

TEMPLE SLAVERY IN ANCIENT SRI LANKA

Much of the evidence on the system of servitude in ancient Sri Lanka is associated with Buddhist temples/ monasteries.¹ The aim of this study is to bring together and analyse the records of the system of servitude that prevailed between the first and the eighteenth centuries of this era.² It is essential to focus on such a vast time span in order to obviate problems regarding the paucity of data for some periods, while enabling us to situate the fragmented data for other periods within a broader context.

Terminology

Prior to discussing temple slavery on the island, it is necessary to survey the scholarship on the subject, and the linguistic terms, that connoted unfree statuses in our sources. The most widely used terms in the island's historical sources are *dāsa* and *vahal*. Of these the origin of the term *dāsa* is attributed to an Indian tribe of this name, which was repeatedly conquered by the Aryans and used to perform menial tasks for the conquerors; later the term *dāsa* was used to describe slaves, denoting their subjectivity and the menial duties assigned to them.³

The term *dāsa* appears in both literary and epigraphic sources throughout history starting from about the second century AD⁴ while the term *vahal* occurs only in epigraphic records from the twelfth century AD. D. M. de Z. Wickramasinghe,⁵ reads both *dāsa* and *vahal* as 'serf' in most cases⁶ and in one case he reads *sangundasan* as "monks' servants".⁷ S.Paranavitāna⁸

¹ Buddhist temples were Buddhist religious institutions which accommodated only one or just a handful of residing Buddhist monks whereas Buddhist monasteries or *parivenas* had many residential monks.

² Monarchy, in historic Sri Lanka, ends in 1815 of our era, but our study focuses on an earlier period because it coincided with enthusiastic royal patronage to Buddhist temples, which began to diminish from 1581. For more details cf. L. Lankananda (ed.), *Mandārampurapuvatha*, (Colombo: Anula mudranalaya, 1958) vv.55-71, 86 and also cf. M. Ilangasinghe, 'Kingship and lineage in Buddhist monastic order in Medieval Sri Lanka' *Kalyāni* 2 (1983): 175-176 and L. Devarājah, *The Kandyan kingdom of Sri Lanka 1707-1782* (Colombo: Lakehouse Investment, 1988): 163-154.

³ D. D. Kosambi, *The culture and civilisation of ancient India in historical outline* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965) p. 81, esp. p. 97.

⁴ The earliest occurrence of this term is in the Ilukwewa inscription which informs us of donation of a male and a female slave to a temple. *EZ* 8: 65= *EZ* 6: 124.

⁵ The editor of the Sri Lankan inscriptions published in the first two volumes of *Epigraphia Zeylanica* [*EZ*], (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1904 and 1928, respectively).

⁶ *Dāsa* – 'serf': Eg. *EZ* 1, no. 4: 41-57 (ll. 43-50); no. 7: 75-113; no.15: 182- 190. *vahal*- 'serf': *EZ* 1 no. 14: 176-182; *EZ* 2, no. 17: 98-123.

⁷ *EZ* 1, no. 4, (l. 53): 41-57.

differentiates the two terms and reads *dāsa* as 'serf' while reading *vahal* as 'slave.'⁹

This confusion has emerged either because a variety of unfree statuses were covered by terms such as *dāsa*, or because of the contemporary and religious concerns of these scholars. For instance, when *dāsa/ dāsi* are cited as property of the *sanga* who are not allowed to possess material property including slaves, one may read the term as 'servant' which does not have the connotation of 'property', or perhaps because these scholars considered serf and slave as synonymous: *Saṅgundasan* is read as "monks' servants"¹⁰ while the same scholar (Wickramasinghe) renders *veherdasun* as '*vihāra* serfs'.¹¹ It is also possible that since some of the *veherdasun* cultivated temple land while residing therein the author may have called them '*vihāra* serfs' to distinguish their duties from other *veherdasun* who performed different menial duties for temples. Moreover, the ownership of slaves/ serfs by the temple would have been less embarrassing than citing them as slaves/serfs of monks.

Doubts arise, therefore, as to whether this difference is due to the choice of words by the respective editors owing to religious concerns rather than representing the real status of *dāsa*. Some scholars, working with narrowly defined notions of slavery or political frames of particular periods of history seem to have held contradictory translations of the same terms. For instance, the extreme notion over the meaning of *dāsa* is that there were no slaves but only male and female servants in the island, as held by W. A. de Silva¹² who studied the Sinhalese society as depicted in *Saddharmāṅkārāya* (fourteenth century AD) which refer to *dāsa*. He refers to the account of Nāgā in the *Saddharmāṅkārāya* as an example for a woman serving to pay her debt.¹³ This notion may have sprung from the writer's belief that the term *dāsa* signified just one type of servitors and also from his consideration for the mild treatment to *dāsa* as advocated by the Buddha.¹⁴

In order to arrive at a safe definition of the status of the individuals

⁸ A renowned archaeologist and the editor of the third (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928-1933) and most records in the fourth (Colombo: Dept. of Archaeology, 1943) and fifth (Colombo: Government Press, 1955 [pt. 1] and 1963 [pt. 2]) volumes of *EZ*.

⁹ *Dāsa* – 'serf': Eg. *EZ* 3, no. 27: 260-269; *EZ* vol. 6 (Colombo: Dept. of Archaeology, 1991), no. 8: 39-58. *vahal*- 'slave': Eg. *EZ* 3, no. 11: 149-153; no. 35: 325-331; *EZ* 4, no. 25: 196-212.

¹⁰ *EZ* 1 no. 4 [I. 53]: 41-57.

¹¹ *EZ* 1 no. 7 [A II. 41-42]: 75-113.

¹² Certain sources do not mention what is denoted by the initials of the author.

¹³ W. A. De Silva, 'A contribution to the study of economic and social organization in early times' *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Colombo Branch [JRASCB]* 31. 81 (1928): 73-74.

¹⁴ J. E. Carpenter & T. W. Rhys Davids, *The Dīgha-Nikāya [DN]* (London: H. Frowde for Pali Text Society, 1911) 3: 191.

designated by these indigenous terms, we may examine their conditions as mentioned in the historical contexts. Two groups of servitors could be identified under the term *dāsa*. Of these, one group displays features of saleability and transferability between owners, while such transactions accompanied land in almost all cases, whereas the condition of the other group seems temporary and presumably non-transferable.

As to the first group, epigraphic evidence shows that they were disposed of as gifts to monks and temples just as any material property.¹⁵ This is reaffirmed in another epigraphic record, namely the Katugaha-galge pillar inscription (c. 1189-1196 AD), which mentions *dāsa* along with land and cattle among the wealth offered to the people of Ruhuna.¹⁶ Further, literary evidence shows that the term *dāsa* is associated with disgrace and humiliation.¹⁷ The accompaniment of *dāsa*¹⁸ with land in almost all donations suggests that while most of the land was to be cultivated by the *dāsa* for the temple, some of the land was used to feed or lodge the *dāsa* themselves. Furthermore, grants of villages containing *dāsa/dāsi* to temples by certain royal officers¹⁹ suggest that such *dāsa* lived in communities with their families and were attached to that land.²⁰ Accordingly, most individuals called *dāsa* show both the so-called slave and serf features.²¹

The term *dāsa* also seems to accommodate debt-bondage for a fixed period. We infer this from the comment of Nāgā's master (though Nāgā is not attached to a temple), that the other *dāsi* (pl. form) try to end their period of bondage for debt by serving the master whereas Nāgā was prolonging her period of bondage by becoming further indebted.²²

As with *dāsa*, so with *vahal*. Both slave and serf features are observable among *vahal*. The features that seem to distinguish the *vahal* include their saleability and their place among property. Many *vahal* are recorded as purchased and inherited property²³; they were also listed among material goods like land and draft animals.²⁴ Furthermore, as in the case of *dāsa*, donations of

¹⁵ Eg. cf. M. Dias (ed.), *EZ* vol. 8 (Colombo: Dept. of Archaeology, 2001): 65 = *EZ* 6: 124.

