaking—the myth has to be refashioned so as to give a higher status to the better assimilated immigrant group. This point could be neatly illustrated in respect of the Karava community of Alut Kuruva, south of Negombo. The 16th century *Rājaratnākara* states that Gajabahu settled his captives in Alut Kuruva. Thus this form of the myth is the same as the one used to refer to present day bilingual fishermen. It is very likely that at the time the *Rājaratnākara* was written the Alut Kuruva fishermen were also recent immigrants, and hence they were treated as the Cola captives of Gajabahu, rather than the original Sinhalese rescued by him. Today however Alut Kuruva is Sinhalese speaking and its people have a clear Sinhalese identity. The Sinhalese Karava groups also believe that they are descended from the prestigious *Kauravas* mentioned in the *Mahābhārata.* The *Kaḍaimpota* version of the colonization of Alut Kuruva quoted by Bell is probably a later version of the myth to suit the changed status of the fishermen of Alut Kuruva. In this account Gajabahu is a contemporary of the Buddha who brought with him settlers from Kururata where the prestigious Kauravas lived.

The Gajabahu myth then is not a static one but expresses a dialectic between various social groups. The second example from the North Central province will illustrate this status dialectic carried to an extreme. From the point of view of the higher castes of the region the blacksmiths of Rotaveva are inferior. Their inferiority is explained by saying that they are captives of Gajabahu settled in this region. However, the Veddahs of the North Central Province give a different twist to this myth. As far as the Veddahs are concerned, they (the Veddahs) are the original settlers of Ceylon; the blacksmiths of Rotaveva as well as the Goigama folk (*raṭē minussu*) are all later immigrants and aliens in territory that is rightfully theirs. Thus Veddahs state that all groups in the North Central Province, excluding the Veddahs, are descendants of Gajabahu's captives. They are no doubt correct for it is very likely that most, if not all, Sinhalese groups in this island were at some period or other immigrants from South India. The Gajabahu myth is a symbolic way of expressing this sociological fact.