

The Vēlaikkārar in Medieval South India and Sri Lanka

1. *The Vēlaikkārar under the Cōlas and their Feudatories in the Tamil Country.*

The formation of the groups of professional fighting-men was one of the characteristic features of medieval Tamil society, especially during the period of Cōla rule. The rise and expansion of the Cōla power during the tenth and eleventh centuries was accompanied by the development of a large, powerful and complex army consisting of many groups and communities of warriors. The most notable among them were the Vēlaikkārar, the Akampaṭis, the Kaikkōlar and the Vanniyar who played an important role in politics and society until the Vijayanagara conquest of the Tamil country around 1370. A study of the military system and tradition developed by the Cōlas, about which very little is known, may throw some new light on the political and social formations in medieval South India.

The Vēlaikkārar were perhaps the most important military group in South India during the period of Cōla rule. They were spread over almost the entire area that came under Cōla administration. Several inscriptions mention the names of Vēlaikkāra regiments which were maintained by the imperial Cōlas. They were also employed by feudatory princes, village assemblies and other public institutions. Although the South Indian inscriptions refer to some of their activities they hardly give any information about the recruitment, maintenance and organization of the Vēlaikkāra armies.

The characteristic feature of the Vēlaikkārar, as could be gleaned from inscriptions, was their high sense of loyalty. They banded themselves together to protect their master in the battlefield and off it even at the risk of their own lives and made oaths to the effect that they would not survive their master if he happens to die.¹ Their practices anticipated in a way the Jauhar of the medieval Rajputs. Medieval commentators and modern historians have explained the expression Vēlaikkārar in different ways. The commentary on the *Sivachana-bhū shanam* describes the Vēlaikkārar as "the servants of the King who chastise those who prove traitorous to him."² But, this is very vague and does not accord fully with the evidence from inscriptions. The explanation of Periyavachchanpillai, the commentator of Nammālvar's *Tirumōli* that the Pū Vēlaikkārar are "those who, when they see the King being without flower (garlands) at the time he ought to wear them, had vowed to stab themselves and die"³ appears to be based on a proper understanding of some of the traditions which regulated the activities and behaviour of this group.

1. The *Madras Tamil Lexicon (MTL)* defines the Vēlaikkārar as "devoted servants who hold themselves responsible for a particular service to their king at stated hours and vow to stab themselves to death if they fail in that." (MTL, VI, 3844).
2. S. Paranavitana, "The Polonnaruwa Inscription of Vijayabāhu I", *Epigraphia Indica (EI)*, Vol. XVIII, p. 334.
3. *ibid.*

In the opinion of Gopinatha Rao they were not mercenaries but "persons who had pledged themselves to do certain duties, failing which, they would voluntarily undergo certain penalties, which in most cases was death."⁴ Krishna Sastri felt that the Vēlaikkārar included all working classes.⁵ These views, based on slender evidence, do not adequately explain the meaning of the expression Vēlaikkārar. The notion that the Vēlaikkārar included all the working classes arises from the confusion between Vēlaikkārar and Vēlaikkārar. The suggestion that they were volunteers enlisted on particular occasions (*velai*) is also unacceptable. As Nilakanta Sastri contends the Vēlaikkārar were the most permanent and dependable body of troops in the service of Kings, feudatory princes and some public institutions.⁶ Their inscriptions reveal that they were bound together by common interests and their designation implies that they were ever ready to defend their master and his cause with their lives when occasion (*velai*) arose. In their functions they were similar to the military groups called *Tennavan āpatutavikal* in the service of the Pāṇḍyas⁷.

The Vēlaikkārar had certain distinctive features and differed from the Kaikkōlar, Akampāṭis and others in many ways. They were not a community in the sense that the others were. They were, like the *Perumpaṭai*⁸ of the thirteenth century Pāṇḍyas, a composite group consisting of several communities and ethno-linguistic groups. Another striking feature about the Vēlaikkārar is the corporate basis of their organization and activities as in the case of the Ayyāvoḷe and other mercantile bodies. They functioned as a sort of a military guild—the *sreṇi-bala* of Indian tradition. Apart from "household warriors" armed retainers and other types of soldiers there were even members of the Imperial and feudatory families who had the designation Vēlaikkārar. Therefore, the problems concerning the nature and origins of the Vēlaikkārar are much more complicated than has hitherto been recognized.

The Vēlaikkārar in the royal Armies of the Cōlas

The Tanjore inscriptions of Rājarāja I and Rajendra I refer to the names of about seventy regiments of soldiers. Among the most prominent of these regiments were those of the Vēlaikkārar. The Vēlaikkārar regiments mentioned in the Tanjore inscriptions may be listed in the following order:

1. Peruntanattu Valaṅkai Vēlaikkārappaṭaikaḷ
2. Aḷakiya Cōlatterinda Valaṅkai Vēlaikkārappaṭaikaḷ.
3. Aridurga langana terinta Valaṅkai Vēlaikkārap paṭaikaḷ
4. Candra parākrama terinta Valaṅkai Vēlaikkārar.
5. Kṣatriya śikhāmaṇi terinta Valaṅkai Vēlaikkārar.
6. Mūrtta Vikramābharaṇa terinta Valaṅkai Vēlaikkārar
7. Nittavinōta terinta Valaṅkai Vēlaikkārar

4. *ibid.*

5. *Annual Report on Epigraphy (ARE)*, Madras, 1913, p. 102.

6. K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Cōlas*, Second Edition, (Revised) 1955, p. 454.

7. According to Marco Polo the latter always kept near the king and had great authority in the Kingdom. K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Pāṇḍya Kingdom* 2nd edition, Madras, 1972, p. 173.

8. An inscription of Jaṭāvarman Sundara Pāṇḍya states that the *Perumpaṭai* consisted of *Vanniya Vaṭṭam*, Canarese, Telugus, Āriyar, Kallar, Villikal (bowmen) and Uṭankūṭṭam (Sahavāsīs?). *South Indian Temple Inscriptions (SITI)*, II, p. 662.

8. Rājaganṭhirava terinta Valaṅkai Vēlaikkārar
9. Rājārājā terinta Valaṅkai Vēlaikkārar
10. Rājavinōta terinta Valaṅkai Vēlaikkārar
11. Vikramābharāṇa terinta Valaṅkai Vēlaikkārar.⁹

These regiments, like many others, were named after the titles or epithets of the Cōla king and each of the names, in the opinion of Nilakanta Sastri, clearly commemorated the time when the regiment was constituted and it possibly recalled, to the minds of contemporaries, the exact occasion for it.¹⁰ As the inscriptions recording some of the transactions of these regiments are from Tanjore it may be assumed that most of them were maintained at the Cōla capital so that they could be sent on any military expedition whenever the government desired.