¹⁶ Eg. *EZ* 3 no. 35: 325- 331.

¹⁷ *Mv.* 49. 62.

¹⁸ Cf. *EZ* 3 no. 27: 260- 269; *EZ* 1 no. 15: 182-190; *EZ* 6 no. 8: 39-58.

¹⁹ Eg. *Mv.* 46. 19-21.

²⁰ Cf. *infra* pp. 11-13.

²¹ The main difference between the slaves and serfs taken into account here is that the former group of unfree persons could be bought, sold or disposed in whatever manner their owner fancied while the latter group were attached to the land they worked and were sold with the land.

²² *Sihalavatthū.* 62.

²³ Eg. Cf. *EZ* 4 no. 25: 196-212. cf. *infra* p. 12 for detail.

²⁴ Eg. Cf. *EZ* 2 no.14: 84-90; no. 17: 98-123; no. 19: 125-127; no.21: 130-134; no. 22: 134-137; no.29: 165-178.

vahal too accompany land²⁵ suggesting that they were bound to the land they worked for the particular owner (temple). There is additional evidence that the status may have been heritable, since *vahal* families are represented among the purchased and inherited groups in the Galapāta vihāra record.²⁶ Such features support the suggestion that the status of *dāsa* and *vahal* was a mixture of both slave, serf and servant status.

The manumission inscriptions belonging to the period between the fourth and the eighth centuries AD contain the phrase *vaharala cidavi* with variant forms²⁷ and the term *vaharala* etc does not occur in any later inscriptions. Scholars such as S. Paranavitana, D. J. Wijerathna, W. S. Karunarathna and S. Ranawella have proposed contrasting readings such as ‘freeing from slavery’,²⁸ ‘cutting wood’,²⁹ ‘making a small vihāra’,³⁰ and ‘issuing monastic tickets’,³¹ respectively for the phrase *vaharala cidavi*. But a careful consideration of all these records show us that only the first reading ‘freeing from slavery’ could be applied with consistency in the contexts of all of them.³²

I agree with J. Udawara³³ that *vaharala*, could be an euphemistic term popularly employed to disguise the existence of servile labour forces in temples, which had been the earliest form of the term *vahal*. Furthermore, the *vaharala* records that register the manumission of those who terminated self-imposed servitude in temples³⁴ testify to the existence of debt bondage and bondage for poverty in temples; they also lead to the implication that the term *vaharala* and its variant forms too cover the status of bondage.

Interestingly, these manumission records, discovered in many parts of

²⁵ Eg. Cf. *EZ* 1. no 14: 176-182; *EZ* 6 no. 27: 126-134.

²⁶ Eg. Cf. *EZ* 4 no. 25: 196-212.

²⁷ Eg. *EZ* 4, no. 15: 128-136; *EZ* 5, no. 2: 27-29. For a full list of the records that bear this term and its variant forms cf. of Chandima S.M. Wickramasinghe, *Slavery from known to unknown: a comparative study of slavery in ancient Greek poleis and ancient Sri Lanka* (Oxford: John & Erica Hedges Ltd, 2005) Appendix 2, nos. 2-36.

²⁸ This is S. Paranavitana’s reading. Cf. *EZ* 4: 128-136 also cf. S. Paranavitana, ‘Some Sinhalese inscriptions of c. sixth century’ *University of Ceylon Review [UCR]* 20.1 (1962): 1-11.

²⁹ D. J. Wijerathne, ‘Interpretation of *vaharala* etc. in Sinhalese inscriptions’ *UCR* 10 (1952): 103-117. This theory was rejected with careful argument by Paranavitana himself: *EZ* 5: 35-62. S. Ranawella in *EZ* 6: 170 also rejects this ‘timber theory’ of Wijerathne.

³⁰ This reading was held by W. S. Karunarathne, in *EZ* 7: 117.

³¹ Rev. M. Wimalakitthi and S. Ranawella, in *EZ* 6: 168-172.

³² Cf. Wickramasinghe, Appendix 1: 98-100, for a detailed discussion as to how the above two readings do not provide sensible meanings when applied to all records that bear the phrase *vaharala cidavi* etc.

³³ *EZ* 6: 120-125.

³⁴ Eg. Two records in Ambagasveva refer to manumission of two individuals from the monastery of Mayagara having settled their debt: Paranavitāna, 8-11.

the island, show some peculiarity in their content.³⁵ In addition to being very brief in content, the terminating clause in the majority of them (*i.e. mehi pala savasatanata* tr. 'may the fruit of this [deed] be [shared by] all') transmits the idea that, just as it was meritorious to offer slaves to temples for the upkeep of the religion, freeing a 'slave' (not necessarily belonging to a temple) also generated merit for the one who caused the manumission by paying the due fee since it involved freeing a person from temporary or permanent bondage to another individual.³⁶

The term *mindī* or *midī* also appearing in at least two epigraphic records belonging to the later part of the tenth and twelfth/ thirteenth centuries AD reads as 'female slave.'³⁷ S. Paranavitāna states that the term *mindī* in Sinhalese literature also carries the same meaning.³⁸ Wilhelm Geiger supports this notion and adds that the term '*midī* derived from Skt. P. *munditā* "shaved", suggesting that in former times a female 'slave' was not allowed to wear long hair, but had to shave her head when she was taken into a family.'³⁹ Also notable is that the reading of the term *mindī* as 'female slaves,' whatever its origin, is not yet challenged by scholars. Due to the scarcity of information it is hard to estimate when this term came into usage.

A further confusion arises when reading the terms *ārāmika* and *kappiyakāraka*, used only in the commentaries on the Pāli Buddhist texts compiled *circa* fifth century AD as 'slaves.' These two terms seem to be further ethical (or rather polite) terms used by the erudite monk Buddhagosa,⁴⁰ who composed these commentaries, to circumvent the prohibition of accepting various types of labour forces by Buddhist temples and *sanga*.⁴¹ In the context noted in the *Pāpancasudāni* (the commentary of *Majjimanikāya*) compiled in the

³⁵ Eg. EZ 4.no. 27: 132-133; *ibid* no.37: 294-296; 6: 168-172 & 173; M. Dias, *Epigraphical Notes, 1-18* (Colombo: Dept. of archaeology, 1991): 33. Cf. Wickramasinghe, Chap. 88-90 for detail.

³⁶ S. Nānāyakkāra, (tr.) *Anāgathavamsadēsanava: metebudu siritha of Wilgammula Sangarāja* (14th cent. AD) ed & tr. by (Dehiwala: Buddhist cultural centre, 1997): 43 mentions that in order to free oneself from evil tendencies one should liberate 'slaves.'

