

The People of the Lion

The Sinhala Identity and Ideology in History and Historiography

The evolution of group identities and of ideologies associated with social groups represents one of the most fascinating areas of historical research. It is also one of the most exacting fields of study requiring of the historian an inordinate amount of caution. The historian who undertakes an inquiry of this type has to constantly keep in mind that group consciousness, like all ideology, is historically determined and historically limited. The Sinhala ideology in its contemporary form, with its associations with language, race and religion, forms an essential part of contemporary Sri Lankan culture and has succeeded in thoroughly permeating such areas of intellectual activity as creative writing, the arts and historical writing. It is not an exaggeration to say that during the last hundred years the Sinhala ideology in its contemporary form has radically refashioned our view of our past. Since many writers assume that the Sinhala ideology in its current form has a very old history, it may be relevant to point out that even in the European languages the word race (Fr. *race*, Ital. *razza*) dates only from about the sixteenth century and that the biological definition of the term as denoting a group distinct from other members of the species by specific physiological characteristics is of even more recent origin. In both Sinhala and Tamil, it is difficult to find a satisfactory equivalent to this word. Hence it does not seem likely that racial consciousness can be traced back very far into the past of these two linguistic groups. Thus when an author of popular historical writings speaks of the mythical Vijaya as having been anxious to find a queen "of his own Aryan race" and further states that "his pride of race revolted at the thought of any but a pure Aryan succeeding to the Government which he had striven so laboriously to found"¹ or when academic historians writing about ancient Sri Lanka refer to "the Sinhala race,"² they are all presenting a view of the past moulded by contemporary ideology. These examples have been cited here to emphasise the need to reexamine this dominant and popular historical view, to go back to the original documents and to place the appearance of different types of group consciousness in their historical settings.

I

The Brāhmī inscriptions, which are the earliest historical documents in Sri Lanka,³ reflect an initial stage in the growth of group consciousness. Perhaps the most important basis of group identity at this time was

1. John M. Senaveratne, *The Story of the Sinhalese*, Colombo, 1930, p. 16.
2. L. D. Barnett, "The Early History of Ceylon" in *The Cambridge History of India*, Vol. I, London, 1921, reprinted in Delhi, 1955, p. 548; G. C. Mendis, *Our Heritage*, Colombo, 1943, p. 20.
3. See S. Paranavitana, *Inscriptions of Ceylon*, Vol. I, Colombo, 1970.

lineage. Individuals who set up inscriptions generally give the names of their fathers or of both fathers and grandfathers, while some of them trace their paternal descent back for three or four generations. Some inscriptions, particularly those of the Brāhmanas, refer to the *varna* status of the authors. Occupations and socio-political status of donors are cited in many inscriptions. It is particularly noteworthy that in a significant number of records the terms *upasaka* and *upasika* are used to describe the donors, reflecting the early beginnings of a religious identity. A few of the records point to other group identities like Kabojha, Milaka and Damedā. It is likely that Kabojha and Milaka were tribal groups. Paranavitana has suggested that Damedā was the equivalent of Tamil.⁴ Whether the term was used in this period to denote a tribal, linguistic or some other group deserves careful investigation. The term Sinhala, on the other hand, is conspicuous by its absence.

The disparate nature of the earliest settlements in the island would not have been conducive to the development of strong group identities which brought together a large number of people into one cohesive unit. At this primary stage of the development of group consciousness lineage was perhaps the most important criterion from which people derived their social identity. Socio-political position, *varna* or ritual status, religion and tribal affiliation were other factors which determined group identity.⁵ During the period from about the middle of the second century B. C. to about the second century A.D., Sri Lanka witnessed the unfolding of a crucial process of social change, bringing about the dissolution of communal property rights and the separation of the primary agricultural producers from elements essential for their production. Parallel and related to this process was the evolution of a state apparatus which brought the whole island under the control of the rulers of Anurādhapura.⁶ It is most likely that the emergence of the state brought with it changes in the ideological sphere, paving the way to a new group identity.

The term Sinhala (Pāli Sīhala, Skt. Simhala) occurs for the first time in Sri Lankan sources in the *Dīpāvamsa* which has been assigned to the fourth-fifth centuries A.D. In this chronicle the term occurs only once, and in this cryptic verse it is stated that the island was known as Sīhala "on account of the lion" (*lan̄kādiṇo ayam āhu sīhena sīhala itī*).⁷ The term Sīhalaḍiṇpa or "the Sinhala island" occurs in the *Samantapāsādikā*⁸ the

4. S. Paranavitana, "The Aryan Settlements: The Sinhalese," Chapter VI in *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon*, Colombo, 1959, Vol. 1, Pt. 1, pp. 87-8.

5. This is evident from the titles borne by people who inscribed the earliest Brāhmi records. See Paranavitana, *Inscriptions of Ceylon*, Vol. 1.

6. For a discussion on the process of state formation in Sri Lanka, see R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, "Social Function and Political Power: A Case Study of State Formation in Irrigation Society," *Indian Historical Review*, Vol. IV, No. 2, 1978, pp. 259-73.

7. *Dv.* 9.1

8. *Samantapāsādikā*, the Bāhiranidāna section, ed. and trsl. by N. A. Jayawickrama as *The Inception of Discipline and the Vinayanidāna*, London, 1962, pp. 2, 136.

commentary on the Vinaya section of the Pāli Canon, written by Buddhaghosa in the fifth century A. D. The text states that the earlier commentaries used by Buddhaghosa had been written in the language of Sihaladīpa. Fa-Hian, who also visited the island in the fifth century, refers to it by the name "the country of the lions."⁹ The term Heladivi, the equivalent of the Pāli Sihaladīpa, occurs in one of the graffiti at Sīgiri which have been assigned by Paranavitana to a period extending from the eighth to the tenth century A.D.¹⁰ By the eighth century the name was being used to denote a group of people, as is evident from an inscription found at a ruined monastic site in the Ratubaka Plateau in Central Java, which refers to the Simhalas.¹¹

Though the earliest reference to the term Sinhala in Sri Lankan sources is in the *Dīpavamsa*, there is evidence in other sources which suggests that the name can be traced back to an earlier date. In the Allahabad inscription of Samudragupta which has been assigned to the fourth century A.D., there is a reference to Saimhalakā, obviously a name derived from Simhala, among those who accepted the suzerainty of the Gupta emperor and paid him tribute.¹² Pelliot has drawn attention to the occurrence of Chinese renderings of the name Sihaladīpa in literary works of the second and third centuries A.D.¹³ Three Brāhmī inscriptions from the far south of the Indian subcontinent, written in a language which has been identified as Tamil in its formative stages, are also relevant to this study. According to the reading presented by Subrahmanya Ayyar,¹⁴ the term Īla is found in these three records. Some epigraphists do not agree with his readings of the Arittāpatti and the Cīttannavāṇal records, but they agree that the Tirupparankunram inscription refers to "Īla householders" and that the term Īla should be identified as denoting Sri Lanka.¹⁵ Ayyar suggested an early pre-Christian date for the record. Mahadevan¹⁶ assigns it to the first-second centuries A.D. He interprets the term *caiyalan* in an inscription from Muttupatti assigned to the same period, as a reference to a person from Sri Lanka, but this translation is doubtful. The term Īla in these records has been identified by epigraphists as denot-

9. See Samuel Beal, "Travels of Fa-Hian or Fo-kwo-ki" in *Travels of Hiuen Tsang*, Calcutta, 1957, Vol. I, p. 45.

10. S. Paranavitana, *Sigiri Graffiti, being Sinhalese Verse of the Eighth, Ninth and Tenth Centuries*, London, 1956, Vol. II, p. 179.

11. J. G. de Casparis, "New Evidence on Cultural Relations between Java and Ceylon in Ancient Times," *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. XXIV, 1962, pp. 241-8.

12. J. F. Fleet, *Inscriptions of Early Gupta Kings and their Successors, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. III, Varanasi, 1963, p. 8.

13. Paul Pelliot, *Review of Chu-fan-chih*, tr. by F. Hirth and W. W. Rockhill, *T'oung Pao*, Vol. XIII, 1921, pp. 462-3.

14. K. V. Subrahmanya Ayyar, "The Earliest Monuments of the Pandya Country and their Inscriptions," *Proceedings of the Third All-India Oriental Conference*, Madras, 1924, pp. 275-300.

15. T. V. Mahalingam, *Early South Indian Palaeography*, Madras, 1967, pp. 201-11, 245-50, 251-7.

16. Iravatham Mahadevan, *Corpus of the Brahmi Inscriptions*, Madras, 1966, pp. 8-9.

ing Sri Lanka. *Īlam* denoted Sri Lanka in classical Tamil works, and it has been suggested in the *Tamil Lexicon* published by the Madras University that the term would have been derived from the Pāli *Sihala* and the Sanskrit *Simhala*.¹⁷ This seems very likely since the *Āntan Tivākaram*, one of the earliest lexicons in the Tamil language, equates *Āinkalam* with *Īlam*.¹⁸ If we accept this explanation of the origin of *Īlam*, it would imply that the term *Sinhala* was also being used by the first or second century of the Christian era to denote a principality and certain types of people from that principality. If indeed the term *Īlam* was derived from *Sihala*, its current use in politics reminds one of the observation made by Marc Bloch, the great medievalist, about the term Frenchmen. It is a historical irony that Gauls bear today a name derived from that of the Franks whom they considered to be their enemies. Bloch pointed out that this inappropriate and unfortunate name gave rise in later times, "among the more reflective of our thinkers, to feelings of tragic anxiety."¹⁹

It seems very likely that the beginnings of the *Sinhala* consciousness arose as part of the ideology of the period of state formation. It is but to be expected that an ideology which evolved during such a period would emphasise a sense of unity. However, state society in Sri Lanka was a society divided on the bases of class as well as lineage, clan, occupation, ritual status and political position. The chronicles give a fair idea how in such a context group consciousness developed and what form it assumed. The *Mahāvamsa* has been generally assigned to the sixth century A.D., but it can be argued that it is a later work. In this chronicle the term *Sihala* occurs only twice. However, on closer examination it becomes clear that the sixth and the seventh chapters present a myth which forms a central element in the *Sinhala* ideology.

According to this myth, the daughter of the king of *Vaṅga* by a princess from *Kaliṅga*, runs away from home and joins a caravan heading for *Magadha*. On the way, in the *Lāla* country, the caravan is attacked by a lion who abducts the princess. From the union of the princess with the lion are born a son and a daughter, *Sihābahu* and *Sihasivali*. When the children grow up, they flee with their mother from the lion's den and reach the frontier regions of their grandfather's kingdom. Here they are befriended by a kinsman who rules the frontier province. The lion ravages villages in his search for his offspring. *Sihābahu* kills the lion. On the death of his grandfather, he is offered the kingdom of *Vaṅga*, but he prefers to found a kingdom with a new capital city, *Sihapura*, where he reigns with his sister as his queen. They have sixteen pairs of twins. *Vijaya*, the eldest, is of violent disposition. He and his seven hundred

17. *Tamil Lexicon*, Madras, 1924, Vol. I, p. 382.

18. *Āntan Tivākaram*, ed. Lōkanāta Mutaliyar, Madras, 1917, p. 62.

19. Marc Bloch, "Sur les grandes invasions: Quelques positions de problèmes," *Revue de Synthèse*, quoted in Paul Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth: A History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe*, London, 1974, p. 19.

followers (*parivāra*) harass the people. When the enraged *mahājanas* demand that Vijaya be put to death, the king exiles him, together with his followers. Their ship touches at Suppāraka, but as a result of their conduct, they are driven away again and they land in Sri Lanka.