Vēlaikkārar and Feudatory Princes

Some of the Cōla feudatories are also known to have maintained Vēlaikkāra forces. The Malayamān chiefs who exercised authority over *milātu*¹¹ otherwise called Jananātha Valanātu from the centres of Kīlīyūr and Āṭaiyūr maintained a number of Vēlaikkārar as a sort of "household warriors." The Vēlaikkārar served some of these chieftains as body-guards. Several inscriptions from the Oppilāmaṅśvara temple at Arakaṅtanallūr in the Tirukkōyilūr Taluk of South Arcot district record the oath of loyalty taken by members of the Vēlaikkāra group to the Malayamān chief called Saṅṅukkuṭātān.¹² The Vēlaikkāra folk who belonged to him pledged to be loyal to him and to perish with him in the event of his death. Some inscriptions provide the interesting information that the Malayamāns themselves were Vēlaikkārar. An inscription which records a compact between Iraiyūran Saṅṅukkuṭātān and others asserts that Cēṭiyārāya Malayamān and Kōvalrāya Malayamān Palavāyudha Vallabha of Kīlīyūr were Vēlaikkārar.¹³

Inscriptions show that the Vēlaikkārar had close connections with some of the chiefs who had the title Vanniyanāyan (the chief of the Vanniyar). As the Malayamān family of chiefs who had a claim to the title Vanniya(r)nāyan¹⁴ had maintained Vēlaikkāra forces and because some of the Malayamāns are known to have been Vēlaikkārar it may be inferred that some of the Vēlaikkārar were Vanniyar. In fact an epigraph from Tirukkōvalūr refers to a certain Vēlaikkāri as Vanninācci.¹⁵ Vanniyanāyan, the masculine form of Vanninācci, could therefore be a Vēlaikkāran.

The Bāṇas and Kāṭavas are two other feudatory families within the Cōla empire who were closely connected with the Vēlaikkārar. The Bāṇas who

9. T. V. Mahalingam, *South Indian Polity*, Madras, 1955, p. 258.

10. *The Cōlas*, p. 454.

11. *Milātu* appears to the abbreviated form of Malayamānātu, which was subject to the authority of the Malayamān chiefs.

12. *ARE*, 1934/5: Nos. 122, 126, 136, 142, 144, 147, 153-159.

13. *ARE*, 1934/5: Nos. 145, 153, 202.

14. Rājārāja Cēṭiyārāyan and Rājārāja Kōvalrāyan are two Malayamāns of Kīlīyūr who had the title Vanniyanāyan. Another Malayamān, Narasimhavarman Karikāla Cōlan of Āṭaiyūr had the title *Vanniyaṁkkaṅnāyan*. see—*ARE*, 1934/5, pp. 61-63; Nos. 125, 186, 188, 190; *ARE*, 1937/8, No. 381 and *South Indian Inscriptions (SII)* VII, Nos. 117, 120.

15. *ARE*, 1934/5, No. 122.

exercised authority over the division called Perumpānappāṭi and were connected to the Cōla dynasty by ties of marriage, appear to have had the designation Vēlaikkāra. The chief queen of Rājarāja III (1216-1253) who was a Bāna princess is described in the Cōla *praśasti* as a Vēlaikkāri who was the ornament of the Bāna lineage.¹⁶ An inscription from Udayendram¹⁷ which records the gifts made by a Kāṭava chief Ponnān Irāman to a Vaiṣṇava temple states that he was one among those who led the Vēlaikkārar.¹⁸ The Kāṭavas, who probably had a claim for the epithet Vanniarnāyan, apparently had Vēlaikkāra warriors serving under them.

South Indian inscriptions contain references to other groups of Vēlaikkārar such as (1) Tiruccirampala Vēlaikkārar (2) Tiruccūla Vēlaikkārar (3) Kaḷḷa Vēlaikkārar (4) Rākṣasa Vēlaikkārar and (5) Tācca Vēlaikkārar.¹⁹ It would appear that the first two among these groups, as suggested by their names, were employed as guards of Saivite temples. The precise functions of the last three groups are not clear and at present we can only speculate about them.

Our examination of the evidence relating to the Vēlaikkārar shows that they were essentially a group of fighting-men who were employed on a permanent basis by kings, feudatory princes and public institutions. They served in the royal armies in large numbers and were sometimes employed as bodyguards of kings and chieftains. They were distinguished by their fighting quality and high sense of loyalty and were bound together by common interests and ideals and possibly belonged to a school of militarism which was considered to be of an exceptional quality.

The Vēlaikkārar who provide the best example of a *srenibala* or "military guild" described in ancient Indian literature were a composite group consisting of many ethno-linguistic groups and communities or castes which were functionally affiliated. The Vēlaikkāra regiments, like the mercantile group of Ayyāvoḷe, functioned on a corporate basis and regulated their own affairs by means of primary assemblies which promoted a sense of unity and fellowship among the many groups of diverse origins which were included within such regiments.

The designation Vēlaikkāra did not signify any position of rank in society or administration. Members of royal and feudatory families and commoners were among the Vēlaikkārar. But a sense of honour and prestige appear to have been always attached to this designation. The care taken by court officials to mention the expression Vēlaikkāra along with the epithets and titles

16. That portion of Rājarāja's *praśasti* which refers to his chief queen runs:

Ula kutaiya perumālutan okka muṭi kavittā! Irājarājan piriya Vēlaikkāri. Irājarājan tiruttāli perṟūtaiya! . urai ciraṇta taniyānai uṇānai perṟūtaiya! puvaniyēl tanatānaiyir purakkum—antappurap-perumā! . Vānar-kula-nīla-viḷakku. See The Cōlas, p. 439 ff. 13.

It would appear from the evidence of this passage that Rājarāja's chief queen was associated formally with him in the government of the Cōla kingdom.

17. In the Gudiyattam taluk of North Arcot District.

18. *...Irājātittanaṭiyār Vēlaikkāra nāyakan Ceyvārkaḷil Irāman Ponnānāna Kāṭavarāyanēn. . .* *SIL*, V, p. 85, No. 230.

19. T. V. Mahalingam *South Indian Polity* (Madras, 1955), pp. 259-60; *ARE* 1914, No. 368 of 1914; *ARE*, 1921, No. 393 of 1921.

signifying great honour and distinction in their description of some members of imperial and feudatory families shows that it was considered an honour even on the part of the royalty to bear the epithet Vēlaikkāra. Traditionally chivalry and martial prowess are the virtues of the ruling classes and the kings and princes who claimed to be Kṣatriya would have naturally considered it honourable to be the followers of a school of militarism which was distinctive in some ways. Some of the Cōḷa generals were feudatory princes and those who commanded Vēlaikkāra forces had a claim to the epithet Vēlaikkāra by virtue of being the leaders of such troops. It was presumably on that basis that some of the Malayamāns and Bāṇas came to be known as Vēlaikkārar.

The expression Vēlaikkāra was not restricted to denote groups of fighting-men only and there is some evidence to suggest that it had a wider connotation. The fact that the chief queen of Rājarāja and some other ladies had the epithet Vēlaikkāri shows that in course of time the word Vēlaikkāra had acquired an additional meaning and that it could have been used in a social sense as well.

The Vēlaikkārar seem to have lost much of their importance in the South Indian military system after the decline of the Cōḷa power. References to them in the inscription of the later Pāṇḍyas, whose sway extended over almost the entire Tamil country during the late thirteenth century, are relatively few. The group called *Tennavan āpattutavikal* who were some times referred to also as *munai etirmōkār* became the most important and dependable section of the army. Yet, the Vēlaikkārar were not entirely discarded by the Pāṇḍya rulers and there is some evidence to suggest that some Vēlaikkārar were placed in positions of power and high-rank under them. An inscription of Māravarmaṇ Sundara Pāṇḍya I (1215-1236) contains the expressions:

*Ceṅkōl Vēlaikkāran²⁰ Senāpati teṅṅanāyakattukkullitta
tantirattukku amainta karaṇavarōm.²¹*

These could be rendered as "We, the Karaṇavar attached to the army under the command of the Vēlaikkāra general in the service of the king." It is thus clear that Sundara Pāṇḍya had a Vēlaikkāra general. There is no means, presently, of ascertaining whether there were other such generals.