³⁷ EZ 4, no. 33 (l. 15): 253-260. & EZ 1, no. 7 (l. 20): 75-113.

³⁸ EZ 4, no. 33: 256, 260 & note 4.

³⁹ W. Geiger, *Culture of Ceylon in medieval times* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1960) p. 36.

⁴⁰ This was an Indian monk who visited Sri Lanka *circa* fifth century and he compiled these commentaries during his stay on the island.

⁴¹ I. B. Horner, *Pāpancasudāni: commentary on the Majjimanikaya [Psudāni]* (London: Pali Text Society, 1976): 404 Cf. note 55 for detail.

As to the use of different ethical terms, it is necessary to remember that the audience of the Pāli commentaries were erudite monks whereas both the writers and the audience of *vaharala* records were the generally educated public who may not have had access to these Pāli texts.

fifth century AD, *kappiyakāraka* and *ārāmika* were those dedicated to monks as offerings, implying that they were the property of the donor – *i.e.* ‘slaves’.⁴² Rev. Walpola Rāhula states that *kappiyakāraka* are laymen who accept the obligation to provide monks with what they needed and *ārāmika* are attendants and servants of the monastery,⁴³ suggesting that every person called thus was not necessarily un-free. A passage in *Samantapāsādikā* (the commentary on the *Vinayapitakaya*) compiled in the fifth century AD, testifies that the ‘slaves’ belonging to a temple were called *ārāmikas*⁴⁴ probably to justify their acceptance by temples on ethical grounds. However, *Samantapāsādikā* reaffirms the ‘slave’ status of *ārāmika* or at least of *ārāmikadāsa* offered to monks by stressing the necessity to manumit them (*ārāmika*) if they were to be admitted to the order of Buddhist monks.⁴⁵ The same source further states that if a poor man becomes a *kappiyakāraka* willingly due to poverty in order to gain subsistence by working for monks, such a person could be admitted to the order without manumission because he did not offer him/herself as a ‘slave.’⁴⁶ Accordingly, the status of a person donated as a *kappiyakāraka* to a temple was similar to that of *ārāmika-dāsa* - ‘slave.’

Thus, both *dāsa* and *vahal*, the more popular terms that were used to denote the unfree groups in historic Sri Lanka seem to incorporate mixed statuses such as that of chattel slave, serf and also that of those in bondage. Hence, I choose to read them as slave or slavery within inverted commas (‘slave’, ‘slavery’) where necessary to highlight the complexity of the statuses suggested by these terms. The available *vaharala* records further help us to determine this reading.

Furthermore, the prevalence of various terms that denote ‘slavery’ in historical sources (both from about second century AD up until early 18th century) shows that the institution of ‘slavery’ was in operation on the island throughout its history. This institution may naturally have been subject to various periodical and regional changes although such changes seem to have passed unrecorded. The suggestible changes that may have affected the system of servitude on the island in its history and the possible reasons that may have

⁴² An account in the *Vinaya* indicates the beginning of the custom of donating *ārāmikas* to monks. According to this a prince saw a monk supervising a levelling of soil and offered him 500 *ārāmikas* who settled down with their families near the monastery and began to work for their new master (H. Oldenberg (ed.), *Vinayapitaka [Vinaya]*, (London: Williams and Norgate, 1881) 3: 248).

⁴³ W. Rāhula. *History of Buddhism in Ceylon: the Anurādhapura period third century BC to tenth century AD* (Colombo: Gunasena, 1956): 147.

⁴⁴ *Smp*, 683.

⁴⁵ *Smp*. 1001. *Vinaya* rules forbade ‘slaves’ from entering the order of monks unless manumitted since ‘slaves’ are a property of another.

⁴⁶ *Smp*. 177 and the compendium of Law of the Kāndyan period state that those come to serve in the monastery out of poverty were not considered as slaves (*NN* 8).

led to its end shall be discussed later after focusing on the conditions, exploitation and management of temple 'slaves'.

Evidence on Temple Slavery

Having presented various terms used to denote unfree groups, we come to the second and the main part of the discussion, which is the analysis of the available evidence on temple slavery in the island, focusing on how they were acquired.

It is interesting to note at this juncture how the Buddhist temples/monasteries and monks came to possess a number of 'slaves' despite the admonition of the Buddha, the founder of Buddhism,⁴⁷ that Buddhist monks must abstain from all kinds of profane pursuits including acceptance and management of property ('slaves' included) and enjoyment of material wealth through commercial and agricultural pursuits.⁴⁸ But, Buddhagōsha's commentary on *Majjima-nikāya* (fifth century AD) confesses that although it was improper for monks to accept 'slaves', monks could accept them when offered as *ārāmika*.⁴⁹ Such philosophical accommodations may have been vital to cope with the increasing numbers of Buddhist monks who were initially fed and clothed at the expenses of the lay devotees, especially those of high social rank. Fa-Hien, a Chinese monk, who visited Sri Lanka in the fifth century AD in the course of his travels in the South Asia, reports that there were 5,000 monks in the Abhayagiriya monastery, 2,000 in Mihintale and 3,000 in Mahavihara during the time of his visit. He continues that besides the 60,000 monks obtained meals from the common stores, the king prepared elsewhere in the city a common supply of food for a further five or six thousand monks.⁵⁰ Sources of

⁴⁷ Buddhism was brought to Sri Lanka in the first century BCE by a group of Indian monks led by Mahinda *thero* (a son of the Indian emperor Asoka himself) as a royal gift from the Emperor Asoka to his counterpart and friend, the king Tissa of Sri Lanka: (Adikāram, 50). It is further mentioned that the king Tissa of Sri Lanka has sent three precious jewels as gifts to the emperor Asoka and who in return has sent many other material gifts along with the gift of Dhamma with the message which informed the king Tissa that Asoka had converted to Buddhism with an invitation to the king Tissa to do the same: (J. Takakusu and M. Nagai (ed.) *Samanthapāsādika: Buddhagōsha's commentary on vinayapitaka* [Smp] 8 vols (London: Luzac and Company, 1924-[1976]): 76 & also cf. 74 & 75). Also cf. A.M.S. Jayaweera, *Lankāve Rajjya saha Āgama* (Kelaniya: W. S. Rathnathunga press, 1986): 13-14.

⁴⁸ *Vinaya* 1:192. For penalties to monks who indulge in commerce and agriculture by depriving their right to reside in a particular monastery cf. eg. *EZ* 1. no. 1 (ll. 16-17): 7 & *ibid.* 1. no. 7 (ll. A 42-43): 104.

⁴⁹ *Psudani* 404: '*Dāsīdāsavasēnēva tēsam patiggahānam nā vattati kappiyakārakam dammi ārāmikam dammīti evam vutte te pana vattati.*' Also cf. *Smp.* p. 1238.