On the day of their arrival in Sri Lanka the Buddha lay dying, but his thoughts were on the safety of Vijaya and his followers, The Buddha assigns Sakka to protect them, and the latter sends the God Uppalavanna to the island. Uppalavanna sprinkles charmed water on the men and ties sacralized thread (*parittasūta*) on their hands for their protection. Kuvannā, a *yakkhinī*, lures the men to devour them but is foiled by the power of the thread. Vijaya overpowers and espouses Kuvannā and, with her help, massacres the *yakkhas* in the island to win over the kingdom. He ruled from Tambapanni and his followers established five other settlements: Anurādhagāma, Upatissagāma, Ujjeni, Uruvela and Vijitapura. The chronicle explains that the region where Vijaya landed and the island itself were known by the name Tambapanni because the hands of Vijaya and his followers were reddened when they touched the earth. The chronicle also gives a definition of the term *Sihala*: "The king Sihabāhu, since he had slain the lion (was called) *Sihala* and, by reason of the ties between him and them, all those (followers of Vijaya) were also (called) *Sihala*."²⁰ Since it is not possible to hold a consecration ceremony without a queen of *ksatriya* birth an embassy is sent to southern Madhurā to ask for the hand of the daughter of the Pāndya king. The Pāndya king sends his daughter, many other maidens and "a thousand families of the eighteen guilds of workmen (*peṣakārake*)."²¹ On the arrival of the princess, Vijaya marries her after brusquely dismissing Kuvannā, and members of his retinue marry the other maidens from Madhurā. Vijaya is consecrated and rules for thirty-eight years at Tambapanni, and every year he sends pearls and chanks worth two hundred thousand to his father-in-law at Madhurā. Kuvannā goes to Lankāpura, the city of the *yakkhas* where she is killed by a *yakkha*. Her son and daughter flee to the Malaya region and live there "with the king's assent" (*rājānuññāya*). The boy takes the girl to wife, and from them are sprung the Pulindas.

The story of Vijaya is found in the *Dīpavamsa* and it is evident from the comments in the *Vamsatthappakāsinī*, the commentary on the *Mahāvamsa*, that there was another version in the chronicle of the Abhayagiri

20. This is Geiger's translation of the relevant strophe from the *Mahāvamsa*. See *Mahāvamsa*, tr. W. Geiger, Colombo, 1950, p. 58.

21. The eighteen groups of *peṣakārakā*, are comparable with the *aṣṭādaśajāti* in South Indian records. See J. F. Fleet, "Sanskrit and Old Canarese Inscriptions," *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. V, 1876, pp. 50-3. The Pāli chronicles of Sri Lanka record instances of kings assigning *peṣakārā* (var. *peṣsiyā*) to serve in monasteries. The groups of people denoted by this term included craftsmen as well as those who performed service functions with a "low" ritual ranking. See R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough: Monasticism and Economic Interest in Early Medieval Sri Lanka*, AAS Monograph Series No. 35, Tucson, Arizona, 1979, pp. 119-20.

monastery. But the Vijaya story was certainly not the only "colonization myth"²² about Sri Lanka. The *Divyāvadāna* presents another story while the account of Hiuen Tsang cites two more. One of the stories cited by Hiuen Tsang (Hiuen Tsang I) is similar to the Vijaya myth. However, the earlier episodes take place not in and around Vaṅga but in South India. Further, it is the killer of the lion who is exiled as punishment for his parricide. He founds a kingdom in the island. "Because the original founder got his name by catching a lion (*chih-sse-tseu*)," the myth explains "they called the country (after his name) Simhala (*Sang-kiā-lo*)."²³ In the second story (Hiuen Tsang II), which is basically similar to that in the *Divyāvadāna*,²⁴ Simhala was the son of a great merchant of Jambudvīpa called Simha (*Sang-kiā*). Simhala comes to the island with five hundred merchants, looking for gems, and stays back to live in the company of *rākṣasīs*. When the merchants discover that they are about to be imprisoned by their paramours, they escape from the island with the help of a flying horse. Simhala is elected king in his own country, but he leads an expedition to the island and founds a new kingdom after vanquishing the *rākṣasīs*. "Because of the king's name," the story states, "the country was called Simhala."²⁵ Some analysts of these myths have drawn attention to the similarity of certain elements in them to Buddhist stories like the Padakusalamānava, Sūtaṇa, Ghata, Valāhassa and Devadhamma Jātakas and it has been suggested that either the myths were influenced by the Jātakas or both groups were derived from a common source.²⁶

The *Mahāvamsa* version of the Vijaya myth contains certain elements which are discordant with the myth of the visit of the Buddha that the same chronicle presents. During the first visit to the island, the Buddha is said to have expelled the *yakkhas* who lived in the island to Giridīpa, but Vijaya and his followers find a flourishing kingdom of the *yakkhas* in the island. However, the *Dīpavamsa* version of the Vijaya myth makes no mention of Kuvanā or of Vijaya's encounters with the *yakkhas* and is, therefore, consistent with myth of the Buddha's visit. This discrepancy between the two main chronicles raises the problem whether the *Dīpavamsa* deleted part of the Vijaya myth to present a more consistent account or whether those elements in the *Mahāvamsa* version relating to the presence of the *yakkhas* represent later accretions. The *Vamsathappakāsinī* provides additional information about the *yakkhas* when it states that the chief of the *yakkhas* at Sirīsavatthu was Mahā ālasena and that he married Po'amittā,

22. I have borrowed this term from Gananath Obeyesekere. See "Gajabāhu and the Gajabāhu Synchronism: An Inquiry into the Relationship between Myth and History," *The Ceylon Journal of the Humanities*, Vol. I, No. 1, 1970, pp. 25-36.

23. S. Beal, *Travels of Hiuen Tsang*, Calcutta, 1958, Vol. IV, pp. 435-7.

24. *Divyāvadāna*, ed. E. B. Cowell, and R. A. Neil, Cambridge, 1886, pp. 523-9.

25. Beal, *Travels of Hiuen Tsang*, Vol. IV, pp. 438-42.

26. See L. S. Perera, "The Early Kings of Ceylon," Chapter VII in *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon*, Vol. I, Pt. I, pp. 98-111; G. C. Mendis, "The Vijaya Legend," *Paranavitana Felicitation Volume*, ed. N. A. Jayawickrama, Colombo, 1965, pp. 263-92.

the daughter of a *yakkhīnī* called Gondā. The text also tells us that the two children of Kuvannā were called Jīvahattha and Dipellā.²⁷ However, it is not possible to consider these statements as indicative of the relative date of this part of the myth since it is not clear from the contexts whether the author of the *Vamsatthappakāsini* is citing, as usual, information from the ancient Sinhala chronicle of the Mahāvihāra or whether he was merely drawing on the extended versions of the myth current in his own time. The *Divyāvadāna* is more useful in this respect since it shows that a version of the myth which spoke of the presence of *yakkhas* at the time of the arrival of Simhala was prevalent at the time *Dīpavamsa* was written.²⁸ Most of the myths cited above present the view that the island was originally inhabited by the *yakkhas*, and in all these stories the attitude towards the *yakkhas* is one of hostility. In the *Dīpavamsa* the Buddha is the hero who vanquishes them while in the *Divyāvadāna* and the Hiuen Tsang II version, it is Simhala, the eponymous hero, who is credited with the achievement. It is likely that the two sets of myths were of independent origin and had a parallel existence. Evidently the *Mahāvamsa* is presenting a combination of these two sets without paying heed to the resultant contradiction. We shall later see that the *yakkhas*, like the element absent from the *Dīpavamsa* version i.e. the arrival of Vijaya's bride from Madhurā, form an essential component which completes the message that the *Mahāvamsa* version of the myth is seeking to convey.

Several writers have seen in the geographical references in the myths, pointers to the original homes of the immigrants who came and settled in the island. Barnett saw in them indications of two streams of migration: one of Dravidians from Bengal and Orissa and a later stream, "mainly Aryan," from the Western regions of India.²⁹ Basham argued for the rejection of the view that the Vijaya story was "a statement of historical fact" but he tended to attach significance to the geographical references.³⁰ He seems to have considered references to Kalinga and Madhurā as later accretions, but he detected in other references the arrival of the first wave of immigrants from the Western parts of India and of a second wave of immigration from the East. It is noteworthy that though the *Mahāvamsa* refers to Lāla as a region between Vānga and Magadha several writers including both Barnett and Basham have identified it with Lāta on the Western coast of India. Paranavitana was inclined to accept the same view in his attempt to trace "the original home of the Aryan settlers" to the North-

27. *Vamsatthappakāsini* (*Vap.*), ed. G. P. Malalasekera, London, 1935, Vol. I, pp. 259-60, 264.

28. While noting that some of the tales in the *Divyāvadāna* had been translated into Chinese in the third century A. D., M. Winternitz (*A History of Indian Literature*, Calcutta, 1953, Vol. II, pp. 285-6) has assigned this work to the fourth century A. D.

29. Barnett, *op. cit.*

30. A. L. Basham, "Prince Vijaya and the Aryanization in Ceylon," *Ceylon Historical Journal*, Vol. I, No. 3, 1952, pp. 163-71.

western parts of India.³¹ However, while all the different versions of the myth reflect what may be called the "immigrant mentality" of a dominant element of the population of Sri Lanka and their belief that they came from India, attempts at locating "the original homes" on the basis of geographical references in the myths would amount to confusing ideological statements with accounts of actual events. The discrepancies between different versions of the myths also point to the need for caution. The *Mahāvamsa* refers to Vāṅga, Kāliṅga, Lāla, Magadha, Suppāraka and Madhurā. The *Dīpavamsa* does not refer to Madhurā and gives Bharukaccha as a place visited by Vijaya on his way to Sri Lanka. On the other hand, Hiuen Tsang I locates the home of Simhala in South India. The *Divyāvadāna* presents Simhala as a merchant from a kingdom called Simhakalpa and implies it was in Jambudvīpa. The Hiuen Tsang II version of the myth does not refer to any specific part of India, but merely state that Simhala was from Jambudvīpa. As Mendis correctly detected, one of the main functions of the different versions of these "colonization myths" seem to be to explain the origin of the name Sinhala. Certain versions attempt to explain how the island came to be called by this name while the *Mahāvamsa* version seeks to explain how the island came to be called Tambapanni and how a certain group of people came to be called the Sinhala. Mendis believed that "Simhala was originally the name of the island and the people got their names from it many centuries later."³² Such a sequence is not evident from the source material examined above, and, in fact, the information in the South Indian Brāhmī inscriptions seems to preclude such an assertion. The writings of Onesicritus who accompanied Alexander to India testify to the fact that Taprobane or Tambapanni was the earliest historical name of the island.³³ Even in the second century A.D., Ptolemy referred to the island as Taprobane though he noted that it was also called Salike.³⁴ The *Mahāvamsa* version of the Vijaya myth, it would thus appear, originally evolved at a time when the island was still known as Tambapanni and a group of people living there were called the Sinhala.

Evidently there were two distinct connotations of the term Sinhala. The long and detailed description of the origin of the ruling family the myth presents carries the implication that it was the members of this lineage who were the real People of the Lion. This association of the term is also found in the later chronicle *Cūlavamsa*. After describing the matrimonial alliance that Mahinda IV formed with Kāliṅga and his elevation

31. *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon*, Vol. I, Pt.1, pp. 82-97.

32. See *Paranavitana Felicitation Volume*, p. 268.

33. J. W. McCrindle, *Ancient India as Described in Classical Literature*, London, 1901, p. 102.

34. J. W. McCrindle, *Ancient India as Described by Ptolemy*, London, 1885, pp. 247-59.

of members of his lineage to high positions in the kingdom, the *Cūlavamsa* states that he thereby strengthened the Sinhala lineage (*Sīhalavamsam*).³⁵ Obviously, the term is being used here to denote the dynasty.