As the Vēlaikkārar are not referred to in inscriptions or literary works that could be dated to any period after the thirteenth century it may be inferred that they were not in military service any longer. Their disappearance was in all probability bound up with the dissolution of the military establishments in the Tamil Kingdoms after the Vijayanagara conquest during the late fourteenth century. That dissolution was part of the larger process of social and political changes which resulted from Vijayanagara rule. With the disappearance of the indigenous dynasties and families of feudatory princes, the military communities like the Akampāṭis, Kaikkōḷar and Vanniyaṅkar who had served them were disengaged from military service. The new rulers relied on Canarese and Telugu armies for the consolidation of their authority in the Tamil country. The indigenous professional military communities who were disengaged from service gradually became cultivators and weavers and their names came to acquire different connotations by becoming the names of hereditary occupational

20. What is meant in this context is obviously Vēlaikkāran and not Vēlaikkāran (workman).

21. *SITI*, II, p. 816.

castes. The groups of professional fighting-men of indigenous origin could not exist after the Vijayanagara conquest and the Vēlaikkārar naturally shared the fate of the other military groups.

2. *The Vēlaikkārar in Sri Lanka*

South Indian warriors were brought to the island in considerable numbers by Sinhalese kings to serve in their armies. Warriors were an important element among the Dravidians settled at important towns and military outposts especially since the seventh century. They were partly responsible for the introduction of Tamil terms relating to military and administrative affairs in Sri Lanka. The Dravidian element in the army became still greater after the Cōla conquest and the sources relating to the history of the Polonnaruva period contain many references to Dravidians employed in the royal armies.

The most prominent among the Dravidian military groups in the island were the Vēlaikkārar. It is probable that there were some Vēlaikkārar among the *meykāppār*, "body-guards", of kings in the ninth and tenth centuries. The Vēlaikkā mentioned in an inscription of Kassapa IV (898-914)²² could possibly have been one of them. Yet it cannot be assumed that there were regiments consisting entirely of Vēlaikkārar before the Cōla conquest. The casual references to the Vēlaikkārar in traditional history are from the reign of Vijayabāhu I (1055-1110) onwards. Yet, it may be assumed that the Vēlaikkāra armies had come to the island in the wake of Cōla conquest and continued to remain in it even after the end of Cōla rule. In the sources relating to the Polonnaruva Period there is no reference to the recruitment of mercenaries from South India until the end of the twelfth century. It may, therefore, be inferred that the Tamil and other Dravidian military communities who served the Sinhalese rulers of the Polonnaruva Period were the descendants of earlier settlers. A fragmentary inscription from Gal Oya near Polonnaruva which could be assigned to the period of Cōla rule on palaeographical considerations provides some evidence for the presence of Vēlaikkārar in the island during the eleventh century. It mentions of a certain Cāraṇan who was a Vēlaikkāran.²³

The Cōla practice of naming Vēlaikkāra regiments after the names, titles or epithets of rulers was adopted in Sri Lanka. The name of a regiment called after the title of a Sinhalese ruler—*Vikkirama Calāmekatterinta Valāṅkai Vēlaikkārar*—is recorded in the Tamil inscription from Paḷamōṭṭai.²⁴

The Vēlaikkāra Armies of the Kings of Polonnaruva

The Vēlaikkārar were to be found in the island for a period of about three centuries. The epigraphic records which refer to them belong to the period between the tenth and the mid-thirteenth centuries. It would appear that the Vēlaikkārar formed an important unit in the army of the Sinhalese kings. The Pāli chronicle refers to them for the first time in connection with the reign of

22. The Vēlaikkā mentioned in the Colombo Museum Pillar Inscription of Kassapa was a body-guard, *Epigraphia Zeylanica (EZ)*, III, p. 276.

23. *SII*, IV, No. 1398.

24. They are believed to have been named after Vikramabāhu but the inscription, in the opinion of Paranavitana, was set up during the reign of Vijayabāhu I (1055-1110). See S. Paranavitana, "A Tamil Slab Inscription from Palamottai," *EZ*, IV, No. 24.

Vijayabāhu I (1055-1110). They are said to have revolted against Vijayabāhu I when he organized an expedition against the Cōlas. The rebellion proved to be a formidable one and the projected invasion against the Cōlas had to be abandoned. The rebels killed the two generals of the king, burnt down the royal palace in Polonnaruva and took the king's sister, Mittā, and her three sons captive. The king, who for a time lost authority over the capital, withdrew to Dakkhinadesa and later with the aid of troops supplied by his brother, Vīrabāhu, defeated the rebels and regained control over the capital.²⁵ The magnitude of the success attained by the rebels in the early phase of the rebellion presupposes that the Vēlaikkāra army at Polonnaruva consisted of a large number of soldiers.

The Vēlaikkārar at Polonnaruva, unlike those of South India, were of a rebellious disposition and could not always be relied on. They revolted once again, in the time of Gajabāhu II. They were instigated against this king by his two rival uncles, Kīrtti Śrī Megha and Śrī Vallabha who held sway over Dakkhinadesa and Rohana respectively. The rebellion coincided with the invasion of Rājaraṭa organized by the two cousins of Gajabāhu. Gajabāhu, however, proved himself strong enough to deal with his enemies and frustrate their designs. The Vēlaikkāra rebellion was suppressed and the invading armies led by the two brothers were defeated and forced to retreat.²⁶

Parākramabāhu I also had Vēlaikkāra troops in his armies. In his reign a Vēlaikkāra regiment was posted at Koṭṭiyāram. When a major part of the king's army had been sent to Rohana with a view to subjugating that principality, the Vēlaikkārar and the Sinhalese and Kerala troops revolted against him in the hope of putting an end to his rule in Rājaraṭa.²⁷ Parākramabāhu, however, defeated them and dispossessed them of their landholdings.

There is some evidence to suggest that the Vēlaikkārar continued to play an important role in political and military affairs in the island up to the mid-thirteenth century. A short and undated inscription from Rankot Vihāra in Polonnaruva provides the interesting information that a Vēlaikkāran called Cētarayan was serving a certain Jayabāhudevar. The latter, as suggested by his name-ending devar, was a person of royal or princely rank. The initial portion of the inscription which runs: *īlam elu nūṛṛukkātam yerīncu koṅṭaruḷiya Ceyapākutēvar nilal Vēlaikkāran*²⁸ implies that Cētarayan was a Vēlaikkāran serving under Jayabāhudevar and that a conquest of the island was effected either by Jayabāhudevar himself or by the Vēlaikkāran on behalf of his master.

The historical value of the evidence from this inscription depends to a large extent on the identification of Jayabāhudevar mentioned therein. Only two persons who had the name Jayabāhu are mentioned in traditional history relating to the Polonnaruva Period. One was the younger brother and immediate successor of Vijayabāhu I²⁹ and the other was the associate of Māgha of Kalinga who conquered Polonnaruva in A.D. 1215. It is difficult to identify Jayabāhu

25. *Cūlavamsa* (Cv), 60:25-44.