⁵⁰ Fa-Hien *A record of Buddhist kingdoms* tr. by J. Lagge for the project Gutenberg, e-text at <ftp://biblio.org/pub/docs/books/gutenberg/etext00/rbddh10.txt> accessed on (2002. 4. 14) [henceforth referred to as Fa-Hien] 38, 39 cf. S. Beal tr.(1890) *Si-Yu-Ki, Buddhist*

permanent revenue may have been crucial to maintain large numbers of residing monks and also for the upkeep of their temples/monasteries, particularly since political disturbances (such as wars, both dynastic and external, and revolts) jeopardised the patronage offered by royalty and social elites. This simultaneously threatened the acquisition of merit by donors, and the survival of the Buddhist monks. Hence monarchs established permanent donations of cultivable lands, reservoirs and cattle together with the necessary workforce to temples/ monasteries since the Sinhalese Buddhist monarchs, the patrons of Buddhism, would not have liked to see monks of a temple working the lands given to it, at least, due to the fear of losing public support since such a practice could be interpreted as an insult to Buddhism. Moreover, practical issues such as extensive amounts of properties sometimes located at substantial distances from the proprietor temple/ monastery⁵¹ also required a regular workforce for their administration and maintenance.

As noted in passing, much of the evidence on servitude in the island comes from temple settings. Evidence suggests that multitudes of *dāsaḥ vahala* etc lived and worked in ancient Sri Lankan temples/ monasteries. The king Sirimēgavanna (362-389 AD), for instance, rebuilt all demolished temples/ monasteries and assigned revenues to *ārāmika* belonging to these establishments.⁵² Also, the king Aḡghabōdhi I (last half of the sixth century AD) gave the village Lajjika for the maintenance of 'slaves' (*dāsa, dāsī*) in the temple Mugasēnāpati, which he constructed.⁵³ The Mihintalē record of the king Mahinda IV (c. 1026-1042 AD) also refers to 'slaves': *daśnat* (A 1.8), *dasun* (A 1.41), *sudasun* (A 1.43), *vehera dasun* (A 1. 45), and states that they are equally subject to the code of rules just as the residing monks and *kāmiyan* (II.7-8), implying that 'slaves' were an important group in the temple/ monastic community.⁵⁴

Although temple 'slaves' were usually offered and served an entire body of monks in a temple, *Samantapāsādikā* mentions that some monks had personal 'slaves.'⁵⁵ Yet, the evidence for personal 'slaves' of monks is rare.

records of the Western world by Hiuen Tsiang (London) [henceforth as Beal (1890)] 1: introd. 73, 76.

⁵¹ Some cases for distant property of temples: *EZ* 4. no. 8: 59-67 - a seminary belonged to Mahāvihāra possessed a tract of land from Muhundnāruva in the eastern Quarter c. 50 miles from Anurādhapura; Sen Sēnevīrad monastery also had lands c. 45 miles away from it, in Anurādhapura: *EZ* 1. no.12: 163-171. For similar cases Cf. *EZ* 1.no. 13: 172-175; no.17: 200-207; 2. no. 44-49; 3: 100-113. Cf. also R. A. H. L. Gunawardane, *Robe and plough: monasticism and economic interest in early medieval Sri Lanka* (Tucson: university of Arizona Press, 1979): 95.

⁵² *Mv.* 37. 63. (cf. W. Geiger (tr.) *Mahāvamsa* (London: pali Text Society, 1912): 4 note 2).

⁵³ *Mv.* 42. 23.

⁵⁴ *EZ* 1, no.7: 85 & 99.

⁵⁵ *Smp.*, p. 1001.

*Sīhalavatthūpakarana*⁵⁶ provides an account where temple ‘slaves’ attend to a sick monk without specifying whether they were personal ‘slaves’ of the monk.

This calls for further examination of the processes and means by which Buddhist temples then acquired ‘slaves.’ Donation, purchase and voluntary and involuntary bondage due to poverty are the notable sources. However, the initial source that supplied ‘slaves’ for the monarchs to enable them to donate ‘slaves’ to temples was apparently captives of war. The single item of precise evidence available informs us that in 619 AD the king Silamegavanna defeated a Tamil invader and ‘...captured those who remained over from slaughter, subjected them to all kinds of humiliation and distributed them here and there as *dāsa* (‘slaves’) to the *vihāra* (temples).’⁵⁷

The main source of ‘slaves’ for temples/ monasteries was thus donation and it was considered a meritorious act. *Samantapāsādikā* clearly mentions that, “there are in monasteries slaves called monastery ‘slaves’ (*ārāmika-dāsa*) granted by kings.”⁵⁸

Literary and epigraphic sources provide further evidence. For instance, a second century record reveals a donation of a male and a female ‘slave’ to a monastery.⁵⁹ The Tamil officer Pottakutta, serving the king Aḡgabodhi IV (667-683 AD), granted to a monastery he erected a reservoir and two villages, one of which was called Nitthilavetthi and contained *dāsa*.⁶⁰

This reminds us of the argument of the editor of the Vēvālkātiya slab inscription of Mahinda IV (c.1026-1042 AD)⁶¹ who states that the problematic term *dasa* in the phrase *dasagama* is for *dāsa* (‘slave’) and not for *dasa* (ten)⁶² and he refers to a number of comparable usages and argues that ‘*dasa-gama*’ is a village in which ‘slaves’ resided.⁶³

As to further donations of slaves, Bhaddhā, the commander of the army of the king Sēna I (mid ninth century AD), built the monastery Bhaddhasēnāpati and gave it ‘slaves’ and revenues. Sēna I also built a monastery and endowed it with extensive revenues, many monastery helpers (*ārāmika*) and ‘slaves’ as labourers (*dāsē kammakārē ce*).⁶⁴ Evidence also shows that various donors

⁵⁶ *Sīhalavatthū*. 19 the term used is *upatthakē* (‘helper’).

⁵⁷ *Mv.* 44.73.

⁵⁸ *Smp.* p. 1001.

⁵⁹ ‘*Amitiya mahajanaka...citiya dinē dāsa Anula dīna dāsa Kāla ca*’: *EZ* 8: 65 = M. Dias (ed.) *Inscriptions of Ceylon: S. Paranavitana*, ((Colombo: Dept. of Archaeology, 2001) vol. 2 part.2 no. 151: 246.

⁶⁰ *Mv.* 46.19-21.

⁶¹ *EZ* 1 no. 21.

⁶² Wickremasinghe, the editor of the record, refers to a contrary view held by Kielhorn who read *dasa gama* as ‘ten villages’ following what is prescribed in Hindu Law books of Manu, Visnu and others. *EZ* 1, no. 21: 243-244.

⁶³ The rendering of *gama* is undisputedly accepted to mean ‘village’: *EZ* 1: 243-244. Ariyapāla agrees with this notion: M. B. Ariyapāla, 120.