Basham and Obeyesekere have drawn attention to the elements of bestiality, parricide and incest in the myth.³⁶ While in certain versions of the myth there is no reference to an animal and Simha is a mere name, in those versions where Simha is in fact a lion the relationship between the lion and the eponymous ancestor assumes a dual character. The latter is both "the progeny of the lion" as well as "the slayer of the lion." It is noteworthy that the *Mahāvamsa* uses the term *ādinnava*, a very rare word, to describe this relationship. The word can be associated with *ādi*, meaning "beginning," as well as with *ādiyāsi*, "to seize." It is most likely that this word was deliberately chosen to convey the dual character of this relationship. This element of the myth endowed the ruling dynasty with a marvellous origin which marked it out from the populace. The depiction of the hero as lion-slayer is comparable with the epic of Gilgamesh whose prowess in combat with lions is highlighted in a large number of Sumerian seals.³⁷ It is also possible to suggest that, as a structural element in the myth, parricide represents the negation and abnegation of animal origins. In later times the lion-slaying aspect of the myth is found to be given greater emphasis. As noted earlier, according to the Hiuen Tsang I version of the myth, the founder of the kingdom received his name on account of his having caught a lion. The *Vamsatthappakāsinī*, too, states that that Sīhabāhu was called Sīhala because he had "caught the lion" (*sīham gahitvā iti*).³⁸ These sources probably reflect the fact that by about the seventh century the People of the Lion preferred to be known as lion-slayers rather than the progeny of the lion. It is this later interpretation of the term *ādinnava* which influenced Geiger to translate the relevant verse of the *Mahāvamsa* as cited above. The Hiuen Tsang I version of the myth does not refer to sibling incest that is found in the *Mahāvamsa*. As Romila Thapar has pointed out,³⁹ while incest of this type explains how two siblings can found a lineage, it also stresses purity of descent. Sibling marriage finds mention in the Dasaratha Jātaka and with reference to the Sākya in the Pāli Suttas. The story of the sixteen pairs of twins in the Vijaya myth also finds parallels in the Indian myths cited by Thapar.

35. *Cv.* 54.10.

36. Basham, *op. cit.*; G. Obeyesekere, "Religious Symbolism and Political Change in Ceylon," *Modern Ceylon Studies*, Vol. I, No. 1, 1970, pp. 43-63.

37. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, tr. with an introduction by N. K. Sandars, Middlesex, 1980, pp. 36, 94.

38. *Vap.* Vol. I, p. 261.

39. Romila Thapar, "Origin Myths and the Early Historical Tradition" in *Ancient Indian Social History*, Delhi, 1978, pp. 294-325.

Information on dynastic emblems of South Indian ruling houses is most useful in enabling us to understand the significance of the term Sinhala. The Pāndyas had the fish as their emblem, the Cōlas and the Sinda branch of the Nāga lineage had the tiger and the Cālukyas had the boar. It is also evident that certain South Indian ruling families bore the lion crest. Though the bull was the most widely used emblem of the Pallavas of the Simhaviṣṇu line, the figure of the lion is found on some of their coins and seals, and on certain early copper plates.⁴⁰ The animal figures on the Ūruvapalli grant⁴¹ and the Pikira copper-plate⁴² have been identified as lions. It has been suggested on the basis of this evidence that the early Pallavas bore the lion emblem. The lion emblem was also used by some minor Cōla ruling houses. The Malēpaḍu plates of Puṇyakumāra, dated in the eighth century,⁴³ and a record from the Bastar region,⁴⁴ issued by a chieftain called Candrāditya, bear the lion crest. Both Puṇyakumāra and Candrāditya claim descent from Karikāla Cōla. It is very likely that, similarly, the lion was the emblem of the ruling house of Sri Lanka and that the dynasty got its name from the emblem. As in Sri Lanka, in South India, too, there were myths which sought to explain these emblems. For instance, the myths of the Sinda dynasty explain how their eponymous ancestor had been brought up by a tiger.⁴⁵

There was evidently a second, wider meaning of the term Sinhala. The Mahāvamsa states that on account of their association with Siḥabāhu (*tena sambandhā*) "all these" were also called Siḥala (*ete sabbe pi sihalā*).⁴⁶ It is not clear from this cryptic verse who "all these" were, but the preceding verses speak of the followers of Vijaya. In its explanation of the passage, the *Vamsatthappakāsini* states that the seven hundred members of Vijaya's retinue and all their descendants "up to the present day" are called Siḥhalas because of their association with the prince called Siḥala (*tena sihalanāmikena rājakumārena sambandhā ete sattapūrisasavā ca tesam puttanattapanatī yāvajakālā manussā ca sabbe pi sihalā nāma ahesunti attho*).⁴⁷ Thus it is clear that, at least by the time the *Vamsatthappakāsini* came to be written, a wider meaning of the term Sinhala was gaining currency.

Hypothetically, it is possible to postulate a dynasty > kingdom > people of the kingdom sequence in the development of the Sinhala identity. However, there appear to have been certain factors operative at this time

40. C. Minakshi, *Administration and Social Life under the Pallavas*, Madras, 1938, p. 82.

41. *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. V, 1881, pp. 50-3.

42. E. Hultzsch, "Pikira Grant of Simhavarman," *Epigraphia Indica (EI)*, Vol. VIII, 1905/6, pp. 159-63.

43. H. Krishna Sastri, "Malēpaḍu Plates of Puṇyakumāra," *EI*, Vol. XI, 1911/2, pp. 337-8.

44. *Madras Epigraphical Reports*, Archaeological Survey, Madras, 1908/9, p. 5.

45. K. A. Nilakants Sastri, *The Cōlas*, Madras, 1935, Vol. I, pp. 24-6.

46. *Mv.* 7.42.

47. *Vap.*, Vol. I, p. 261.

that prevented the development of a Sinhala consciousness which embraced all the people in the kingdom. It is particularly noteworthy 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. The Vijaya myth recognizes the existence of three major groups of people in the island. While outlining in detail the origin of the Siḥalas, it also seems to explain the origins of the service castes and the Pulindas. Verses 43-45 in the seventh chapter of the *Mahāvamsa* describe the settlements established by the seven hundred followers of Vijaya while verses 56-57 refer to the arrival of the thousand families of the service castes sent by the king of Madhurā. The implication that this later group should not be confused with the Siḥalas is emphasised in the *Vamsatthappakāsinī* when it specifies that the Siḥalas were the descendants of "the seven hundred" who formed Vijaya's retinue and thereby excludes from this group the descendants of "the thousand families." The origin of the third major group, the Pulindas who occupied the Malaya region, is traced to the offspring of Vijaya and Kuvannā. Geiger was right in identifying the Pulindas with the Veddas.⁴⁸ Sibling incest in the story of their origin emphasises the "purity" of their descent and their distinct status. Thus the Vijaya myth seeks to indicate that the three major groups it identifies are separate categories with distinct origins. If the myth suggests any link at all, it is between the Sinhala ruling house and the Pulindas, but here again it is noteworthy that, according to the myth, Vijaya did not have any children by his marriage with the Pāṇḍya princess. Thus, while the violent Vijaya who suffered exile for his reprehensible ways is presented as the ancestor of the Pulindas, the ancestry of the Sinhalese ruling house is traced to Sumitta, the more sedate younger brother whose youngest son Paṇḍuvāsudeva is said to have succeeded Vijaya. On the other hand, the service castes are presented as the descendants of the thousand families from Madhurā: they are thus unlinked by blood with the other two major groups.

These distinctions that the myth makes are of crucial importance for understanding the nature of group consciousness that was developing in the period after the formation of a unified kingdom under the control of Anurādhapura. They enable us to distinguish the Sinhala consciousness of this early period from linguistic nationalism and other types of group consciousness typical of more recent times. Of course, the presence of a common language was a basic prerequisite for the emergence of group consciousness. Buddhaghosa's commentaries speak of a language specific to the island. However, it is significant that language was not conceived as the crucial criterion or the basis of the Sinhala identity at this time. The Sinhala group consciousness did not bring together all speakers of the

48. *The Mahāvamsa*, tr. Geiger, p. 60.

language but deliberately left out a considerable section of the linguistic group including the craftsmen-agriculturists and others who performed ritually "low" service functions.

In essence the Vijaya myth is presenting what may be termed a political definition of the Sinhala identity. The ruling house represented the Sīhalas *par excellence*. It may be relevant to note here that the Sigiri monument, constructed by Kaśyapa I (A.D. 477-95), gave expression to this identity through some of its architectural features. The dominant feature of this monument was the massive figure of the lion after which it was named. The royal apartments were on the summit of the rock. The architectural arrangements were such that the king, descending from his apartments, would walk out through the mouth of the lion, emerging, as it were, from the bowels of the lion, and thereby evoking the mythical origins of the ruling house. The ruling dynasty sought to consolidate its power by utilizing such monuments to propagate the Sinhala myth. On the other hand, by emphasising its equally mythical relationship with the lineage of the Buddha, they attempted to draw upon the growing religious consciousness of the Buddhists in order to strengthen their position.⁴⁹ According to the myth, those other than members of the ruling house acquired the Sinhala identity only through their association with the ruler or through being born in families with such associations. The seven hundred settlers are described as Vijaya's retinue (*parivāra*) and some of them are specifically referred to as state functionaries (*amacca*). It has been pointed out elsewhere that in ancient Sri Lanka state functionaries were recruited primarily from families of high rank who owned property in irrigation works and land, and that there was a tendency for political office to be associated, generation after generation, with certain families.⁵⁰ Traders were another prominent element in the society and their importance is reflected in certain versions of the myth where Simhala is presented as a merchant. Thus, those brought together by the Sinhala identity were primarily the most influential and powerful families in the kingdom. It is likely that it was such elements who are denoted by the term *mahājana* in the myth. In the ancient texts it did not carry the meaning that its phonetic equivalent *mahajanayā* conveys today, but denoted "the great men." Thus at this stage of its development the Sinhala consciousness was the consciousness of the ruling class. It probably had a regional tinge, at least initially, since, according to the myth, the original settlements founded by the Sīhalas were on the banks of the Kadamba (Malvatu) and

49. See R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, "The Kinsmen of the Buddha: Myth as Political Charter in the Ancient and Early Medieval Kingdoms of Sri Lanka," *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, Vol. II, No. 1, 1976, pp. 53-62.

50. R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, "Social Function and Political Power: A Case Study of State Formation in Irrigation Society," *Indian Historical Review*, Vol. IV, 1978, pp. 259-73.

Gambhīra (Kanadarā ?) rivers and in the surrounding region. It is worthy of note that the chronicle attributes a different origin to the settlements in the eastern and southeastern regions of the island⁵¹

The Vijaya myth seeks to define the position of the Pulindas and their relationship with the Sinhala dynasty: They live in the Malaya region with the assent of the king, thereby acknowledging his suzerainty. Certain elements of the myth portray the relationship between the king and the "great men." It was the "great men" of the kingdom who protested about the violent and oppressive behaviour of Vijaya. They demanded that he be put to death and Sīhabāhu was constrained to send him away in exile. In the *Divyāvadāna* and Hiuen Tsang II versions of the myth Simhala is a merchant who is selected by the people of his kingdom to be the king of their land. In the *Divyāvadāna* Simhala protests that he is only a trader, but the people insist that he accepts the kingship because he was the only capable person.⁵² In the Hiuen Tsang II version Simhala is selected on account of his religious merit, wisdom, skill, virtue, loyalty and prudence.⁵³ While these versions present the view that personal ability and qualities of character rather than ritual status should be the criteria that determine the suitability of a person for kingship, the *Mahāvamsa* version seeks to present a markedly different point of view. It embodies the message that the *ksatriya* status of the ruling family marks them out from people of all other ritual categories. The story of the embassy sent to Madhurā to fetch a *ksatriya* princess and Vijaya's treatment of Kuvanna serve to underline the point that only such a king who is a *ksatriya* and who also has a queen of the same *varna* status can be consecrated: others do not have a legitimate right to rule. Thus while the "great men" of non-*ksatriya* status may force the ruling family to govern justly without harassing them, they may not aspire to kingship. The discrepancies between different versions of the myth, reflecting probably their different social origins, point to the tensions within the dominant social group and the problems of political power in the country at this time.

It is also possible to see the Vijaya myth as an expression of a corpus of religious beliefs. The *yakkhas* and *rāksasīs* occupy a prominent position in many versions of the myth. In the words of Vijaya "men are ever in fear of non-human beings." Oblations (*bali*) are offered to the *yakkhas* to placate them. The *Mahāvamsa* version of the myth highlights the potency of sacralized thread as a charm which afforded protection against the *yakkhas*: it saved the lives of Vijaya's men. Uppalavanna is introduced as a god of the Buddhist pantheon vested with the protection of the island, and it is stated that it was the request of the dying Buddha that Vijaya and the island be protected which led to Uppalavanna being sent by Sakka,

51. *Mv.* 9.7-10.

52. *Divyāvadāna*, p. 527.