26. Cv, 63: 24-29.

27. Cv, 74: 44-49.

28. A. Velupillai, *Ceylon Tamil Inscriptions*, pt. I (Peradeniya, 1971), p. 26.

29. As Vikramabāhu seized power in Polonnaruva around 1112 it may be assumed that Jayabāhu lost the throne after having reigned for one year.

(1110-1111) mentioned in the inscription with the brother and successor of Vijayabāhu because the claim of the conquest of Īlam made in the inscription is totally inconsistent with the account of Jayabāhu as found in traditional history. According to the *Cūlavam̄sa* and other chronicles Vijayabāhu's brother who enjoyed a short spell of power was dislodged from the throne by Vikramabāhu, the son of Vijayabāhu. Vikramabāhu is said to have been uniformly successful in all his engagements against Jayabāhu and his supporters. From the account of Jayabāhu in traditional history one gains the impression that Jayabāhu was a weak ruler and he is not known to have gained any military victory over any rival.

The palaeography of the inscription is another important consideration against identifying the person referred to in it as the younger brother of Vijayabāhu I. The palaeography of the record represents a more advanced stage of development than that of the slab-inscription of the Vēlaikkāras from Polonnaruva and resembles that of the Paṇḍuvasnuvara inscription of Nissankamalla.³⁰ It may therefore be suggested that Jayabāhutēvar of the present record is different from and later than Jayabāhu (tevar) who had a brief spell of power over Rajaraṭa during the second decade of the twelfth century.

Jayabāhutēvar of our inscription was a conqueror of princely rank who had a Vēlaikkāran among his principal supporters. Māgha, who had as his associate Jayabāhu, conquered and dominated a part of the island mainly with the aid of Tāmil and Keraḷa troops.³¹ The conqueror referred to in the inscription therefore may be identified as Jayabāhu, the associate of Māgha.³² The precise nature of the relationship between Māgha and Jayabāhu is not known but the evidence from the *Cūlavam̄sa* suggests that Jayabāhu was in some way associated with Māgha in the conquest and administration of Rajaraṭa. Both are said to have maintained fortifications at several localities and held sway over Rajaraṭa for a long time.³³

The Vēlaikkāra Cētarāyan was not an ordinary soldier but was a dignitary of high rank. He was placed in charge of the administration of a large territorial division called Mahamaṇḍala.³⁴ He was in all probability a military leader and he may be considered as one of the key figures of the time of Māgha. It could also be inferred that the Vēlaikkārar were included among those who served Māgha's cause in the island.

30. The formation of the letters *ka*, *ta* and *na* in the inscription from Rankot Viḥāra differs considerably from that of the same letters in the slab inscription of the Vēlaikkāras from Polonnaruva.

31. *Cv*, 80: 61, 70, 76.

32. Jayabāhu is referred to as the associate of Māgha at two instances in the *Cūlavam̄sa*. *Cv*, 82: 27; 83:15.

33. The *Cv*. gives the following account of these two rulers:

"At that time the Damiḷa kings, Māghinda and Jayabāhu had set up fortifications in the town of Pulatthi (nagara), famous for its wealth, in the village of Koṭṭhasāra, in Gangātaṭāka, in the village of Kākālaya, in the Paḍi district and in Kurundi, in Mānāmatta, in Mahātittā and in the harbour of Mannāra, at the landing-place of Pulacceri and in Vālikagāma, in the vast Gona district and in the Gonusu district, at Madhupādapatittā and at Sūkaratittā: at these and other places, and committing all kinds of violent deeds, had stayed there a long time. Their forty and four thousand soldiers, Damiḷas and Keralas came . . . to Pulatthinagara . . ." *Cv* 83: 15-21.

34. The correct reading is Mahamaṇḍala and not Mahāmaṇḍala as the sign representing the vowel ā is not to be found in the inscription. Mahamaṇḍala may be identified as the territorial division of that name mentioned in the Īripinniyāva pillar inscription. See *EZ*, I, p. 164.

The Vēlaikkāra Army in Polonnaruva: Composition and Organization.

The undated slab inscription of the Vēlaikkārar from Polonnaruva³⁵ furnishes important details—details which are not to be found elsewhere—about the nature and composition of the Vēlaikkāra regiments. This neatly engraved and well preserved inscription, which is one of the longest among the Tamil inscriptions in the island, records an undertaking by the Vēlaikkārar resident in Polonnaruva to protect and maintain the Tooth Relic temple on the request of Mahāthera Mugalan and some ministers of state. The inscription could be assigned to the period that followed the reign of Vijayabāhu I.

The inscription provides the interesting information that the Vēlaikkāra army was a large and composite one divided into several units called *paṭai*. It included within its fold the communities of *Itāṅkai*, *Valaṅkai*, *Siṟutanam*, *Pillaikaltanam*, *Parivārakkontam*, *Vaṭukar* and *Malayālar*.³⁶ The formation of these groups was not on a uniform basis. The last two are ethno-linguistic groups consisting exclusively of Telugus and Kēraḷas. The fact that the Telugus and Kēraḷas were considered as two exclusive groups within the Vēlaikkāra army presupposes that all other groups which together formed a large proportion of the army belonged to another ethno-linguistic group—the Tamils.

The *Itāṅkai* and *Valaṅkai* are the two broad divisions into which Tamil society was divided in medieval times. Each of the two divisions included a number professional or caste groups. The Vēlaikkāra army in Polonnaruva, unlike the ones known from the Cōḷa inscriptions from Tanjore, included recruits from both divisions, the *Itāṅkai* and the *Valaṅkai*.³⁷ The precise nature of *Siṟutanam* and *Pillaikaltanam* are not clear. A third such group, the *Peruntanam* is mentioned in South Indian inscriptions. *Siṟutanam* has sometimes been explained as minor treasury.³⁸ *Siṟutanam* and *Peruntanam* have been confused at times with *Siṟutaram* and *Peruntaram* which presumably denoted the lower and higher grades of officials respectively in the Cōḷa administration. *Siṟutanam*, however, seems to have a military significance as is suggested by such expressions as *Siṟutanattu Valaṅkai Vēlaikkārappaṭaikaḷ*, “Vēlaikkārar of the *Valaṅkai* division belonging to the *Siṟutanam*,” and *Siṟutanattu Vaṭukar kāvalar*, “The Telugu guards belonging to the *Siṟutanam*.”³⁹ *Siṟutanam* was a group of soldiers

35. The inscription which is one of the most important historical documents of the Polonnaruva period corroborates the evidence from the *Cv.* regarding some of Vijayabāhu’s achievements. It refers to his military victories, his purification of the three *Nikāyas*, and the restoration of the Buddhist *Sangha*. Besides, it mentions that Vijayabāhu was crowned with the consent of the *Sangha*.

See D. M. de Z. Wickremasinghe, “Polonnaruva Slab Inscription of the Vēlaikkāras” *EZ*, II: No. 40.

36. S. Parnavitana, “The Polonnaruva Inscription” of Vijayabāhu I”, *EI*, XVIII, pp. 330-339.

SII, IV: 1393.

37. The South Indian inscriptions which have been brought to light so far do not contain any reference to Vēlaikkārar of the *Itāṅkai* division.