⁶⁴ *Mv.* 50. 82 & 63-64 respectively.

granted *ārāmika* and *ārāmikagāma* (villages with *ārāmika*) to temples. For instance, Aḅgabōdhi I gave 100 *ārāmika* to Kandavihāra monastery.⁶⁵ Jettā, the consort of the king Aḅgabōdhi IV granted 100 *ārāmika* with two villages to Jetthārāma monastery.⁶⁶

Moreover, Queen Līlāvati (end of the twelfth–thirteenth century AD) built a temple in Anurādhapura and granted it thirty *vahal*, cattle and land.⁶⁷ Queen Kalyānawati (beginning of the thirteenth century AD) also constructed a monastery and granted it villages and *dāsi dāsa* among many other offerings.⁶⁸ The same queen built an alms-house and granted 30 slaves (*vahal*) and cattle and buffaloes and lands to it.⁶⁹ Although this alms-house was designed to offer food to the poor, it is likely that it also offered meals to monks who failed to collect a meal before the stipulated time. Ayaśmanta the General of Kalyānawati too built a monastery and supplied it with lands and *dāsi dāsa*.⁷⁰ Another rock inscription of Lankāthilaka royal temple (in Gampola)⁷¹ of 1344 AD also mentions a grant of lands, 200 male and female ‘slaves’ (*thamangē magul vahalin ranvahalin gūnūngen pirimingen vahal rū desīyakut...*) and 400 cows and buffaloes to the temple by Sēna-Lanka-Adhikāra.⁷² A record dated to the fourteenth century AD registers a grant of land and *vahal* to the temple of Gadalādeniya by the king Buvanekabāhu IV.⁷³ Notably however, certain monarchs such as Silamēghavanna (619-628 AD) gave only ‘slaves’ to temples.⁷⁴ Aḅgabōdhi IV (667-683 AD) placed *dāsa* at the disposal of the community of monks when they were required.⁷⁵

When donations dried up or when a temple had not yet established itself as a major recipient of donations from the wealthy, or alternately when temples had become enormously wealthy corporate institutions, temples also acquired ‘slaves’ by purchase. A record from a period between the twelfth and

⁶⁵ *Mv.* 42.16.

⁶⁶ *Mv.* 46. 27-28.

⁶⁷ *EZ.* 1.no. 14 (l. 24): 179.

⁶⁸ *Mv.* 80. 35-36.

⁶⁹ *EZ.* 1. no. 14: 179 & 181-182.

⁷⁰ *Mv.* 80. 40.

⁷¹ There was another temple of the same name in Polonnaruwa.

⁷² B. Gunasēkara, ‘Three Sinhalese inscriptions: Text, transliteration, translation and notes’ *JRASC* 10. 34, (1887): 83-95, (l. 25). He renders *vahal* as ‘servants’. Cf. H. D. Evers, *Monks, priests and peasants: a study of Buddhism and social structure in central Ceylon* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972):. 209. cf. A. Vellupillai, *Ceylon Tamil inscriptions* (Peradeniya: Royal Printers, 1972) pt. 2 (ll. 13-27): 68-81 for the Tamil version of this inscription that was found below the Sinhalese version in the same stone.

⁷³ *EZ.* 4. no. 12, (l. 20): 101 & 104.

⁷⁴ *Mv.* 44. 73.

⁷⁵ *Mv.* 46. 10-11. For further grants Cf. also *ibid* 14 & 28 (*dāsi, dāsiārāmikē ce*) to temples.

the thirteenth centuries AD reveals that the Galapātha monastery had purchased 'slaves' out of its own funds (*mē vihārayehi mundukaraduyen ran dīla genā lū*) from an officer.⁷⁶ However, this is the only piece of evidence so far available testifying to the purchase of 'slaves' by a temple.⁷⁷

Once the 'slave' groups in temples were established, often through donations and rarely by purchase, such groups may have continued through self-procreation (*i.e.* inheritance of status),⁷⁸ as suggested by the Galapātha record.⁷⁹ The consent that temple slaves received to live in families and communities from the proprietor temple also supports this notion.⁸⁰

Another interesting source of 'slavery' in Buddhist temples in historic Sri Lanka was donating oneself voluntarily as a slave to gain merit attached to the deed, and this could be the extension of donating slaves to temples.⁸¹ Though such deeds may have been open to all Buddhists, irrespective of caste or class, historical sources only inform us of such affairs of the royalty or of the high ranking officers because almost all of the historical sources of historic Sri Lanka were composed with the objective of eulogising monarchs, perhaps to hold them up as models for future rulers. Sadly very few, if any, of the sources reflect social history bereft of such. King Mahādathika Mahā Nāga (first century AD), for instance, offered himself and his family to *sanga* and redeemed themselves after offering much wealth to the respective temple.⁸² Furthermore, King Nissankamalla (1187-1196 AD) offered both his son and daughter to the Tooth and Bowl relics of the Buddha and thereafter redeemed them by an offer of an enormous amount of wealth to the temple concerned.⁸³

⁷⁶ *EZ.* 4, no. 25 (II, 12-13): 203-204.

⁷⁷ Also we do not have any concrete evidence in support of sale/purchase of slaves by lay individuals either. But the inclusion of *ranvahal* (purchased slaves) among those sold to the temple by the officer indicate that buying and selling slaves did exist in the society even to a lesser scale and apparently the transactions occurred directly between the buyer and the seller without a middle man.

⁷⁸ The *vahal* or *dāsa* who inherited their status from their mother did not seem to have lacked civil status for being the property of *sanga* (Buddhist monks) as noted by F. K. Lehman, 'Freedom and bondage in traditional Burma and Thailand' *JSEAS* 15.2 (1984): 236 in reference to traditional Burmese temple slavery.

⁷⁹ Cf. *infra* pp. 20-21.

⁸⁰ Cf. *infra* pp. 20-21.

⁸¹ Interestingly, M. Aung-Twin, 'Hierarchy and order in pre-colonial Burma' *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* [*JSEAS*] 15.2 (1984): 227, 229-130 explains that there was both voluntary servitude (*kyanship*) for merit and another form which was born out of poverty in pre-colonial Burma where the indigent would work for Buddhist temples. Cf. also Lehman, 236 on bonded labour in traditional Burmese and Thai temples.

⁸² *Mv.* 34, 86-89.

⁸³ *EZ.* 2, no. 17 (I, 24): 107-121. Another record set up by the same monarch (*EZ.* 2, no. 14: 86-87 & 90) repeats this donation. Also cf. *Mv.*, 46, 14 & 49, 63; *Sīhalavathū.* 71 for parallel cases.

Such kingly 'commendations' of self and dependants may not have provided labour for the respective temples as the monarchs had to be alert to protect the kingdom and the religion from foreign invasions and from rival competitors. Thus their servitude may have been rather symbolic in nature and may have been an extensive source of wealth to the temples concerned. Nonetheless, in doing so, established kings as foremost Buddhists of the realms may have set themselves as important models for their subjects while at least some monarchs, especially of Indian origin who ascended to the throne, such as Nissankamalla, may have used such acts as a competitive prestige-claiming exercise vis-à-vis monks or other lay men.

It is, therefore, clear that Buddhist temples, at least those accommodating large numbers of monks/nuns, became the second important 'slave' owner in the island in antiquity⁸⁴ mainly through donations by monarchs and those of high social rank, the chief 'slave' holders of historic Sri Lanka.⁸⁵

Condition, Exploitation and Management

This leaves us to examine how slaves were exploited in Buddhist monasteries on the island. Since most of the endowments of 'slaves' occurred alongside the grants of land, cattle and necessary irrigation facilities, we infer that the main task of the majority of temple 'slaves' was cultivation.⁸⁶ The types of donations suggest that most temples focused mainly on wet-rice agriculture, though coconut⁸⁷ and perhaps dry-cereal cultivation was also probably practised. A high proportion of labour is required for wet-rice agriculture during the first and especially during the last phases (harvesting and storing). The redundant labour that may occur during the intermediary stage would have been directed to cultivating dry-crops (known as *chena* cultivation) with different agricultural patterns or/and even to provide menial labour in renovation activities of temples and reservoirs.

Moreover, a considerable amount of 'slave'/bonded labour may have been required for regular chores such as preparing food, cleaning, and also for many other menial tasks in temples, while also attending to the personal needs of

⁸⁴ Also note that all Buddhist temples/ monasteries in historic Sri Lanka were not slave owners.