53. Beal, *Travels of Hiuen Tsang*, Vol. IV, p. 441.

the king of the gods. The myth synchronises the arrival in the island of Vijaya and his retinue with the death of the Buddha. It also seeks to enunciate certain Buddhist virtues and to point out the "rewards" accruing to those who practise them: the lion was not harmed by the arrows shot by Sīhabāhu as long as he harboured feelings of loving kindness (*mettacitta*) in his heart but was killed the moment he was moved by wrath. At another level the myth reflects the importance of certain places other than Anurādhapura as political centres. All the different versions of the myth seek to explain the name Sinhala, and indeed this was one of the basic functions of the myth. While it is possible to understand this myth at several such different levels, it is possible to see in its *Mahāvamsa* version what Malinowski termed a "charter,"⁵⁴ and in this sense it is comparable with the myth of the visit of the Buddha that the present writer has analysed elsewhere.⁵⁵ One of the primary social functions of the Vijaya myth was the validation of a particular socio-political order. It identifies certain major social groups in the island and seeks to locate their positions in the social order. The Sinhala consciousness presented in the myth was the product of caste (*jāti*) ideology, for the service castes were excluded from membership of the Sinhala group. The Vijaya myth in the *Mahāvamsa* also 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. When the island came to be called Sīhaladīpa or the island of the Sinhala, this name reflected the claim of the ruling house and this dominant social group to political power over the whole island. By implication, this ideology sought to relegate all other social groups like the service castes and the Pulindas to a subservient position. Evidently, chronicles like the *Mahāvamsa* served as valuable media for the propagation of this ideology.

Invasions from South India posed a threat to the dominant position occupied by this social group, and when powerful kingdoms of the Pāndyas, the Pallavas and the Cōlas appeared in the South Indian political scene these invasions were indeed a serious threat to their political power. The Sinhala ideology presented in the chronicles reflects the tension and antipathy aroused by this threat. It is particularly noteworthy that the chronicles present a version of history which had been moulded to conform to the needs of this ideology. For these chroniclers all kings since the mythical Vijaya were rulers of the whole island. It is only through a reexamination of the *Mahāvamsa* in the light of evidence from the early Brāhmī inscriptions and literary works like the *Dhātuvamsa*, the *Sīhalavatthupparāṇa* and the *Sahassavatthupparāṇa* that the process of political development in the island leading to the emergence of a unified kingdom could be reconstructed. Information from inscriptions at sites distributed over a wide area like Periya

54. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays*, Boston, 1948, p. 145.

55. *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, Vol. II, No. 1, 1976, pp. 53-62.

Puliyankulam, Occāppukallu, Āmbul-ambe, Yatahalena, Lenagala, Gōnavatta Bāmbāragala, Kandēgamakanda, Kusalānkanda, Olagamgala, Mottayakallu, Bōvattegala, Kottadāmūhela, Kolladeniya and Kirimakulgolla, when taken together with evidence in the literary sources mentioned above, point to a situation quite different from what the author of the *Mahāvamsa* would have us believe. It is evident from information in these sources that at the beginning of historical times there were several petty rulers holding sway over various parts of the island. Of these rulers those at Anurādhapura were the preeminent. Devānāmpiyatissa of Anurādhapura sent a delegation to the court of Asoka, held a consecration ceremony with the ritual goods provided by the latter and assumed the titles *devānāmpiya* and *mahārāja*. There is no evidence, however, to show that the other rulers acknowledged his suzerainty or that he was more than a mere aspirant to overlordship over the whole island.⁵⁶

It is against this background that the campaigns of Dutthagāmaṇī which form an integral and important element in the Sinhala ideology, particularly in more recent times, have to be examined. In the *Mahāvamsa*, Elāra, against whom Dutthagāmaṇī waged his war, was the ruler of the whole of northern Sri Lanka and members of Dutthagāmaṇī's lineage had been rulers of the entire Rohana kingdom ever since Mahānāga established his power at Mahāgāma. Dutthagāmaṇī is presented as waging war in the interest of Buddhism. His campaigns culminate dramatically with the capture of Anurādhapura after a duel fought in accordance with the *ksatriya* rules of chivalry. Thus a Buddhist prince of the Sinhala dynasty who ruled over the southern principality conquers the northern principality ruled by a Tamil who, though known for his just rule, was yet a man of "false beliefs." This view of the chroniclers has influenced modern historical writings, and the chauvinist Sinhala writings have picked on these campaigns as representing the exemplary victorious war waged by the Sinhalese against the Tamils. However, even the author of the *Mahāvamsa*, who was obviously transposing to an earlier period conditions more typical of his own times, found it difficult to reconcile material available in his sources with this anachronistic picture he was trying to present. Some information in the *Mahāvamsa* itself suggests that not all the people who fought against Dutthagāmaṇī were Tamils. For instance, Nandhimitta, a general in Dutthagāmaṇī's army, is said to have had an uncle who was a general serving Elāra.⁵⁷ Though the *Mahāvamsa* tried to present Dutthagāmaṇī as the ruler of a unified Rohana fighting against the sole ruler of the northern plains, it is evident that the sources used by the chronicler carried accounts of Dutthagāmaṇī fighting against thirty-two different rulers. As the present writer has pointed out previously,⁵⁸ the most plausible explanation of the

56. R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, "The Rise of a Unified Kingdom," synopsis of a chapter for the proposed revised edition of the *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon*, distributed in 1971 among scholars invited to contribute to this work. Material presented in this synopsis has been incorporated in this and the following paragraph.

57. *Mv.* 23. 4-5.

58. See note 56.

available evidence is that Dutthagāmaṇi was a powerful military leader who unified the island for the first time after fighting against several independent principalities. His campaigns do not appear to represent a Sinhala-Tamil confrontation and, as noted already, the development of Sinhala consciousness is a phenomenon observable after the formation of a unified kingdom ruled by the kings of Anurādhapura.

The Sinhala ideology elaborated in the account of the campaigns of Dutthagāmaṇi clearly reflects the influence of the religious identity which evolved with the expansion and consolidation of Buddhism in the island. Both the *Mahāvamsa* and the *Cūlavamsa* present the view that support for the Sinhala dynasty against the Damilas is conducive to the glory of Buddhism. Dutthagāmaṇi in the *Mahāvamsa* and Dhātusena in the *Cūlavamsa* are both presented as waging war against the Damilas to restore Buddhism to its proper position. When describing the South Indian invasions in the fifth century the *Cūlavamsa* states that all men of good birth (*janā kulīnā sabbe*) left the area occupied by the invaders to go and live in Rohana.⁵⁹ And, after describing the victory of Dhātusena, the chronicle says that he “restored to its former place the *sāsana* destroyed by the foe.”⁶⁰ The chronicle seeks to create the impression that there was a strong anti-South Indian feeling among the dominant elements in Sri Lankan society, but it is less than convincing. A few strophes after making the statements cited above it admits that some men of “good birth” did opt to serve the Tamil rulers. After capturing power Dhātusena is said to have taken punitive action against those “men of good birth who had attached themselves to the Damilas and protected neither himself nor the *sāsana*.”⁶¹ The claim that the Buddhist order was destroyed by the invaders is also not borne out by the inscriptional records of this period. They indicate that there were Buddhists among the invaders. Some of them were generous patrons of the Buddhist clergy and one of their kings bore the title Budadasa which meant “the servant of the Buddha.”⁶²

It is only after the development in South India of a militant form of Hinduism which adopted a pronounced hostile stance against both Buddhism and Jainism that Tamils would have been considered foes of the faith by the Buddhists of Sri Lanka. The Sanskrit literary works composed by the Pallava king Mahendravarman I (A. D. 600–630) and such Tamil writings like the *Tiruvātavūrar Purānam* and the *Periya Purānam* reflect the intensity of the hostility that the devotees of the Saiva faith harboured against the Buddhists and the Jainas. Tiruñānacampantar is said to have defeated the Buddhist inhabitants of the Potimankai settlement at debate and converted them to Saivism. It is also said that another Saiva

59. Cv. 38. 11-2.

60. Cv. 38. 37.

61. Cv. 38. 38-9.

62. See *Epigraphia Zeylanica* (EZ), Vol. IV, p. 114.

saint, Mānikkavaṇṇa, participated in a similar debate at Čitamparam where he humiliated a Buddhist monk from Sri Lanka.⁶³ It has been suggested that Tiruṇāṇaṇṇampantar lived in the seventh century, and Mānikkavaṇṇa has been assigned to the ninth century.⁶⁴ However, in the earlier periods there is no evidence of such hostility towards the Buddhists. Thus while the Buddhist identity was one which linked the Buddhists of Sri Lanka with coreligionists in South India and other parts of the Indian subcontinent, it is only after about the seventh century that prerequisite conditions matured making it possible to link the Sinhala identity with Buddhism and to present Tamils as opponents of Buddhism.

In the second instance where the term Sinhala occurs in the *Mahāvamsa* Vagttagāmaṇī is described a *mahākālasihala*.⁶⁵ Though Paranavitana preferred to see in this phrase an allusion to Yama,⁶⁶ its literal meaning is "the great black Sinhala." It is also noteworthy that the father of Dutthagāmaṇī was called Kākavannatissa which means "Tissa the crow-coloured." Both the father and son of King Mahāsena bore the title *meghavaṇṇa* which meant "one with the colour of the rain colour." The paintings and graffiti from Sigiri also provide valuable information on physical features of the upper rungs of Sri Lankan society at the time. The complexions of the ladies depicted in the paintings vary from a light yellow-brown to a deep blue or black colour. These ladies are richly adorned with jewellery including tiaras, earrings, necklaces and bangles. The paintings certainly depict members of the highest social strata. The variety of the physical types that they represent clearly indicates that the dominant social group at the time was not of a physically homogeneous type. The "amateur poets" who scribbled verses on the Mirror Wall at Sigiri were mostly giving expression to their admiration of the damsels in the paintings. These verses reveal a certain preference for ladies with a lighter complexion, described as the "golden hued" (*raṇvaṇ*) ones. Some of these poets considered those with dark complexions beautiful and desirable. There were several admirers who wrote verses expressing their desire for the darker maidens, whose complexion was poetically compared with the hue of the blue lily (*mahanel*, *Nymphaea stellata*). In a verse that has been often quoted, one damsel is compared to a blue *katrola* (*Clitoria ternatea*) flower.⁶⁷ "When I remember the blue lily-hued ones there is no sleep for me, O friend, I have become like unto an ass," another visitor to Sigiri laments in a poem scribbled on the wall.⁶⁸ The fact that some preferred to be dark than light in complexion is evident from the *Saddharmālaṅkāra*, a literary work datable to

63. See H. W. Schomerus, *Sivaitische Heiligenlegenden (Periyapurāṇa and Tiruvā-tavūrapurāṇa)*, Jena, 1925, pp. 155, 264-80.

64. K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, Madras, 1955, pp. 405-7. 65. *Mv.* 33.43

66. S. Paranavitana, *The God of Adam's Peak*, Ascona, 1958, pp. 61-7.

67. Paranavitana, *Sigiri Graffiti* v. 334.

68. *Ibid.*, v. 449.

about the beginning of the fifteenth century. In this work is to be found a story about a lady who performed several meritorious acts and wished that through the effects of the merit thus accumulated she should be born with the complexion of a blue lily in every successive birth.⁶⁹

The *Dharmaṣṭrādīpikā*, which has been assigned by most scholars to the end of twelfth century, also provides information on the ideas of physical beauty in early medieval Sri Lanka. This work presents a discussion on the five characteristics of female beauty. In its description of the skin characteristics of the ideal beauty, it refers to both the dark (*kāliya*) and the golden-hued (*helilla*) maiden, in that order. The ideal beauty had to have a clear and uniform complexion, "untainted by other colours," and it could be either the colour of the blue lily or that of the *kinihiri* (*Cochlospermum religiosum*) flower.⁷⁰ In literary works, objects of golden colour were compared with the *kinihiri* flower. The *Vesaturudā Sanne*, an exegetical work written in the period of Polonnaruva kingdom, compares people clad in gold-coloured clothes and wearing golden ornaments to *kinihiri* trees in full bloom. It also states that *kinihiri* trees in bloom looked as if they were covered with golden nets.⁷¹ Thus preferences about skin pigmentation appear to have varied as would be expected in a physically heterogeneous society. The sources examined above reflect the rather unusual aesthetic values of a society in which there were not one but two alternate ideals of physical type: black is beautiful, the *Dharmaṣṭrādīpikā* asserts, and so is the "golden" hue. The *Buddhavamsa* reveals that these aesthetic values influenced even the Buddhist tradition. Popular tradition holds that the *Buddhavamsa* contains "the word of the Buddha," but the fact that it refers to the death of the Buddha, the distribution of his relics and even to relics venerated in Sri Lanka clearly shows that it is a late work composed probably in Sri Lanka. In its description of the chief disciples of the Buddha this work states that *Sāriputta* was of the colour of the *koranda* flower which, according to the *Vesaturudā Sanne*,⁷² was golden in colour, and that *Moggallāna*'s complexion was comparable to the black rain cloud and the blue lily.⁷³ Evidently, the "black" rain cloud and the "blue" lily are here supposed to denote the same complexion. It is particularly interesting to note that the two chief disciples of the Buddha are in this text representatives of the two main physical types. Thus these two physical types came to be not only idealized but also "enshrined:" the figures of two chief disciples are to be found up to the present day in Buddhist shrines scattered over many different parts of the island. It seems reasonable to suggest that this emphasis on these two physical types reflects the heterogeneous composition of the dominant social stratum.