The *Valaṅkai* and *Itāṅkai* meaning “The right arm bloc” and “The left arm bloc” are the two broad divisions into which Tamil Society was divided in medieval times. This classification which excluded Brahmins was in vogue since the period of the Imperial Cōḷas. In Indian symbolism the right is usually regarded as superior to the left and “The left arm bloc” tried to emulate the Brahmins in order to assert their superiority over “The right arm bloc”. Although some inscriptions give long mythological accounts of the origins of these divisions the historical and sociological factors which led to their differentiation are not clear.

38. *MTL*, pt. I, p. 1460; *SII*, II, Introduction p. 9, *EI*, 18, p. 336.

39. *EI*, XVIII, p. 336.

whose homogeneity was perhaps derived from a common social origin and common interests. The Pillaikaḷtanam must have been a military group the members of which were recruited from a section of the community of agriculturists. The Parivārakkontam probably consisted of foot-soldiers armed with spears (*kuntam*).⁴⁰

The expressions *Mūṇṇukaittiruvēlaikkāran* and *Mātantiram* have been interpreted by scholars in different ways and a misunderstanding of these have led to serious misconceptions about the nature and religious affiliations of the Vēlaikkārar. As regards the first of these terms Wickramasinghe observes:

“Whether the term *mūṇṇukai* refers to the triple principle, namely Civa-Cakti-Anu or Pati-pacu-pāca corresponding to the trika of Cashmere Caivism or it is only an epithet of the Vēlaikkāras due possibly to their army being composed of three wings we are unable to say.”⁴¹

Of the two alternative explanations of the word *Mūṇṇukai* given by Wickramasinghe one suggests a religious significance while the other suggests a military connection. Nilakanta Sastri suggests that the expression *Mūṇṇukai* denotes the three of the four traditional divisions of the army after the chariots went out of use.⁴² Paranavitana observes that the *mūṇṇukai* denotes the Mahātantra, the Vaḷaṇceyar and the Nagarattār who, in his opinion, formed the three divisions of the Vēlaikkāra army.⁴³ This view, however, has to be rejected for reasons that will be seen later. The explanation that the *mūṇṇukai* refers to the triple principle of Saivism also is not a convincing one and it may be assumed, in the absence of another equally plausible explanation, that the *mūṇṇukai* signified the three wings of the army: elephants, cavalry and infantry.

The Army called the *Mūṇṇukai Mahāsēnai* was one of the most important among the Cōla armies. It had played a decisive role in the Cōla conquest of neighbouring kingdoms including Sri Lanka.⁴⁴ There is some evidence to suggest a connection between the Vēlaikkārar and the *Mūṇṇukai Mahāsēnai*. A certain Atikaraṇan Cāraṇan is referred to as a *mūṇṇukaittiruvēlaikkāran* in an inscription from Gal-Oya near Polonnaruva.⁴⁵ In this instance the *mūṇṇukai* seems to be an abbreviation of *Mūṇṇukai Mahāsēnai*. The expression *Mūṇṇukait tiruvēlaikkāran*, therefore could be a reference to a Vēlaikkāran who belonged to an army called *mūṇṇukai mahāsēnai*, “The Great Army of the three wings”.

It is necessary to consider the meaning of the term *Mātantiram* in order to ascertain whether there could have been a connection between the Vēlaikkārar

40. It has been suggested that the *Parivārakkontam* may stand for the spearmen in the king's procession. Army divisions called *Parivārattar* are mentioned in a number of South Indian Inscriptions. *EZ*, II, p. 254; *SII*, II, Introduction, p. 9.

41. *EZ*, II, p. 251.

42. K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, “Vijayabāhu I, The Liberator of Ceylon,” *JRAS(CB)*, *NS*, IV 1954, p. 69.

43. *EI*, XVIII, p. 334.

44. The *praśasti* in an inscription of this army from Tiruvāliśvaram records the extensive conquests made by the “many thousands of armed soldiers belonging to the Great Army of the three arms.” The *praśasti* claims that they destroyed the fortifications at Mātōṭṭam. On the basis of its contents this inscription could be assigned to the period of Cōla expansion under Rājaraḷa I and Rājendra I. *The Cōlas*, p. 455

45. *SII*, IV, No. 1398

and the Mahāsenai. The word *Mahātantiram* which occurs in our inscription has been explained in different ways by three leading scholars. Wickremasinghe believed that it was the name of a Saivite text and on account of that belief he assumed that the Vēlaikkārar were Saivites.

Commenting on this inscription Paronavitana, however, observes:

"It seems from our inscription as if the three divisions or 'hands' into which the Vēlaikkārar were divided consisted of the Mahātantram, the Valaṅceyar and the Nagarattār. Out of these terms Mahātantra is not found elsewhere and its sense is not clear. Probably it was used here with a Buddhist significance."⁴⁶

In the opinion of Nilakanta Sastri, Mahātantiram has a military significance and probably denoted a certain school of militarism in South India.⁴⁷ The expression, of course, had a military significance but one cannot accept the view that it denoted any school of militarism. The explanations of the word as given by all these scholars are wrong and in coming to hasty conclusions and by not taking into account all available epigraphic and literary evidence relating to the use of the word *tantiram* they have slipped into error. In Indian literary and epigraphic usage *tant(i)ram* means among several other things, an army unit⁴⁸ and this meaning of the word is the most appropriate one when the word occurs in a document which records the activities of an army. The expression Mahātantiram formed by the addition of the prefix *Mahā* to *tantiram* would mean "The Great Army."⁴⁹ Mahātantiram and Mahāsenar are therefore synonymous and could have been used interchangeably to denote "The Great Army".

The Vēlaikkārar, like the Ayyāvoḷe, seem to have been organised on a corporate basis. All members of the army were summoned for a meeting and the Vēlaikkārar who met in assembly made certain resolutions and entered into an agreement concerning the Tooth Relic Temple with the Mahāthera Mugalan and the ministers of state. They resemble the Ayyāvoḷe in another respect. They were a confederate body comprising several sub-groups each of which seems to have had a certain degree of homogeneity. In military affairs, as in trade, several groups which were separated from one another by social origins, beliefs and practices but following more or less the same profession were brought under a common organization. Despite the lack of homogeneity a strong sense of fellowship and solidarity seem to have been developed largely by means of primary assemblies in the deliberations of which all members were responsive and equal partners. In its organization and activities the Vēlaikkāra army at Polonnaruva is reminiscent of the *śrenis*, "guilds", described in the *Dharmaśāstras*. The Vēlaikkārar of the Mahātantiram may be regarded as an example of the *śrenibala* mentioned in ancient works like the *Arthaśāstra*, *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana*.⁵⁰

46. *EI*, XVIII, p. 334

47. *JRAS (CB)*, NS, IV, 1954, p. 71.

48. *MTL*, III, p. 1747; Monier Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, (Oxford, 1899), p. 362.

49. The Sanskrit prefix *Mahā* becomes *mā* or *makā* in Tamil usage. The Sanskrit expression *Mahātantram* has been Tamilised as *mātantiram* in our inscription.

50. Kauṭilya refers to a class of Kṣatriya *śrenis* which lived upon trade and war in the following manner: "*Kāmojja-Saurāstra Kṣatriya-Śreniyādayo Vārttā-Śastropajivinaḥ.*" In the opinion of R. C. Majumdar this passage refers to a class of guilds which followed some industrial arts, and carried on the military profession at one and the same time. The *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana* seem to refer to such guilds as *śrenibala* and *Sayodha Śreni* respectively. See R. C. Majumdar, *Corporate Life on Ancient India*, (Calcutta, 1920), p. 30.