⁸⁵ The monarch seems to be the chief slave owner and the distributor of the island. His officers received 'slaves' as a part of payment to their services (Eg. *EZ* 2, no. 17) and some people may have received slaves when they performed pious deeds (Eg. *Sīhalavatthū* 33, 35 & 45; *EZ* 1 no. 9; *EZ* 2, nos. 19, 21, 22, 24, 29; *EZ* 5, nos. 43 & 44).

⁸⁶ Cf. *supra* pp. 9-11 for evidence on such endowments.

⁸⁷ Aggabodhi 1 (the last part of the sixth century CE) donated a coconut plantation of 3 *yōjanas* in extent to Kurunda monastery (*Mv.* 42, 15). 1 *yōjana* – 12 or 12½ miles cf. M. B. Ariyapala, 151.

the multitudes of resident monks or nuns.⁸⁸ Preparing food for large numbers of monks could have been an exhausting task assigned to temple 'slaves'.⁸⁹ An account in the *Sīhalavatthūpakarana* refers to monastic 'slaves' (*ārāmika*) responsible for cooking meals for residing monks in a particular temple.⁹⁰ The Mihintale tablets too reveal arrangements made for providing food for the monks residing in the temple.⁹¹ Apart from work in the kitchen, some temple 'slaves' may also have been used as cleaners of the residential areas and places of worship, as can be seen in the same inscription.⁹² Moreover, some temple 'slaves' may also have been employed as bearers of palanquins⁹³ while others, when the need arose, served to bury the dead and arrange funeral obsequies.⁹⁴

Evidence informs us that female 'slaves' came into the possession of Buddhist temples through donations and the single reported case of purchase of slaves, that by the Galapātha temple, also included female 'slaves'. The kind of duties and the form of support received by the female 'slaves,' at least in the reported cases, bear parallels to Leslie Orr's discussions on temple women in medieval Tamilnadu.⁹⁵ For instance, the record of Mahinda IV in Mihintale shows that 24 *vatmidi* (women working in the paddy pounding/husking halls and in alms hall) were paid with a portion of land and an annual allowance for

⁸⁸ EZ. 1 (ll. 30-45): 89-90 & 110-111.

⁸⁹ Ordinary men may not have been able to feed multitudes of monks regularly although it was a possibility for monarchs. But even the royal support may have been irregular due to political disturbances making it necessary to prepare meals for residing monks from the resources available for temples. Cf. *supra* 8-9.

⁹⁰ *Sīhalavatthū* 16, Van Eecke, (tr.): p. 50. The term used in the original Pāli text is 'ārāmika'.

⁹¹ EZ 1, no. 7 (ll. 23-25).

⁹² The attendant who kept the premises clean (sweepers): EZ. 1. no. 7: 90 & 112, (B ll. 51-52). In addition to these, some workers called *pahāvāsi* occur in the same record (EZ. 1: 89 (B ll. 26-27)). Wickramasinghe, agreeing with Müller and Mudaliyar rendered the term as 'thatcher' (EZ 1: 110 note.1) considering the terms *veheravāsi* and *velvāsi* (EZ 1. no.16, (C ll.10-11): 195 & *ibid.* 4 no. 6 (A ll. 6-8 p.52), *velvāssan*; *ibid.* 2. no. 29 (l. 23): 170, *veheravāssan*) which enables to trace its root from Pāli *pāsādavāsi*, which probably meant 'an attendant attached to a monastic residence'.

⁹³ The use of palanquins is mentioned in *Dambadenikathikāvata* requesting monks to use them as shared property in A. V. Suraveera (ed.) *Sinhala kathikāvath hā Bhikkshu samājaya* (Colombo, Gunasena: 1971): 133.

⁹⁴ J. D'Oyly, *A sketch of the constitution of the Kandyan kingdom* (Dehiwala: Tisara Publishers, 1928): 119 mentioned in reference to the Kāndyan period that a chief duty of a domestic slave was to bury the corpse of the master. That could be a main duty of slaves all times even in monasteries.

⁹⁵ L. C. Orr, *Donors, devotees and daughters of god: temple women in medieval Tamilnadu* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 119 & 129.

clothing.⁹⁶ Moreover, as Orr rightly points out, female servants in temples may have been engaged in various tasks⁹⁷ and the term *dēva-dāsi* may probably signify the sense of belonging to the particular god(s) of the religious establishment (*i.e* *dēva*--god). This Sanskritised Tamil term (*tevaratiyāl*) may not be applicable to female servants in Buddhist temples due to the simple reason that the Buddha was no god but a human being who had attained enlightenment and Buddhist temples were not considered abodes of any deity.

Female 'slaves,' mostly living in families, were performing a range of duties for temples from cultivation to cleaning, just as their male counterparts. Also, given the nature of the Buddhist precepts, which condemn prostitution and the disciplinary code for Buddhist monks and nuns which was designed to help monks and nuns banish worldly desires as they schooled themselves to attain *nibbāna*, the ultimate goal of a Buddhist, none of these female temple 'slaves' was likely to have been used for any form of prostitution or obscene dancing in order to draw revenue for Buddhist temples at any period in the history of the island. Such an usage of male or female servitors belonging to Buddhist temples would have been considered an unimaginable denigration of Buddhist values, especially by the general public of Sri Lanka (who were mainly Buddhists).⁹⁸ Similarly, if there were any *dēva-dāsis*, in the South Indian Buddhist temples, as noted by K. C. Tarachand,⁹⁹ these were possibly female servitors who performed various menial tasks such as cleaning and husking paddy in these temples. It is unlikely that they were engaged in any erotic services because, as noted above, the idea of entering monkhood itself was to practise controlling one's worldly desires to attain *nibbāna* and to direct lay folks towards the same end. Noteworthy, therefore, is Orr's rejection of the notion that *dēva-dāsis* were sacred prostitutes and his calling them 'temple women' instead, who perform various chores in temples.¹⁰⁰

Although renovation activities and cultivation of temple lands may also have received free labour from the professional based caste system¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ EZ 1, no. 7: 75-113. Also cf. Rev. M. Wimalakitthi, *Silalekana sangrahaya* 1 (Moratuwa: Dodangoda: 1957) 42.

⁹⁷ Orr, 3-17.

⁹⁸ For the religious impact on the political system in the island cf. Rev. Hanguranketa Deerananda, *Rajjyathvaya saha Agama* (Warakapola: Ariya publishers, 2004).

⁹⁹ K. C. Tarachand, *Dēvadāsi custom: rural social structure and flesh markets* (New Delhi: Reliance Publishing house, 1991) esp. the introduction: 11.

¹⁰⁰ Orr, 3-17.

¹⁰¹ The caste system penetrated into the Sri Lankan social system through Indian influences although this developed with the local character, based on the profession of an individual but not birth as it was in India. This social feature appears in a mild form from about fifth century AD and operated rigidly in the Kandyan period (1529-1815). The highest in the social strata according to this categorisation were the rulers (*kshattiya*) where as the farmer caste (*govi kula*) included the bulk of the population and those belonged to the higher subdivisions in the farmer caste (*radala, mudali*) served the king

which provided skilled wage-workers and the service of free tenants, the service of temple 'slaves' would obviously have been cheaper. Moreover, a temple could also rent its lands,¹⁰² and though temporary, some temples might also have had a few bondsmen working to pay their debts.¹⁰³

The percentage of 'slaves', bondsmen and free workers in a temple/monastery may have differed from one temple/monastery to another, based on the wealth of that establishment and the generosity of its donors.¹⁰⁴ Also, we need to note that the available evidence does not support the notion that all Buddhist temples in the island possessed 'slaves,' let alone large numbers.