69. *Saddharmālaṅkāra* ed. Bentara Saddhātissa, 1934, p. 176.

70. *Dharmaṣṭrādīpikā*, ed. R. D. S. Dharmarāma, Pāliyagoda, 1951, p. 254.

71. *Vesaturudā Sanne*, ed. D. E. Hettiaratchi, Colombo, 1950, pp. 19, 67.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 67-

73. *Buddhavamsa*, ed. R. Morris, Pali Text Society, London, 1882, p. 5.

It will have been evident from the preceding discussion that the social group brought together by the Sinhala consciousness does not appear to have coincided with a linguistic grouping in the island or to have represented a single physical type, and that it is only after about the seventh century that it could have been linked with a religious grouping. It is the social and political criteria which clearly stand out in an examination of the factors that united the Sīhalas. It is evident that at the time Dhātusena ascended the throne in the fifth century the Sinhala consciousness was not strong enough to unite the leading elements in society in opposition to the South Indian invaders. At the end of the seventh century, Mānavamma, a Sinhala contender for the throne, captured power with from aid the Pallavas, but the dynasty he founded soon proved to be capable of maintaining their independence and they successfully resisted intervention by powerful South Indian kingdoms for more than two centuries. This long period of political rivalry between the Sinhala and the South Indian kingdoms witnessed the rise and expansion of a militant and vigorous form of Hinduism in South India, displacing both Buddhism and Jainism. On the other hand, Buddhism continued to maintain its dominant position in the religious life of the people of Sri Lanka. These developments provided the prerequisite conditions for the growth of a tendency towards the convergence of the Buddhist and the Sinhala identities. From the time of Kāśyapa V (A.D. 914-23) kings begin to actively propagate the idea, implicit in the chronicles, that they belong to the same lineage as the Buddha.⁷⁴ An inscription issued by Mahinda IV (956-72) claims that the Buddha had given the assurance that none but Bodhisattvas would become kings of Sri Lanka.⁷⁵ Thus kings of Sri Lanka had to be not only Buddhists, but men destined to be Buddhas. Such ideas would have had considerable political potency at a time when the Sinhala kingdom was confronted with the threat from the Hindu kingdoms of South India. The success of the Sinhala rulers in defending their independence till the time of Mahinda V would have been due primarily to their achievement in utilizing these ideas to mobilize the leading elements in their kingdoms, particularly those who traditionally bore arms, in support of their dynasty. However, even at this stage, it is doubtful whether the Sinhala grouping and the Buddhist grouping in the island were identical. While nearly all the Sinhala were Buddhists, there is still no evidence to suggest that the service castes were now being considered members of the Sinhala group.

The long period of Cōla occupation in the island, spanning the tenth and eleventh centuries, and the intense rivalry between the South Indian and the Sinhala kingdoms would have been a factor which encouraged the extension of the Sinhala identity to cover a wider social group. However

74. Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough*, pp. 173-4.

75. *EZ*, Vol. 1, p. 237.

there were impediments to such a development. Inscriptions from the period immediately after the Cōla occupation reveal that caste (*jāti*) distinctions had become so rigid that they even affected the organization of Buddhist ritual. According to a lithic record set up by Vijayabāhu I (1017-70), he constructed two terraces on the summit of Sumanakūta. The upper terrace was reserved for men of "good caste" and was enclosed by a wall which had gates fitted with locks. He had a second terrace built on a lower elevation for those of "inferior caste" (*adhama jātin*) who came to worship the footprint of the Buddha.⁷⁶ Such arrangements for the performance of ritual at this important centre of pilgrimage reveal how sharply the differences between these two status groups were being emphasised.

Evidently, the intense political rivalry between the Cōla and the Sinhala kingdoms in the time of Parākrāmabāhu I (1153-86) affected even the religious. Up to this time it was the *nikāya* affiliation which divided them, and these *nikāya* divisions had cut across political boundaries. Several monks from South India had produced commentarial works on Buddhist texts where they professed to follow the traditions of canonical interpretation of the Mahāvihāra *nikāya* at Anurādhapura. In the reign of Parākrāmabāhu I, various Buddhist fraternities were unified under the leadership of Sāriputta.⁷⁷ Thus, for the first time, the *saṅgha* in Sri Lanka gave precedence to unity on the basis of a political and regional unit, rather than to unity on the basis of sectarian affiliation. Sāriputta's writings were severely criticised by Kassapa, a monk who lived at the Nāgānana monastery situated "in the heart of the Cōla kingdom," at Colādhināthapura. Sāriputta's interpretations, he claimed, encouraged lapses in discipline in the Cōla land and, as such, they had been rejected by the leading monks of that land who cleansed the *saṅgha* of monks who supported such views.⁷⁸ The tenor of this criticism implies that there was something more than mere disagreement on doctrinal matters. That a certain element of regional rivalry had come into these disputes is more clearly evident from the *Simā'āṅkāra*, a work from the same period devoted to the problem of demarcating ceremonial boundaries. In this work the author declares his intention to vindicate the position of the Sinhalese monks. All those who knew the Vinaya rules and wished for the perpetuation of the *sāsana*, he maintains, should accept the opinions of the Sinhalese monks which are in accordance with the scriptures and their commentaries. They should certainly reject the views of the Cōlians which were false and contrary to these. It was a Sinhalese monk, he claims, who wrote the *Simā'āṅkāra* and its commentary.⁷⁹ It is evident from these

76. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 202-18.

77. Ganawardana, *Robe and Plough*, pp. 313-37.

78. *Vimativinodanī*, ed. Boratudīve Dhammādhāra Tissa, Colombo, 1935, pp. 96-100

79. *Simā'āṅkāra*, ed. Buddhāsiri Tissa, Colombo, 1904, pp. 42-3.

polemical writings that, while the Buddhist identity transcended political boundaries, attempts were being made during this period to mark out within this larger identity the separate positions of the Cōla and the Sinhala monks.

The political conditions of this period were favourable for the extension of the Sinhala identity, and it is evident that, by the time Gurulugomi wrote the *Dharmapradīpikā*, the term Sinhala had acquired a wider meaning. While reiterating the earlier view that the kings of the dynasty descended from Simhala, the father of Vijaya, were the primary group denoted by the term Simhala, Gurulugomi also gives three other connotations of the term. The island ruled by the dynasty received the name of the dynasty; the inhabitants of the island received the name of the island; and their language was called *simhalabhāṣā*.⁸⁰ Gurulugomi's view of a dynasty > island > inhabitants of the island > their language sequence in the extension of the meaning of the term Sinhala reflects an important stage in the evolution of the Sinhala identity. It is noteworthy that, unlike previous writers, he does not refer or allude to the separate position of the service castes. He further differs from them by stating that it was by being inhabitants of the island rather than being descendants of a particular group of people that those other than the members of the ruling house acquired the Sinhala identity. Thus it is evident that the term Sinhala had come to denote by this time "the inhabitants of the island," meaning probably the Sinhala-speaking population who were the preponderant element of the people in the island.

While the Sinhala identity was thus being extended to cover a wider group than in the previous period, there are indications that not all the members of the group within this period were Buddhists. The influence of Saivism lingered on during the period which followed Cōla rule. This faith received the patronage of three successive rulers, i. e. Vijayabāhu I, Vikramabāhu and Gajabāhu II. The *Cūlavamsa* claims that Gajabāhu brought nobles of "heretical faith" from abroad and had his kingdom filled with "briers of heresy."⁸¹ Tamil tradition claims that he was converted to Saivism.⁸² It has been suggested that both Vikramabāhu and Gajabāhu were Hindus.⁸³ In its description of the invasion of Māgha (1215), the *Pūjavāliya* states that this invader compelled "the great men" to adopt false faiths.⁸⁴ Liyanagamage has suggested that this is a reference to people being converted to the Virasaiva sect of Saivism.⁸⁵ The vehemence with which

80. *Dharmapradīpikā*, p. 55.

81. Cv. 70.53-4.

82. *Ṣṛī Takṣina Kailāṣa Purāṇam*, ed. Vaittialīṅka Tēṣṭhar, 1916, Pt. 2, p. 20.

83. See Sirima Kiribamune, "Buddhism and Royal Prerogative in Medieval Sri Lanka," *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka*, Chambersburg PA, 1978, pp. 107-18.

84. *Pūjavāliya*, ed. A. V. Suravīra Colombo, 1961, pp. 108-9.

85. Amaradasa Liyanagamage, *The Decline of Polonnaruwa and the Rise of Dambadeniya*, Colombo, 1968, p. 128.

Vidāgama Maitreya attacks Saivism and other faiths in his *Budugunālankāraya*,⁸⁶ written in the fifteenth century, also points to the influence of these faiths amongst the Sinhala-speaking population at the time. It is evident from the preceding discussion that while it is possible to speak of a Sinhala variety of Buddhism during this period, as distinct from the Cōla and other varieties of the Theravāda, this does not imply that the terms Buddhist and Sinhala denoted the very same group. These terms denoted two intersecting groupings, and, though there was a substantial population which came within both, there were people who belonged to one group, but not the other.

This period did not witness the growth of a Sinhala consciousness which could prevent the rise to power of kings who were not members of the Sinhala group. And during the six centuries which followed there are several instances of Kalinga and Tamil princes assuming royal power in Sri Lanka. The position of the kings of the Kalinga dynasty which came to power at the end of the twelfth century, appears to have been challenged by South Indian as well as Sinhala contenders to the throne. Nissanka Malla, the first king of this dynasty, was a clever propagandist who used lithic records to propagate the view that *ksatriya* status and adherence to the Buddhist faith were essential prerequisites for kingship. He argued that non-Buddhists such as princes of the Cōla and Kerala origin were unsuited to rule the island which belonged to the *sāsana* and that it would be ludicrous for a man of the Govi caste to aspire to kingship as for a firefly to try to emulate the sun.⁸⁷ It is noteworthy that to a certain extent Nissanka Malla was seeking to counter the Sinhala ideology by emphasising that it was not the Sinhala identity but criteria related to religious affiliation and ritual status which determined the suitability of a person to be the king of the island.

II

The period of political disintegration which followed the collapse of the Polonnaruva kingdom witnessed significant changes in the composition of the population of the island. The chronicles contain several references to these developments, but it is in works like the *Vit̥tipot* which have not received adequate attention from historians that these events are described in detail.⁸⁸ It is evident that there were several waves of immigration which brought not only South Indian linguistic groups like Demala, Malala, Kannada and Doluvara (Tulu) but also group like Jāvakas from Southeast Asia. Myths of this period reflect the distribution of the immigrant

86. *Budugunālankāraya*, ed. K. Nānavimāla, Colombo, 1953, vv. 121-183.