The Vēlaikkārar and the Mercantile Communities

The Vēlaikkārar of Polonnaruva were in some way associated with the mercantile communities settled in that town. When a meeting of the Mahātantiram was summoned the two mercantile communities called the Vaḷaṅceyar and the Nakarattār were also invited to the meeting. The portion of the inscription which refers to the connection between the Vēlaikkārar and these two communities runs:

Mātantirattōm kūṭi eṅkalukku mūtātaikalāyulla Vaḷaṅceyaraiyum eṅkalōtu kūṭivarum Nakarattār ullittōraiikum kūṭti....

“We of the Mahātantiram having assembled and invited (for the assembly) the Vaḷaṅceyar who are our ancestors and others including the Nakarattār who always accompany us....”

The expressions *eṅkaḷ mūtātaikalāyulla* and *eṅkalōtu kūṭivarum*, which have been used to denote the relationship which the Vēlaikkārar had with the Vaḷaṅceyar and the Nakarattār, are vague and ambiguous in their meanings. The expression Mūtātaikaḷ which literally means “ancestors” has been translated as ‘elders,’⁵¹ ‘leaders’⁵² and ‘grandfathers’⁵³ respectively by Wickremasinghe, Paranavitana and Nilakanta Sastri. Commenting on Paranavitana’s translation of this expression Nilakanta Sastri aptly observes:

“The translation of Mūtādaigaḷ into ‘leaders’ is not accurate; the word literally means ‘grandfathers’, and what is meant cannot be physical descent when it is one corporation claiming this relation to another, and must imply some kind of spiritual or constitutional relation.”⁵⁴

As the expressions which denote the relationship between the Vēlaikkārar and the two mercantile communities could be interpreted in different ways, three plausible explanations may be given about their inter-relationship in the light of historical evidence bearing on the connection between military and commercial communities. The first, based on the literal meaning of *Mūtātaikaḷ*, could be, as R.C. Majumdar suggests, that some of the Vēlaikkārar were recruited from the community of Vaḷaṅceyar.⁵⁵ Such an explanation may be justified on the consideration that there were in ancient India certain *śrenis* or guilds which pursued economic as well as military activities. Such institutions are known from the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya⁵⁶ and the Mandasor inscription of Kumāragupta and Bandhuvarman.⁵⁷ But the main argument against this explanation is that the known examples of such *śrenis* are from a period which is many centuries earlier than our inscription. Besides, they are from an area where the Vēlaikkārar and the Vaḷaṅceyar are not known to have existed.

51. *EZ*, II, p. 254

52. *EI*, XVIII, p. 335.

53. *JRAS(CB)*, NS, IV, 1954, p. 70.

54. *Ibid.*

55. *R. C. Majumdar Corporate Life in Ancient India*, Calcutta, 1930. p. 30.

56. “The corporations of warriors (Kshatriya śreni) of Kāmbhoja, and Surāshṭra, and other countries live by agriculture, trade and wielding weapons’. See *Kauṭilya’s Arthaśāstra* trans. by R. Shamasastri, Seventh Edition, Mysore, 1961, p. 407.

57. *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. III, p. 82.

The second explanation is that the Vēlaikkārar who consisted of groups belonging to the Valaṅkai and Iṭaṅkai divisions of society had the Vaḷaṅceyar and the Nagarattār respectively as their leaders.⁵⁸ This explanation appears to be the most plausible one in view of the fact that in medieval Tamil Society in India the Valaṅkai had the Vaḷaṅceyar and the Nānādesis among their leaders while the Nagarattār were among the leaders of the Iṭaṅkai communities.⁵⁹ The Vaḷaṅceyar and the Nagarattār were invited for the meeting of the Vēlaikkārar of the Mahātantiram, presumably, in their capacity as leaders of the Valaṅkai and Iṭaṅkai divisions in that army.⁶⁰

It could also be suggested that the relationship which the Vēlaikkārar had with mercantile communities was a twofold one. While acknowledging the precedence and leadership of the mercantile communities over them in social affairs the Vēlaikkārar could have served the Vēlaṅceyar and other mercantile communities as their mercenaries. It is possible that there were Vēlaikkārar among the mercenaries who were employed by the Ayyāvoḷe. A South Indian inscription which records an agreement between the Malayamān called Saṅṅukutātān and a Vēlaikkāran states that the latter was an *Aṅkakkāran*.⁶¹ The Aṅkakkārar probably served as bodyguards (*meykāppār*) of princes, chieftains and other dignitaries.⁶² The Aṅkakkārar were among the many military groups in the service of the Ayyāvoḷe settled at several localities in the island during the Polonnaruva period.⁶³ Some of the Aṅkakkārar may have been Vēlaikkārar.

The Vēlaikkārar and Religious Institutions

The Vēlaikkārar were sometimes appointed as the trustees or custodians of religious institutions or of endowments made to such institutions. The Paḷamōṭṭai inscription of the 42nd year of Vijayabhū I records that a substantial endowment made by a Brahmin widow to the temple of Ten Kailāsam, otherwise called Vijayarājaiśvaram, at the Brahmin settlement called Vijayarāja Caturvedimaṅkalam at Kantaḷāy was placed under the custody of a Vēlaikkāra regiment known as Vikkīrama Cālāmekatterinta Valaṅkai division.⁶⁴ The endowments to the temple of Ten Kailāsam consisted of a golden crown of the weight of three *kaḷaṅcu*, a golden chain of three *kaḷaṅcu* and one *kaḷaṅcu* of

58. *Imperial Gazetteer of India, XVIII*, pp. 198-199.

59. *Idid*.

60. Commenting on this matter Gopinatha Rao observes:

“The Valaṅjiyar and the Nagarattār . . . apparently occupied a high position in social life as the leaders of the Vēlaikkāras, and are represented by the present Bananjiga and Nagaratta communities of the Kanarese country. It may also be remarked that at the time we are speaking of, they were considered, members of the Mahatantra, i.e. Buddhists. Whatever the Velaikkaras may have been in their religious creed, it is clear from what is stated in the inscription that they included all working classes and were apparently of Indian origin who immigrated into Ceylon with the merchants whom they served *ARE*, 1913, p. 102.

61. *ARE*, 1934-'35, p. 61, No. 203.

62. The word Aṅka(k)kāra which occurs also in Telugu and Kannada inscriptions is some times explained as ‘a soldier or warrior who took a vow to defend his master and fight in the latter’s cause to death’. The element aṅka in aṅkakkāran is the Dravidian form of Anga meaning body or limb and is therefore synonymous with the Tamil word *mei* (body). Aṅkakkārar and Meykāppār may therefore be regarded as two different words by which those who performed the role of bodyguards were referred to.

63. The Inscriptions of the Ayyāvoḷe from Vāhalkada, Padaviya and Vihārahinna make mention of the Aṅkakkārar. *CTI*, pt. I, pp. 53, 55.