Instructions on how *dāsas* and *kammakāras* should be treated fairly are given by the Buddha in the *Sigālōvada sutta*.¹⁰⁵ A master must assign work to them in accordance with their strength, must supply them with food and 'wages' (*bhatta-vēttanānuppadānēna*),¹⁰⁶ must tend them when sick, must share with them even unusual delicacies, and must grant them leave at times.¹⁰⁷ These instructions do not seem to have emerged from cruel treatment to 'slaves' on the island, but possibly as a reaction against such in ancient India in the time of the Buddha.¹⁰⁸ Unfortunately, we do not have precise instances to judge the extent to which such Buddhist teachings influenced lay masters.

Nonetheless, it is interesting to examine how these temple 'slaves' were managed or treated. The Vēvālkātiya slab inscription of Mahinda IV (c. 1026-1042 AD), which deals with the administration of criminal justice in

as his high dignitary officers. A minority of the population belonged to the lower social strata (*hina kula*) which had further subdivisions according to one's trade such as drummers (*berava*), washers (*ridi*), cleaners (*chandāla*). Cf. P.V.B. Karunātilake, 'Early Sri Lankan society- some reflections on caste, social groups and ranking' *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* 9, 1 & 2 (1983): 108-143; *ibid*, 'Caste and social change in ancient Sri Lanka – the growth of the caste system in the early Anurādhapura period: a study based on Buddhist commentaries' *Social Science Review* no. 4 (1988): 1-30; M. Roberts, *Caste conflict and elite formation – the rise of a karāva elite in Sri Lanka 1500-1931* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) for more on caste.

¹⁰² *EZ* 1 no. 4: 44 & 54 and note 4; *EZ* 1 no. 7 (ll. A 43-44): 87 & 104-105; *EZ* 5 no. 10 (ll. 9-12): 136, 140.

¹⁰³ *Supra* p.3.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *supra* pp. 9-11: 'slaves' mostly and initially poured into temples through donations.

¹⁰⁵ One of the *Suttas* in the *Dīga Nikaya*, one of the discourses belonging to the *Suttapitakaya* in the *Tipitaka* (Buddhist canon).

¹⁰⁶ 'Wages' may not be the precise reading of *vēttanā*. The implication could be necessities such as clothing besides food.

¹⁰⁷ *DN* 3: 191. The same account refers to the five fold-obligations of slaves to their masters: they should rise before the master, should go to rest after the master, must be happy with what is given to them, should do their work well, should carry about his (master's) praise and good fame.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Chanana, 54.

'*dasa-gama*',¹⁰⁹ an endowment of a monastery (*Demel-vihara*) in the northern quarter of the island, is of special importance as this provides an example of a slave community and gives an idea of how their internal affairs were managed in *circa* eleventh century AD. The communal life of these *dāsa* indicates that they inherited the obligation to labour for the temple. Moreover, the record stresses that their service must be confined to the temple, highlighting their unfree status:

... From those who went out [of the temple] to do menial work, a fine of 50 *kalañdas*¹¹⁰ [weight] of gold shall be exacted. Should this not be feasible *ge-dad*¹¹¹ shall be levied. Should there be no *ge-dad* they shall be punished by having their hands cut off... (ll. 21-23).

This inherited obligation to labour also included the duty to labour in a police capacity as well - the account of the Mahinda IV grant suggests that the headmen of '*dasa-gama*' could be compelled to inquire among the inhabitants in the event of murder or robbery committed with violence within *dasa-gama* about the crime and to punish the murderer with death (ll. 9-12).¹¹² It continues stating harsh punishments to thieves, that they must be 'hanged' and the stolen property restored to the owner (ll. 12-14).¹¹³ The inhabitants of '*dasa-gama*' were obliged to find the offenders and have them punished within 45 days and failure to do so compelled them to pay a fine of the weight of 125 *kalañdas* of gold to the *radolat*¹¹⁴ (ll.14-18).

Unfortunately, we do not have evidence to estimate, let alone to compare, the proportion of fines paid by a 'non-slave' village and a 'slave'-village in historic Sri Lanka. Regarding serious assault not resulting in death,

¹⁰⁹ EZ 1 no. 21. Cf. *Supra* p.11 for a reading on *dasa gama* as 'slave village.'

¹¹⁰ One *Kalañda*= 8 *Aka*; 1 *Aka*=20 paddy seeds (paddy -rice with husks). From Ariyapāla,158.

¹¹¹ This may be confiscation of some property of the culprit(s). It is unlikely that the reference is to a fine imposed on each household as suggested by the editor of the inscription, as this measure seems to be an alternative punishment for the accused when unable to pay the fine, 50 gold *kalañda*.

¹¹² EZ 1 no. 21.

¹¹³ The editor of the record explains that "hanged" here carries the sense of "suspending", and adds: 'I have not yet come across "hanging" mentioned as form of a capital punishment in Sinhalese literature.' EZ 1 p. 250 note 1.

¹¹⁴ The editor of the record reads this term as 'the State' and mentions that it could refer to 'the royal family': cf. EZ 1: 250 note 3. A possible reason for the necessity to pay the fine to the 'State' or to the royal family or the king could be that the law and order of all communities, let alone, servile communities whether they were property of temples or not, were still under the control of the monarch, who was the supreme authority of his kingdom. Also note that it was the royal officers who promulgated these regulations (ll. 41-45) on behalf of the king presumably with the consent of the monastery.

the penalty was a fine of the weight of 50 *kalaṇḍas* of gold, and in failure to pay the fine, *ge-dad* was to be exacted. Once again, when the offender could not be detected, the inhabitants had to pay an identical fine to the *radolat* (ll. 18-20).

The record further mentions that capital punishment should be imposed upon these 'slaves' for slaughtering buffaloes, oxen, and goats. When the animals were stolen and not slaughtered, after due investigation each offender should be branded under the armpit and when the offence could not be identified (whether of slaughter or theft of the animal) the culprit should be beaten (ll. 25-30). The practice of branding offenders further adds colour to the servile status of these villagers. Moreover, the punishment for effacing the brand-mark, probably of cattle, was to make the culprit stand on red-hot iron sandals. This kind of torture reminds us of Sawyer's remarks that the masters could torture their slaves with red-hot iron.¹¹⁵

The nature of the ruling mentioned, that the inhabitants would be punished if they did not detect and punish the offenders themselves, suggests that the offenders generally came from the same community and that these regulations pertained to the punishment of the criminal behaviour of slaves implying that these 'slave' inhabitants were responsible for controlling their internal affairs. These measures were aimed at protecting the 'slave' and animal property of the monastery, while exacting the maximum service for the monastery concerned.

Heavy punishments such as the death penalty may have been measures implemented to prevent the crimes concerned, perhaps at the expense of losing one or two 'slave' culprits. The threat of heavy fines may have resulted in a collective effort of the 'slave' community to prevent offences being committed, since inability to pay fines may result in incapacitating them from purchasing freedom for generations.