87. EZ, Vol. II, p. 114.

88. See *Trisimhalē Kaḍa-im saha Vitti*, eJ. A. J. W. Marambe, Kandy, 1926. Ananda S. Kulasuriya cites some material from the *Vit̥tipot* in his "Regional Independence and Elite Change in the Politics of 14th Century Sri Lanka," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1976, pp. 136-55.

population over different parts of the island.⁸⁹ It was probably through a long process that these different linguistic groups came to be absorbed into the two main linguistic groups in the island. There were two kingdoms which were clearly the most prominent among the several diminutive polities which arose during this period. At times there were several polities in the Sinhala-speaking areas. Swept by political winds, the political centre of the main kingdom shifted hastily from place to place till finally it came to rest in the central highlands. The other main kingdom was in Jaffna where immigrations would have added to existing populations to form the heaviest concentration of Tamil-speaking peoples. Though the establishment of a unified realm covering the whole island would have been the aim of many a potentate, it is achieved only in the reign of Parākramabāhu VI (1412-67) who is said to have vanquished Sinhala, Demala, Malala, Kannada and Doluvara foes.⁹⁰

Evidently, this was a period of cosmopolitan culture when fluency in six languages was considered to be a desirable accomplishment by Sinhalese scholars. The hierarch of the Galaturumula fraternity who lived at the end of the thirteenth century or the beginning of the fourteenth century was the first person to be referred to by the title *sadbhāṣāparameśvara*, "the lord of six languages."⁹¹ The reign of Parākramabāhu VI marks a high point in the development of cultural contact between the Sinhala and Tamil linguistic communities. Nannūrutun Minisannas, a Tamil prince who was married to the king's daughter, composed the Sinhala lexicon *Nāmāvaliya*.⁹² It is clear from this scholarly work that the author had attained a high level of proficiency in the Sinhala language. The author of the *Kokila Sandesa* spoke proudly of his ability to preach in both Sinhala and Tamil.⁹³ It was also a period when Tamil poems and songs were popular among the Sinhala community. According to the *Kokila Sandesa*, poems composed in Sinhala, Tamil, Pāli and Sanskrit were recited at the court of Parākramabāhu VI.⁹⁴ Maha Vāligama was described by the same poet as a place where Tamil songs were sung, and his description clearly reveals an appreciation for this genre of music.⁹⁵ The popularity of the cults of Ganapati (Ganeśa) and Pattini was a factor conducive to the expansion of Tamil cultural influences among the Sinhalese. The *Parevi Sandesa*, written in the middle of the fifteenth century by Totagamuvē Rāhula, refers appreciatively to Tamil songs being sung at the temple of

89. See Gananath Obeyesekere, "Gajabāhu and the Gajabāhu Synchronism: An Inquiry into the Relationship between Myth and History," *The Ceylon Journal of the Humanities*, Vol. I, No. 1, 1970, pp. 25-36.

90. *Kokila Sandesa*, ed. W. F. Gunawardhana, Colombo, 1945, v. 251.

91. *Sūryaśataka Sannaya*, ed. M. Piyaratana in *Vilgammula Paṭaṇḍa*, Colombo, 1956, p. 567.

92. *Nāmāvaliya*, ed. H. Jayatilaka, Colombo, 1888, vv. 285-6.

93. *Kokila Sandesa*, v. 286.

94. *Ibid.*, v. 155.

95. *Savan purā pevesana demala gī rasiṇ*. *Ibid.*, v. 55.

Gaṇapati in southern Sri Lanka.⁹⁶ The *Vayantimālaya*, a poetical work on the goddess Pattini which has been assigned to the period of the Kōtte kingdom, was a translation of a Tamil work.⁹⁷

The interest of the Sinhalese literati in Tamil literature persisted during the period of the Kandyan kingdom when a significant number of Tamil works was translated from Tamil into Sinhala. Some of these, like the *Mahāpadarāṅga Jātaka*, were Buddhist works⁹⁸ and point to the prevalence of Tamil literary works of Buddhist inspiration even at this late date. Kirimātiyāvē, the scholar responsible for some of the translations made during this period, speaks of his knowledge of several South Indian scripts.⁹⁹ South Indian scripts were used at times even to write the Sinhala language.¹⁰⁰ The Grantha and Tamil scripts were used by some leading figures among the Sinhalese officials in the Kandyan kingdom even in their signatures.¹⁰¹

The Sinhala consciousness persisted during this period, particularly among certain sections of the literati, as is evident from works like the *Pūjāvaliya* and the *Cūlavamsa*. However, unlike in certain earlier periods, the Sinhala ideology does not appear to have been propagated by the state, and it does not seem to have even received persistent support from kings. Some instances have been cited by certain scholars as pointing to the influence of the Sinhala consciousness. The death of Parākramabāhu VI was followed by a struggle for power, and when Prince Sapumal, the governor of the northern regions, captured power and ascended the throne, he faced an uprising in the southern part of the kingdom. Paranavitana has suggested that this uprising, which is referred to as *Simhalasamge* in the Dādigama inscription,¹⁰² and as *Simhalaperali* in the *Rājāvaliya*,¹⁰³ was "an upsurge of national sentiment" amongst the Sinhalese against a ruler of Malayali extraction.¹⁰⁴ However, this appears to be too sweeping a conclusion to draw from the name giving to the uprising. More recently, Somaratne has suggested that it was a rebellion organized by the supporters of Vīraparākramabāhu whom Sapumal deposed.¹⁰⁵ Vīraparākramabāhu

96. *Parēvi Sandesa*, ed. Tangallē Siri Sunandāsabha, Colombo, 1902, v. 140.

97. Puñcibandāra Sannasgala, *Siṃhala Sāhitya Vaṃṣaya*, Colombo, 1964, p. 286.

98. *Ibid.*, pp. 382 ff.

99. *Ibid.*, p. 347.

100. See A. H. Sunder Raman, "Four Telugu Manuscripts in the Colombo Museum Library," *Ceylon Literary Register*, Vol. III, No. 5, 1933, pp. 193-8.

101. There are several instances of the nobility using the Tamil and Grantha scripts or a combination of these and the Sinhala script in their signatures. See, for instance, the signature of Dumbara Rājakarunā Mudiyanse in documents dated in the years 1688 and 1714 of the śaka era (National Archives Documents Nos. 5/63/67 - 3 and 12)

102. *EZ*, Vol. III, p. 280.

103. *Rājāvaliya*, ed. B. Gunasekara, Colombo, 1953, p. 49.

104. S. Paranavitana, "The Kotte Kingdom up to 1505," *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon*, Vol. I, Pt. 2, 1960, p. 679.

105. G. P. V. Somaratne, *The Political History of the Kingdom of Kotte*, Nugegoda, 1975, pp. 142-8.

was a prince of Tamil descent, being the son of Prince Minisannas, but he had been chosen as the successor by Parākramabāhu VI. Clearer evidence of expression of Sinhala consciousness and antipathy towards the Nāyakkar rulers of Kandy is to be found in the *Kirala Sandesa* and the *Vaḍuga Hatana* cited by Sannasgala and Dharmadasa.¹⁰⁶ These two works were written by a supporter of Āhālēpola, a contender to the throne, after the last Nāyakkar king had been captured by the British. In these two works the author attacks the last king for his false beliefs and calls him a "villainous, wicked and heretical eunuch of a Tamil." Obviously, this attack on the king was designed to justify Āhālēpola's betrayal of the king and his reasonable dealings with the British. Dharmadasa argues that this expression of "Sinhala Buddhist" sentiments was not an isolated incident and that there was similar "ideological motivation" behind previous instances of opposition to Nāyakkar rule. However, it is difficult to agree that the evidence he cites is adequate for such a conclusion. Dharmadasa cites two previous instances of opposition to Nāyakkar rulers. The first was when the last Sinhala king decided to designate his brother-in-law, a Nāyakkar prince, as his successor. Some nobles supported the claims of Prince Unambuve, a son of the king by a Sinhalese lady who was not of *ksatriya* status. However, ritual status turned out to be the decisive criterion, and even the leading courtier who supported Unambuve's claims, later accepted office under the Nāyakkar king.¹⁰⁷ In the second instance, a section of the nobility plotted to kill Kīrtti Śrī Rājasimha, who is described in one source as "a Tamil heretic." Though it could be argued that such a description reflects the presence of a "Sinhala-Buddhist" consciousness, it is noteworthy that the work in which this description occurs was written not during the period of Nāyakkar rule but in the reign of Queen Victoria when, as will be seen later, an altogether different intellectual milieu had come into being. It is also significant that the leaders of the plot could not decide on a Sinhala noble to replace the Nāyakkar king, and were attempting to win the throne for a Thai prince.

Rebellions led by sections of the nobility were not uncommon occurrences even when Sinhala kings were on the throne. On the other hand, it is significant that a small band of Nāyakkars from South India did manage to remain on the throne of Kandy for almost a century and the Sinhala consciousness could not unite the nobility to depose them. During this epoch the Sinhala consciousness did not possess the class character of an earlier epoch. It may be also suggested that cultural cosmopolitanism would have contributed to the weakening of the Sinhala consciousness and that the feudal ethos would have further diminished its

106. Sannasgala, *op. cit.*, pp. 466-8, 529-31; K. N. O. Dharmadasa, "The Sinhala-Buddhist Identity and the Nayakkar Dynasty in the Politics of the Kandyan Kingdom," *Collective Identities, Nationalisms and Protest in Modern Sri Lanka* ed. M. Roberts, Colombo, 1979, pp. 99-128.

107. L. S. Dewaraja, *A Study of the Political, Administrative and Social Structure of the Kandyan Kingdom of Ceylon, 1707-1760*, Colombo, 1972, pp. 81-2.

influence. Unlike the ruling class of the Anurādhapura kingdom, the Kandyan nobility did not possess a powerful unifying ideology strengthened by myths. The feudal ideology of the Kandyan kingdom emphasised "noble" (*radala*) status to such an extent that in effect the *radala* constituted a sub-caste. However, the *radala* nobility was a group whose unity was severely undermined by factional rivalry. In this atmosphere of intense rivalry only such a person could be king whose ritual status placed him well above the *radala*. The failure of Unambuve and the choice of the Thai prince highlight this situation. The success of the Nāyakkars in maintaining their position was due as much to the divisions among the nobility as to the fact that they were the only *ksatriyas* in the island. Apart from the ideology of status, the other major ideological influence was Buddhism. All Nāyakkars had to, at least overtly, declare adherence to the Buddhist faith. Thus it is evident that the decisive criteria of the legitimacy of power had been derived from principles related to ritual status and religious affiliation rather than membership of the Sinhala group. Owing to a combination of factors, the ideology of ritual status gained such an influential position in the last century of the period of the Kandyan kingdom that in effect it disqualified members of the Sinhala group from assuming kingship.

III

It was during the period of colonial rule that the Sinhala consciousness underwent a radical transformation and began to assume its current form. In developing their group consciousness the social classes created by colonial rule drew as much on European thought as on their own past traditions. The period during which the modern Sinhala consciousness evolved witnessed the rise into prominence of racialist theories in Europe. These theories were particularly influential in the study of Asian languages and history. William Jones' lecture on the structural affinities between Indian and European languages, published in 1788, marked the beginning of a new trend of thought in both Asia and Europe. Racial theories followed closely on the heels of theories of linguistic affinity, and the relationship between languages was explained as reflecting the common ancestry and common blood of the speakers of those languages. In 1819 Friedrich Schlegel used the term "Aryan" to designate the group of people whose languages were thus structurally related.¹⁰³ The new racial theory which spoke of a common origin of the non-Semitic peoples of Europe and India had many enthusiastic supporters. Hegel was one of them. Hegel hailed the theory of the affinity of the European languages with Sanskrit, referring to it as "the great discovery (*die grosse Entdeckung*) in history" comparable to the discovery of a continent. It revealed, he stated, the historic relationship between the German and Indian peoples. For

103. Poliakov, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

Hegel, "the dispersion of these peoples, starting from Asia, and their distinct evolution beginning with the same ancestry," were "irrefutable facts (*unwidersprechliches Faktum*)."¹⁰⁹

If the Aryan theory found an influential supporter in Hegel, in Max Müller it found its most effective propagandist. In his writings Müller used the term "Aryan race" very often, and some of his research efforts were directed towards locating "the cradle of our race" and the identification of languages classifiable within the Aryan group. His career spanned more than half a century, and his standing as one of the foremost scholars in Oriental languages added authority to his views. Müller considered the affinity between languages to be indicative of the origin of the speakers of those languages from a common racial "stock." It was his view that the same blood flowed in the veins of both the Englishmen and the Bengalis,¹¹⁰ and in his later writings he described himself as "the person mainly responsible for the use of the term Aryan in the sense of Indo-European."¹¹¹ Racialist thought owed as much to ethnology as it did to comparative philology, and contemporaries of Müller like Knox and Gobineau were propounding a theory of "the white races."¹¹² By about 1875, as Maine observed in his Rede Lecture, a new theory of race, derived primarily from the researches on philology, had come into being.