64. *EZ*, IV, No. 20.

gold for burning a perpetual lamp. Besides, eight *kaḷaṅcu* of gold were deposited so that the compound interest on it could be used for maintaining a garden in the temple premises. Moreover, thirty five *kaḷaṅcu* were invested for maintaining a group of seven *devadāsīs*. The endowment was to be in the custody of the Vēlaikkārar who also accepted responsibility for administering it.⁶⁵ This arrangement presupposes that the Vēlaikkārar at Kantalāy had a permanent settlement within the locality and were expected to remain there for a long time.⁶⁶ It may be inferred that there was a military outpost at Kantalāy during the reign of Vijayabāhu I.

A more important religious institution which came to be associated with the Vēlaikkārar was the Tooth Relic Temple in Polonnaruva. The Vēlaikkārar became the custodians of this shrine as the result of an agreement between them and the Mahāthera Mugalan, the royal preceptor, and (some of) the ministers of state. The portion of the inscription which records the agreement runs:

“The Mahāthera Mugalan of Utruḷu-mūla, the royal preceptor and⁶⁷ grammarian (*viyārin*) who is endowed with piety, virtuous conduct and (animitable) knowledge of all branches of learning and schools of religious systems, came with the ministers of state, invited us and said, ‘the Tooth Relic Temple should be under your custody.’ Thereupon we, the members of the ‘Great Army’ met together. . . . [In this assembly] we invested the Tooth Relic Temple with the name *mūṅṅu kait tiruvēlaikkāran* *Daḷadāypperumpalli*, and made the declaration that it shall remain as our charitable institution under our custody, and that by appointing one soldier from each regiment of the army with the assignment of one *vēli* of land for each of them as maintenance we shall protect the villages, retainers and property belonging to this shrine as well as those who seek refuge in it even though (thereby) we may suffer loss (of life) or ruin, and that we shall do everything necessary for this (shrine) as long as our lineage exists.”⁶⁸

The foregoing passage sets forth the manner in which the Vēlaikkārar became the custodians of the Tooth Relic Temple. The inscription asserts that the royal preceptor Mugalan and the Ministers of state had invited the Vēlaikkārar and requested them to undertake the responsibility of protecting and maintaining it. The Tooth Relic Temple was richly endowed and was one of the most sacred shrines as it housed the Tooth Relic of the Buddha which came to be regarded as a sort of a palladium of the Sinhalese royalty. The question arises as to why the Vēlaikkārar had to be entrusted with the task of protecting

65. *Ibid.*

66. The expressions *Vikkirama Calāmekatterinta Valaṅkai Vēlaikkāran aram* may imply that the responsibility of administering the endowment was vested collectively with the members of the whole regiment and not with an individual Vēlaikkāran, as in the case of the Tooth Relic Temple. Although the latter was placed under the custody of the Vēlaikkārar of the Great Army it was named Vēlaikkāran *Daḷadāypperumpillai*. The use of the singular form Vēlaikkāran in these expressions does not mean that only a single individual was involved in these arrangements.

67. The word *Vyāriṇi* may be a Tamil form of the word *vyārin* which, in the opinion of Wickremasinghe ‘is probably a derivative from the Sanskrit form *Vyākaraṇin*. The epithet *Vyāriṇi* may imply that Mugalan was an authority on grammatical works. Yet, the Mahāthera of Utruḷumūla cannot be identified with the grammarian Moggalana who was a contemporary of Parākramabāhu I because of the wide time gap that intervened their periods of life.

68. *SII*, IV, No. 1393.

and maintaining it and this cannot be solved unless the date of the events recorded in the inscription could be determined. As seen earlier the inscription is not dated in the regnal years of any monarch. This was presumably because it was issued by the Vēlaikkārar and not by court officials. The inscription must have been set up after the reign of Vijayabāhu I as it refers to him as one who had ruled for fifty-five years and had lived for seventy-three years. Vijayabāhu's long reign, according to the *Cūlavamsa*, was of fifty-five years duration and an inscription set up after the fifty-fifth year of that monarch certainly has to be assigned to a date after his reign.

The agreement between the Mahāthera and the Vēlaikkārar regarding the maintenance and protection of the Tooth Relic Temple in the capital presupposes that there was a growing sense of insecurity created by disturbances and social unrest in the kingdom. Arrangements had to be made not only for the protection of the shrine but also for its maintenance. It may therefore be inferred that the shrine which was previously protected and maintained with royal support had, owing to some reason, lost that support. Events that followed the death of Vijayabāhu I seem to provide, in some measure, the reason why this shrine lost royal support.

On the death of Vijayabāhu his sister, Mittā, her three sons, the ministers and the Sangha met together and decided to consecrate Jayabāhu, the late king's younger brother, as king. The rank of Yuvarāja, to which Vikramabāhu had the strongest claim, was however conferred on Mānābharana, the eldest son of Mittā.⁶⁹ This latter arrangement amounted to a violation of a long-established custom.⁷⁰ Vikramabāhu, fought against it and secured authority over Rajaraṭa after dislodging Jayabāhu and his accomplices from Polonnaruva and ruled for a period of twenty-one years. The Sangha which had earlier connived with others to keep him out of the succession had to suffer under Vikramabāhu. It has also been claimed, recently, that Vikramabāhu had strong leanings towards Hinduism.⁷¹ Under Vikramabāhu Buddhism and its institutions were denied royal support and became the targets of attack. The *Cūlavamsa* gives the following account of the state of Buddhism under this ruler:

“King Vikramabāhu took the maintenance villages which belonged to the Buddha and so forth and gave them to his attendants. In Pulatthinagara he gave over several Vihāras distinguished by (the possession of) relics, to foreign soldiers to live in. Precious stones, pearls and the like, presented by the pious as offerings for the Relic of the Alms-bowl, and for the sacred Tooth Relic, the sandalwood, the aloes, the camphor, the many-images of gold and the like which he took forcibly, he used as it pleased him. Beholding this manifold evil committed against the order and the laity, the ascetics in the eight chief vihāras, looked up to as people worthy of honour, and the Pamsukūlin bhikkhus belonging to the two divisions, were wroth at the matter and thinking it were better to remove themselves from the vicinity of people who like those erring from the faith, wrought in

69. *CV*, 61:1-3.

70. As regards this arrangement the Chronicler states: But to the dignity of Uparāja they appointed the prince called Mānābharana, all thereby quitting the path of former custom. *CV*, 61:4.

71. S. Kiribamune, “Royal consecration in Medieval Sri Lanka”, *The Sri Lanka Journal of South Asian Studies* (Thirunelveli. 1976), pp. 13-15.

this way so much evil against the order, they took the sacred Tooth Relic and the Alms-bowl Relic, betook themselves and settled themselves here and there in places where it pleased them."⁷²

It is thus clear that the Tooth Relic Temple and other Buddhist institutions were disendowed by Vikramabāhu. It was presumably during the early part of his reign that the Tooth Relic Temple was placed under the protection of the Vēlaikkārar on the initiative of the Mahāthera Mugalan and other dignitaries who were concerned about the security of the shrine and its properties. Whether this arrangement was made before or after the shrine was disendowed by Vikramabāhu is not clear. The inscription does not mention anything about the Tooth Relic which is said to have been removed to Rohana when Vikramabāhu was ruling over Rajaraṭa. It could be inferred from the evidence of the inscription of the Vēlaikkāras that Vikramabāhu did not secure unchallenged supremacy over Rajaraṭa and that there were pockets of resistance against his authority.