In the later years of his career Müller did have some misgivings about the use of the term "Aryan race." "To me an ethnologist who speaks of Aryan race, Aryan blood, Aryan eyes and Aryan hair, is as great a sinner as a linguist who speaks of a dolichocephalic dictionary or a brachycephalic grammar," he wrote in his *Biography of Words* published in 1888. "Aryan, in scientific language, is utterly inapplicable to race," he further stated. "It means language and nothing but language; and if we speak of Aryan race at all, we should know that it means no more than x+Aryan speech."¹¹³ While this passage reveals Müller's strong reaction to the confusion resulting from the use of common terms by philologists and ethnologists, it is worth noting that the last conditional clause somewhat diminishes the emphatic ring of the preceding statement. In fact, Müller continued to use the term race, and the very essay in which these passages occur was devoted to a search for what he termed "the cradle of our race."¹¹⁴ He was not very precise about the use of the term and he did not specify what exactly he meant when he said that race was "x + speech." Those who had been influenced by Müller's earlier views were even less inclined to avoiding

109. G. W. F. Hegel, *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, ed. J. Hoffmeister, in *Sämtliche Werke*, Band XVIII, Hamburg, 1955, p. 163.

110. Quoted by T. H. Huxley, "The Aryan Question" in *Man's Place in Nature and Other Essays*, London, 1901, p. 281, n.l.

111. Max Müller, *Essays*, Leipzig, Vol. II, 1879, p. 333.

112. Poliakov, *op. cit.*, pp. 232-8.

113. Max Müller, *Biography of Words and the Home of the Aryans*, London, 1888, pp. 120-1.

114. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

confusion between race and language. The theory of the Aryan race was by this time too well established to be shaken by such a statement. Müller's later work cited above did not undermine the race theory, and, on the other hand, it contributed to the popularity of the mystical search for "the original home" of the Aryans, and the "study" of their expansion which seems to have been conceived in terms evocative of the expansion of the political power and the languages of European states in more recent times.¹¹⁵

No traces of the influence of the Aryan theory are to be found in William Knighton's *The History of Ceylon*, published in 1845, or Charles Pridham's *An Historical, Political and Statistical Account of Ceylon and its Dependencies*, published in 1849. Knighton referred to the similarities between the inhabitants of India and Sri Lanka which he thought pointed to immigrations from the neighbouring subcontinent.¹¹⁶ It was Pridham's conjecture that the population of the island represented a fusion of immigrants from India and from China or Siam.¹¹⁷

B. C. Clough who compiled the first Sinhala-English Dictionary, published in parts in 1821 and 1830, was the first writer to present the view that the Sinhala language was derived from Sanskrit.¹¹⁸ But this view was not easily accepted by some exponents of the Aryan theory. Christian Lassen, whose influential work *Indisches Alterthumskunde* was published in 1847, distinguished Sinhala from the Aryan languages of the North Indian peoples (*die Arischen Inder*) and listed it with the South Indian languages.¹¹⁹ James de Alwis used the introduction to his edition of the *Sidath Sangarawa*, published in 1852, to present a view which, though basically similar to Clough's, took a position different from Clough on the nature of the relationship between Sanskrit and Sinhala. De Alwis was aware of the researches of William Jones and Franz Bopp. He argued that Sinhala shared a common origin with Sanskrit; it was not, however, a dialect of Sanskrit. De Alwis' hesitant presentation of his argument reveals that his views were not clearly formed at this time:

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 Malayalim in the Southern family...the Singhalese

115. See *ibid.*, pp. 91-3.

116. William Knighton, *The History of Ceylon*, London, 1845, pp. 2-4.

117. C. Pridham, *An Historical, and Statistical Account of Ceylon and its Dependencies*, London, 1849, pp. 20-2.

118. B. C. Clough, *A Dictionary of the English and Sinhalese, and Sinhalese and English Languages*, republished as *Sinhalese - English Dictionary*, Colombo, 1892, p. viii.

119. Christian Lassen, *Indisches Alterthumskunde* London, 1847, pp. 362-3.

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.¹²⁰

In his work published in 1859, James Emerson Tennent was more inclined to agree with Lassen, and spoke of "unequivocal proof" of the affinity of Sinhala with "the group of languages still in use in the Deccan; Tamil, Telingu and Malayalim," adding, however, that Sinhala appeared to have borrowed terms pertaining to religion from Pāli and those pertaining to science and art from Sanskrit.¹²¹

The years that followed saw the publication of two major works both of which wielded a deep influence on the evolution of the Sinhala consciousness. In 1861 Müller published his *Lectures on the Science of Language* and in this work he declared that "careful and minute comparison" had enabled him "to class the idioms spoken in Iceland and Ceylon as cognate dialects of the Aryan family of languages."¹²² While Müller's verdict wielded a decisive influence over the Sri Lankan literati, Caldwell's study of the comparative grammar of South Indian languages was certainly another major factor behind the hardening of opinion around the Aryan theory. In his work published in 1856 Caldwell presented a theory which was both a counter and a complement to the Aryan theory. Caldwell used the term Dravidian to designate what he termed "a family of languages," and this was the first time that the term had been used in this sense. According to Caldwell, the Dravidian "family" included six "cultivated dialects" (Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, Canarese, Tulu, Kadagu) and six "uncultivated dialects."¹²³ It was also Caldwell's opinion that there was "no direct affinity" between Sinhala and Tamil.¹²⁴

De Alwis' essay of 1866 on the origin of the Sinhala language reflects the new climate of opinion that had set in. Not only does he refer to "the Aryan invasions" in this essay, thereby presenting what was to become a popular interpretation of the Vijaya myth, but also he seeks to prove, citing both Caldwell and Müller, that Sinhala belonged to "the Arian or Northern family, as contradistinguished from Dravidian, or the Southern class of languages."¹²⁵ Like many who were influenced by Müller's theories, he was not very careful about making distinctions between race and

120. James de Alwis, *The Sidath Sangarawa, A Grammar of the Sinhalese Language*, Colombo, 1852, p. xlvii.

121. James Emerson Tennent, *Ceylon, an Account of the Island: Physical, Historical and Topographical*, London, 1859, p. 328.

122. Max Müller, *The Science of Language*, 1861, republished, London, 1890, p. 60.

123. Robert Caldwell, *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or the South Indian Family of Languages*, 1856, 6th edition, Madras, 1956, pp. 3-6.

124. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

125. James de Alwis, "On the Origin of the Sinhalese Language," *Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (JCBRAS)*, Vol. IV, No. 13, 1865/6, p. 143.

language. "Though the complexion of the Sinhalese presents different shades," he wrote, "the 'copper colour' is that which prevails over the rest, and this it would seem is the colour of the Aryan race, so much honoured by Manu (ch. iv, sutra 130) when he declared it an offence to pass over even the shadow of the copper-coloured man."¹²⁶ Thus, at a time when the Aryan theory was gaining general acceptance in Europe, de Alwis was claiming Aryan status not only for the Sinhala language, but also for the speakers of that language.

The Aryan theory provided a section of the colonial peoples of South Asia with a prestigious "pedigree": it elevated them to the rank of the kinsmen of their rulers, even though the relationship was a distant and tenuous one. The term *Ārya* had great appeal also because of its previous religious associations. In Sinhala the term *caturāryasatyaya* denoted "the four noble truths" of Buddhism. *Ārya-astāṅgikamārga* denoted "the eightfold path" of spiritual advancement and *āriyapuggalā* were individuals known for spiritual attainments. In the *Cūlavamsa* the term *Ariya* had been used to denote a group of people, but it is remarkable that in this instance it denoted people who were clearly distinguished from the Sinhalese. In its description of the reign of Bhuvanekabāhu I (1272-1284), the chronicle distinguishes the *Ariya* mercenaries from the Sinhala soldiers.¹²⁷ No Sinhalese kings have been referred to as *Ariya* and, interestingly enough, it was the dynasty which ruled over the Tamil kingdom in Jaffna who called themselves *Ārya Cakravarti* or "Arya emperors." It is an irony of history that in later times it was the Sinhalese who came to be associated with the term *Arya* and were, as such, distinguished from the Tamil speakers.

The classification of the Sinhala language in the Aryan group received the support of several influential writers including Childers, Goldschmidt, and Kuhn.¹²⁸ Meanwhile, as in Europe, in Sri Lanka, too, the exponents of racial theories received strong support from physical anthropology. M.M. Kunte's lecture on Ceylon, delivered in 1879, was one of the most important sources of support. "There are, properly speaking, representatives of only two races in Ceylon—Aryans and Tamilians, the former being divided into descendants of Indian and Western Aryans," Kunte declared, adding that he had discovered that "the formation of the forehead, the cheek-bones, the chin, the mouth and the lips of the Tamilians are (sic)

126. *Ibid.*, pp. 150-1.

127. *Cv.* 90. 16-30.

128. R. C. Childers, "Notes on the Sinhalese Language: No 1: On the Formation of the Plural of Neuter Nouns; No. 2; Proofs of the Sanskrit Origin of Sinhalese," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. VII, 1874/5, pp. 35-48; Vol. VIII, 1875/6, pp. 131-55; Paul Goldschmidt, *Report on the Inscriptions Found in the North-Central Province and the Hambantota District*, Sessional Paper No. 24, Colombo, 1875; Ernst Kuhn, "Origin and Language of the Inhabitants of Ceylon," *Orientalist*, Vol. II, 1865/6, pp. 112-7, republished in *Ceylon Literary Register*, Vol. II, 1932, pp. 489-96.

distinctly different from those of the Ceylonese Aryans."¹²⁹ C.F. and P.B. Sarasin identified three principal "well distinguishable" races in Sri Lanka: the Sinhalese, the Tamil and the Veddas, and they believed that the Tamils were more closely related to the Veddas than the Sinhalese.¹³⁰ Rudolph Virchow, too, tended to agree that there were three races in Sri Lanka. He considered "the Sinhalese race" to be the result of a mixture of Vedda elements and immigrants from India. There were resemblances between these two groups, but they were both distinct from the Tamils. Though the Sinhalese were "a mixed race," there was no doubt that "the Sinhalese face" was "an importation from the Aryan provinces of the Indian continent."¹³¹ These theorists disagreed on the position of the Vedda group and its relationship with the other two groups they had identified, but the views of Kunte and Virchow added strength to the opinion that the Sinhalese were either Aryans or "a mixed race" derived from the fusion of the Aryans and the aboriginal inhabitants in the island. Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, linguistic groups were being given new definitions in terms of physical characteristics which were supposed to be specific to those groups. The Sinhala and Tamil identities acquired thereby a racial dimension.

These new theories were not easily admitted into the history books. A. E. Blazé's *A History of Ceylon for Schools*, published in 1900, does not show their influence. However, there is evidence from about the end of the nineteenth century that these theories were gaining wide popularity. In December 1897, a magazine called *Buddhist* carried an article entitled "The Aryan Sinhalese." A booklet called *Aryan Sinhalese Names* was published in 1899. In 1910 A. E. R. Ratnaweera founded the magazine named *The Aryan*. If history books had reservations about the Aryan theory at the beginning of the century, they had begun to overcome these reservations by the 1920s. Blazé's book was revised, though with obvious hesitation, to accommodate the new theory, and the mythical founder of the Sinhala kingdom was introduced as "believed to be of Aryan race."¹³² H. W. Codrington, whose *Short History of Ceylon*, was published in 1926, accepted the Aryan origin of the Sinhalese, but ventured to suggest that their "original Aryan blood" had been very much diluted through inter-marriage: "Vijaya's followers espoused Pandyan women and it seems probable that in course of time their descendants married with the people of the country on whom they imposed their language. Further dilution

129. M. M. Kunte, *Lecture on Ceylon*, Bombay, 1880, p. 9.

130. C. F. and P. B. Sarasin, "Outlines of Two Years' Scientific Researches in Ceylon," *JCBRAS*, Vol. IX, 1886, pp. 289-305.

131. R. Virchow, "The Veddas of Ceylon, and their Relation to the Neighbouring Tribes," *JCBRAS*, Vol. IX, 1886, p. 490. See also Virchow's "Ethnological Studies on the Sinhalese Race," translated by W. R. Kynsey and J. D. Macdonald as "Professor Virchow's Ethnological Studies on the Sinhalese Race," *JCBRAS*, Vol. IX, 1886, pp. 267-88.

132. L. E. Blazé, *A History of Ceylon for Schools*, 6th ed, Colombo, 1931, p. 9.

of the original Aryan blood has undoubtedly taken place in later ages, with the result that, though the Sinhalese language is of North Indian origin, the social system is that of the south."¹³³

A few writers expressed their reservations about this trend of thought that was becoming predominant. "Whether the Sinhalese language is a language with an Aryan structure and an Aryan glossary, or a language with a Dravidian structure with an Aryan glossary has divided scholars, and must await a thorough philological investigation," Ponnambalam Arunachalam observed in 1907.¹³⁴ W. F. Gunawardhana was more forthright in his criticism. In a lecture delivered at Ananda College on September 28, 1918, he presented the view that in grammatical structure Sinhalese was Dravidian though its vocabulary was mainly Aryan.¹³⁵ In a paper entitled "The Aryan Question in Relation to India," published in 1921, he further developed this view. He pointed out that it was under Max Müller's influence that the Sinhalese claims to membership of the Aryan race had been put forward. While reiterating his earlier views about the affinity between Sinhala and Dravidian languages, he tried to argue that the Sinhalese were "a Dravidian race slightly modified by a Mongoloid strain and an Aryan wash."¹³⁶ It is noteworthy that while Gunawardhana questioned the classification of the Sinhalese as Aryans, his arguments were based on the concept of the Aryan and Dravidian racial categories. His views provoked a lengthy "refutation" by C. A. Wijesinha who quoted Müller, Kunte and Havell to conclude that the Sinhalese "have hitherto been classified as an Aryan race, and will therefore continue to be classified as Aryan."¹³⁷ In *The Early History of Ceylon* published in 1932, G. C. Mendis also made an attempt to correct this line of thinking by pointing out that Aryan and Dravidian were not racial categories but merely groups of languages.¹³⁸ Coming as it did from a person who had studied in Germany in the period of the rise of Nazism, it was indeed a remarkable contribution. Unfortunately, his views lacked clarity; Mendis himself confused language with race, speaking of "the Sinhalese race" in the same page and of "Tamil blood" in the second edition of this work.¹³⁹ From about the 1920s racialist writings in Sinhala take a vehemently anti-Tamil stance, and they select the Dutthagamānī - Elāra episode for special treatment. V. B. Vatthu-

133. H. W. Codrington, *A Short History of Ceylon*, London, 1926, p. 10.

134. Ponnambalam Arunachalam, "Population: the Island's Races, Religions, Languages, Castes and Customs" in *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*, ed. Arnold Wright, Colombo, 1907, p. 333.

135. W. F. Gunawardhana, *The Origin of the Sinhalese Language*, text of lecture delivered at Ananda College, Colombo, 1918.

136. W. F. Gunawardhana, "The Aryan Question in Relation to India," *JCBRAS*, Vol. XXVIII, 1921, pp. 12-60.

137. C. A. Wijesinha, *The Sinhalese Aryans*, Colombo, 1922, p. 110.

138. G. C. Mendis, *The Early History of Ceylon*, Calcutta, 1932, pp. 15-6.

139. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

hamy's *Dutugāmuṇu - Elāra Mahāyuddha Kathālanākāraya* was one of the first works of this genre. This poem, published in 1923, reveals an intense antipathy towards the Tamils. This was to become a prominent ingredient in the Sinhala ideology of the following period.¹⁴⁰

If in earlier historical epochs the Buddhist identity reflected a cosmopolitan outlook and extended beyond political boundaries to include coreligionists in different kingdoms, in the twentieth century a new term, "Sinhalese Buddhist," comes into use to denote a group of people in the island who are distinguished from the Sinhalese of the other faiths. Anagarika Dharmapala was probably the first person to use the term. He inaugurated the publication of the newspaper *Siṃhala Baudhdhaya* in 1906. One of the points emphasised by Dharmapala was the need for a leadership, both among the religieus and the laity, to direct "the ignorant, helpless Sinhalese Buddhists."¹⁴¹ The portrayal of "the Sinhalese Buddhists" as an underprivileged group had a certain basis in fact in that, under colonial rule, governmental patronage had favoured Christians, particularly those converted to the Anglican faith. The need to struggle for "the legitimate rights of the Sinhalese Buddhists" was to become an essential element of the Sinhalese Buddhist ideology. And, since this group was the largest in the island, the leadership that Dharmapala looked for was not hard to find, particularly after universal suffrage was introduced to Sri Lanka in 1931.

In the context of the socio-economic transformations taking place under colonial rule, the Sinhala consciousness found it possible to overcome some of the limitations which prevented its expansion in its previous historical forms. Though the Sinhala identity had been "extended" earlier to cover "the inhabitants of the island," it is during this period that it entered the consciousness of the masses, bringing together that section of the population belonging to the Sinhala linguistic group through a consciousness overarching their local, regional and caste identities. This consciousness developed among this group of people an appreciation of their common culture. It infused the nationalist movement with certain anti-imperialist potentialities. However, in its varied aspects the Sinhala ideology does not lend itself to being categorized simply as an anti-imperialist ideology. In fact, it was also used to serve a contradictory purpose. Dharmapala extolled the past greatness of the Sinhala Aryans "who had never been conquered," but what he demanded was "self-government under British protection."¹⁴² On the other hand, there were certain propagandists of the Sinhala

140. V. B. Vathuhamy, *Dutugāmuṇu Elāra Mahāyuddha Kathālanākāraya*, Co'ombo, 1923.

141. See Anagarika Dharmapala, *Return to Righteousness, A Collection of Speeches, Essays and Letters of Anagrika Dharmapala*, ed W. Guruge, Colombo, 1965, pp. 519-21.

142. Dharmapala., *op. cit.*, p. 517.

ideology like Ratnaweera, the editor of the *The Aryan*, who took great pains to dissociate the Sinhalese from the militant nationalists of Bengal and stated: "It is a consolation to see....that we are governed by an Aryan nation."¹⁴³ It is not surprising that such an ideology did not produce an anti-imperialist movement of mass proportions.

However, it is necessary to emphasise that the weakness of the nationalist movement cannot be explained only in terms of the ideology, and that the ideology was itself a reflection of the nature and the limitations of the socio-economic changes that had taken place. While British rule undermined certain aspects of precolonial social relations, it did not set in motion that process observable in European history, which swept aside precapitalist institutions and "lumped together into one nation" different social groups, subordinating all other identities to the unifying national ideology of the bourgeoisie. That European process derived its motive power from a particular combination of an industry, an industrial bourgeoisie and a centralizing market.¹⁴⁴ The nascent bourgeoisie of the period of colonial rule in Sri Lanka was a weak bourgeoisie, nurtured by and dependent on foreign capital. Its weakness was reflected in the poverty of its culture, especially in its failure to develop a unifying national ideology, overarching the identities derived from previous historical epochs. The dominant ideas of the culture of this class represented a combination of ideas borrowed from contemporary Europe and from earlier epochs of the island's history. Several ideas borrowed from contemporary Europe came from the ideological armoury of racialism than from the rich stocks of humanism. Even Buddhist leaders like Dharmapala are found using the phraseology of anti-Semitism which was then becoming increasingly evident in a genre of European writings. In his contribution to the *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon* published in 1908, Dharmapala speaks of "the glorious inheritance of Aryan ancestors, uncontaminated by Semitic and savage ideas."¹⁴⁵ In this new intellectual milieu the Sinhala ideology inherited from the past came to be refashioned and infused with racialism.

The Sinhala ideology has reflected the interests and aspirations of the element which has served as its main propagandists, i. e. the Sinhala-educated literati, and this has made it difficult for one to recognize its primary social function of mobilizing the Sinhala masses under the leadership of the Sinhala bourgeoisie. In addition to this "unifying" role, the Sinhala ideology has also played a "divisive" role. While it has been antithetical to the development of a broad nationalist movement and has thereby contributed to its weakness, in its present form, the Sinhala ideology is a

143. The Editorial, *The Aryan*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1910.

144. See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, Moscow, 1958, Vol. I, p. 38.

145. Dharmapala, *op. cit.*, p. 487.

factor which divides the bourgeoisie. It has confronted the bourgeoisie with the critical problem of maintaining their class unity while resorting, for the purpose of mass mobilization, to the propagation of an ideology which is disintegrative in its effect on that very class and its state. However, the crisis represented by the conflict of identities is not limited to the bourgeoisie and has affected other classes as well. The Sinhala ideology and other similar group ideologies have left a deep and debilitating impact on particularly the working class by dividing it sharply and by hampering the development of its class consciousness.

IV

It will have been evident from the preceding survey that the nature of the Sinhala identity as well as the relationship of the group brought together by this identity with other groupings based on religion, ritual status and language varied in different periods of history. Thus all these groupings presented historically variable, intersecting social divisions. Identities based on ritual status and religion can be traced back to the most ancient historical documents available in Sri Lanka. The Sinhala identity in its earliest historical form bears the imprint of its origin in the period of state formation, in association with the ruling dynasty and its immediate social base. It is only by about the twelfth century that the Sinhala grouping could have been considered identical with the linguistic grouping. The relationship between the Sinhala and the Buddhist identities was even more complex. There is a close association between the two identities, but at no period do they appear to have coincided exactly to denote the self-same group of people.¹⁴⁶ As Jacobsen observed with reference to Sumerian history, religion and language provided the bases for distinct identities, but it is difficult to group these distinct features within one convenient "bundle."¹⁴⁷

Our survey highlights the role that the literati, the group which occupies the misty regions on the boundaries of class divisions, played in identity formation in ancient as well as modern times. In selecting and reformulating myths and in giving them literary form, the literati played a significant role in the development of Sinhala ideology in ancient society. They fashioned a version of history in conformity with the dominant ideology of their society. This intellectual role was not one that was independent of, or unrelated to, the structure of power. Though it may be rash to generalize about the entire literati on the basis of the evidence in the Pāli chronicles, it can be confidently asserted that these

146. Gananath Obeyesekere presents a different view about the relationship between the Sinhala and the Buddhist identities. See "The Vicissitudes of the Sinhala-Buddhist Identity through Time and Change" in *Collective Identities, Nationalisms and Protest in Modern Sri Lanka*, pp. 279-313.

147. T. Jacobsen, "Political Institutions, Literature and Religion," *City Inevitable*, ed. C. H. Kraeling and R. M. Adams, Chicago, 1960, pp. 64-5.

chronicles reveal the important role of at least a section of the literati in the formulation and propagation of a state ideology in ancient and early medieval society.

The history of the development of the Sinhala ideology since the nineteenth century reveals the formidable role that the study of "dead languages" and "the remote past" has played in shaping mass consciousness and thereby in the moulding of the present. It was the study of Oriental languages, particularly Sanskrit, and of comparative philology that initiated in the nineteenth century a trend which came to wield such a decisive influence on contemporary mass consciousness. In Sri Lanka the discipline of history was initially a reluctant draftee, but it is now firmly entrenched within this ideological framework. The depth of the impact of this ideological current becomes evident even from a cursory review of recent research on Sri Lanka in those disciplines categorized as the humanities and the social sciences which perform a crucial social function in either validating or refashioning current ideology. 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.¹⁴³

R. A. L. H. GUNAWARDANA

143. This is a revised version of a paper presented to the Seminar on Nationality Problems in Sri Lanka, organized by the Social Scientists' Association and held on 22 December 1979. The author is grateful to the participants in this Seminar and to Dr. Ralph Pieris for comments.