Each of the soldiers posted by the Vēlaikkārar to protect the temple of the Tooth Relic was assigned a *vēli* of land from the holdings of the "Great-Army". The use of the term *vēli* in connection with the land-holdings of the Velaikkarar is significant. The system of measuring land under the Cōlas was by units called *vēli* and this system had been introduced into the island when it was under Cōla rule. The restoration of Sinhalese rule under Vijayabāhu was followed by a revival of the Sinhalese system of land measurement which was according to sowing capacity. Yet, the Cōla system of land measurement continued until the mid-twelfth century among the Tamil settlements which had originated under Cōla rule. The use of the word *vēli* in the inscription of the Vēlaikkārar may suggest that the lands held by them for maintenance had been granted before the accession of Vijayabāhu. It may also be inferred that the Vēlaikkārar who undertook to protect the Tooth Relic Temple were previously serving in the royal armies.

Another Buddhist institution, a Vihāra at Padaviya, was placed under the protection of the Vēlaikkārar. An undated Sanskrit inscription in Grantha characters, recovered from the architectural remains of a Buddhist monument at Padaviya, which could be assigned to the thirteenth century on palaeographic considerations, records that the general called Lokanātha constructed a Vihāra at Śrīpatigrāma and placed it under the protection of the Vēlaikkārar.⁷³ The form Śrīpatigrāma which occurs also in the Sanskrit inscription on a seal discovered from the architectural remains of a Hindu shrine at Padaviya⁷⁴ seems to be a variant of Padī or Padīnagara by which names Padaviya was referred to in contemporary Sinhalese and Pāli texts.

As this inscription does not mention the name of any ruler but commences with a brief eulogy of Setu Kula it may be assumed that Lokanātha who had caused the Vihāra to be constructed at Śrīpatigrāma had either belonged to the

72. *Cv*, 61:54-61.

73. S. Paranavitana, "A Sanskrit Inscription from Padaviya", *JRAS*(CB), NS, Vol. VIII, pt. 2, pp. 261.-264.

74. The expression *dvijāvāsa Śrīpatigrāma* occurring in this inscription implies that there was a Brahmin settlement at Śrīpatigrāma when the inscription was issued. *Ceylon, Observer*, Nov. 28, 1970, p. 2.

Setu Kula or was an agent or Sāmanta of a ruler of the Setu Kula. The expression Setu Kula occurring in this inscription seems to suggest that the general Lokanātha was in some way connected to the Ārya Cakravarttis.

The Setukula was in all probability a dynasty or family which had either come from a locality called Setu or had close connections with such a locality. There were several localities called Setu in the southern extremity of India. The island of Rāmeśvaram and the reef of sunken rocks connecting the island of Mannar with Rāmeśvaram were called Setu. Among the ruling families of Sri Lanka only the Ārya Cakravarttis of Jaffna had connections with Setu. Traditions recorded in contemporary texts claim that the kings of Jaffna were in the lineage of two Brahmins of Rāmeśvaram who had attained the rank of Sāmantas in the distant past.⁷⁵ The Ārya Cakravarttis had the epithet Setu Kāvalan, "the Guardian of Setu," which they probably inherited from their ancestors—the Ārya cakravarttis of Cevvirukkaināṭu which was a territorial division around Rāmeśvaram in the Pāṇḍya Kingdom.⁷⁶ They used Setu as a benedictory expression on their inscriptions and coins.⁷⁷ The Setu Kula referred to in the Sanskrit inscription from Padaviya may therefore be identified with the Ārya cakravartti family and on the basis of this identification it may be assumed that the general Lokānatha was an associate or agent of either the Pāṇḍya general Arya cakravartti who invaded the island in 1284 or one of his kinsmen who secured power over the kingdom that had emerged in the northern part of the island. Lokanātha could have even become a local chieftain in consequence of the Pāṇḍya invasions. From the evidence of this inscription it may be inferred that there were Vēḷaikkārar in the Pāṇḍya armies that invaded the island during the late thirteenth century.

The construction of a *vihāra* by Lokanātha and the arrangements made by him for its protection and maintenance presupposes that he had a solicitude for the welfare of Buddhism and its institutions. The general Lokanātha and possibly some of the Vēḷaikkārar under his command could have been Buddhists. It could also be surmised that such activities on the part of Lokanātha were undertaken with a view to appease the local Buddhist population. The fact that the *vihāra* constructed by Lokanātha was named after the Vēḷaikkārar and placed under their protection may suggest that there was at Padaviya, as at Kanṭalāy, a military outpost occupied by the Vēḷaikkārar.

In conclusion it may be stated that the Vēḷaikkārar were one of the important groups of Dravidian mercenaries employed in the island during the period between the tenth and fourteenth centuries. As there is evidence to show that some of the Aṅkakkārar, "body-guards," were Vēḷaikkārar it may be assumed that there were Vēḷaikkārar among the Mekāppār or body guards maintained by the Anurādhapura rulers during the tenth century. There must have been only a small number of such warriors in the island before the Cōḷa conquest. Army units consisting entirely of Vēḷaikkārar seem to have been brought to the island only after the Cōḷa conquest. The Vēḷaikkārar were,

75. *Cekarācācēkaramālai* edited by I. C. Irakunātaiyar, Kokkuvil, 1942, *Cirappuppāyiram* V. 2, VV, 76, 86; *Takṣinakkailāsapurāṇam* edited by P. P. Vaithilinka Tecikar, Point Pedro, 1916, *Cirappuppāyiram*.

76. S. Pathmanathan, *The Kingdom of Jaffna* Circa A.D. 1250-1450. Ph.D. Thesis (unpublished). University of London, 1969, pp. 403-405.

77. *ibid.*, pp. 403-407; S. Gnanapragasar, 'The Forgotten Coinage of the Kings of Jaffna', *Ceylon Antiquary*, Vol. pt. V, (IV), p. 179.

perhaps, an important element in the Cōḷa armies maintained at military outposts in various parts of the island during the period of Cōḷa rule and it would appear that they continued to live in the island after the fall of Cōḷa power and subsequently served in the armies of the Sinhalese rulers. Vijayabāhu, Gajabāhu II and Parakramabāhu I are known to have had Velaikkārar in their armies. Besides, the Vēlaikkārar had their settlements at Polonnaruwa, Kanṭalāy, Kōṭṭiyāram and Padaviya. The Vēlaikkāra army at Polonnaruwa which was a large and composite one functioned as a guild or *sreni* and retained all the basic features which were characteristic of the Vēḷalaikkārar in South India.

There were some Vēlaikkārar among the warriors brought by Māgha and later by Ārya Cakravartti in the thirteenth century. Some of the leaders of Vēlaikkāra armies were placed in charge of territorial divisions as in the case of Vēlaikkāran Cētarāyan who became the chief of the division called Mahamaṇḍala. As some of the inscriptions of the Ayyāvoḷe make mention of the Aṅkakkārar some of whom were Vēlaikkārar, the Vēlaikkārar may have been among the mercenary bodies employed by the Dravidian mercantile communities settled in the island. In Sri Lanka, as in South India, the Vēlaikkārar were also employed to protect public institutions, their endowments and trust properties. The epigraphical and literary sources do not refer to the Vēlaikkārar in the island after the thirteenth century and it may be assumed that the political and socio-economic changes that took place in Rajarāṭa during the thirteenth century and later led to the dis-engagement of Vēlaikkārar from active military service as in the Tamil Kingdoms of South India.

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