Although this is the only record of this type, it is possible that other 'slave' villages belonging to monasteries and perhaps also to lay aristocrats, where 'slave' or free tenants resided, were administered in a fairly identical manner. Thus the Vēvālkātiya record is the only evidence that testifies temple 'slaves' were living in communities in which they had some responsibility over managing their internal affairs.

The Lāhugala record (1153-1186 AD) states that the *vahal* of the temple Galapāya were given 'heritable' lands (ll.15-17),¹¹⁶ further supporting the argument that what these *vahal/ dāsa* inherited was the obligation to work

¹¹⁵ Sawyer 30 *ap.* A. C. Lawrie, *Kandyan law and history: materials collected for two project works by Lawrie* (archived in five manuscript volumes in the Commonwealth Relations Library) vol. 3: 301.

¹¹⁶ *EZ.* 6. no. 27 (ll. 15-17): 130-131: 'Fields measuring a total (sowing extent) of two *yāla* from ... *neriya* and *Ran(n) Pattu*, measuring one *yāla* (of sowing extent) each were given away to slaves (*vahal*) as heritable lands (*pamunu kota dunnei*).'

for the temple. The land referred to here could be perpetually reserved to lodge and sustain such self-perpetuating 'slave' families who remained in servitude of the temple for generations.

The Galapāta record (twelfth /thirteenth century AD)¹¹⁷ is the only hard evidence that throws any light on the family structure of temple 'slaves'. The slave groups noted here were allowed to live in families and probably in a community while owning property. It provides a list of more than eighty 'slaves' owned by the Galapāta monastery, registering them by name and normally by their relationship to an adult in their respective families. The record mentions wives, siblings, children of both sexes, both parents and even other relatives. For instance, the first family registered after an adult male reads:

..Konta Boganta, *his mother* Uba, *his younger sister* Mindi, *his father* Uyavandā, *his younger brother* Getkāmi Lokeyi, *his younger brother* Ponvānī Mindā, *his younger brother* Raku, *his younger brother* Suva;(ll.13-14)¹¹⁸ [Italicised for emphasis].

Further, wives are mentioned along with children in three families and each of them was registered after the husband (ll. 17, 20, 23). Interestingly, one case also cites an aunt of a 'slave', along with his siblings and son (l.19). In another, a daughter, a younger sister, and a younger brother were registered under a female 'slave' (ll.16-17) and not under her husband, who is not mentioned; this woman perhaps was a widow and no adult males were present in the family. But the fragmentary nature of the record¹¹⁹ does not permit a clear observation of the condition of this family nor of any other 'slave' family. Also, it is noteworthy that these slaves were given land, presumably to maintain their families while working for the temple (l. 23).¹²⁰

As noted above, the consent given to these *vahal/ dāsa* by the owner to live in families and community and also to own property could be to enable exacting a range of services from the group for generations, without taking on the costs of providing for their daily existence. This may have been particularly necessary for temples which were cooperate institutions.

Conclusions

What has become evident is that it was the desire to work for the perpetuity of Buddhism which initially inspired the royalty and their entourage to donate

¹¹⁷ EZ 4, no. 25 (ll. 12-23): 203-204.

¹¹⁸ EZ. 4, no. 25: 203. For a brief study on Sri Lankan 'slave' names cf. N. Wijesēkara, 'Slavery in Sri Lanka' JRASCB 18, ns. (1974): 16-17. ¹

¹¹⁹ The name of the younger brother of the woman and also the name of the main 'slave' in the next family are illegible or erased (ll.16-17).

¹²⁰ EZ 4. no. 25.

'slaves' as the necessary work force to work on the lands given to the *sanga*. Just as in pre-colonial Burma, these 'slaves' were exempted from paying tax to the monarch, being *sāngika* property.¹²¹ But their social and political position does not seem to be far different from that of the poor free, let alone that of the other servile groups belonging to lay owners. There was no particular regimen regarding food or dress code designed for temple 'slaves', as there was no such code for the generality of 'slaves' in the island. Also there is no indication that 'slaves' in historic Sri Lanka were socially discriminated for being *sangika* property as it was observed in traditional Burmese society by Lehman.¹²²

The lack of commercial transactions in 'slaves' could be partly due to the fact that there was little commercial exchange and the money economy in the Sri Lankan society of the time. Focus may, therefore, have been on inheritance as the prime source for the continuation of the servile groups that were initially established with prisoners of war.¹²³

Due to these complex conditions it is hard to tag the servile populations working for temples, or those on the island as a whole, as belonging to the 'closed' or 'open' pattern of 'slavery,' as framed by A. Reid following J. Watson.

Reid informs us that a 'closed' pattern occurs 'typically in relatively static and self-contained communities practising labour-intensive wet-rice agriculture, where commercial exchange and the money economy have made little impact.' But he defines the system as 'one oriented primarily towards retaining the labour of slaves by reinforcing their distinctiveness from the dominant population.' In the 'open' system, notes Reid, the labour was acquired through capture or purchase of slaves and gradually assimilating them to the dominant group.¹²⁴

The complexity of the system of servitude in historic Sri Lankan temples, which is the main source of information of 'slavery' on the island, and its particular character is clear from the variety of terms used to denote the servile groups working in them. The mild nature associated with the system of servitude until the arrival of the Europeans may have led to its prevalence in

¹²¹ Aung-Thwin, 230.

¹²² Lehman, 236.

¹²³ The reference to *karamarānita* in the literary sources such as *Smp.* (:747), T. W. Rhys Davis (ed.) *Sumangalavilāsini* (London: Pāli Text Society, 1968): 168 and *Niti Niganduwa* [C. J. R. le Mesurier & T. B. Panabokke tr. *Niti Niganduwa- on the vocabulary of law as it existed in the last days of the Kandyan kingdom* (Colombo, Government Press: 1880): 7-12] compiled on the island in the fifth century and the 18th century CE as a source of slavery bears evidence for the existence of this group. As to precise cases, evidence is scanty, and of which the account in the *Mv.* 44, 73 reports that the king Silamēghavanna defeated a Tamil invader and reduced the captives into slavery.

¹²⁴ A. Reid, ' "Closed" and "Open" slave systems in pre-colonial Southeast Asia' in A. Reid ed. *Slavery bondage and dependency in Southeast Asia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983): 156.

the island for centuries. Harsh treatment shown to slaves after the arrival of the Portugese and Dutch may have led to the subsequent abolition of slavery on the island in 1833.

Furthermore, although Buddhist teachings encouraged fair treatment of 'slaves,' the condition of 'slaves' mainly depended upon the particular master-'slave' relationship. The strategy of Buddhist teachings appear to have been to pacify both master and 'slave', reminding how each one ought to dispose him/herself to the other. While instructing the masters how they should treat their 'slaves' while exacting service, Buddha also instructs how 'slaves' should react to such treatment from the master. This shows that the attempt of Buddhist teachings was to establish a 'give-and-take' relationship between master and 'slave', which, according to O. Patterson,¹²⁵ never existed in slave based societies.

Although the pious idiosyncratic attempt of ancient Sinhalese to eliminate the silent struggle of mind and soul between masters and 'slaves' may not have been a complete success, Buddhist temples may have displayed an exemplary role to lay owners by treating 'slaves' belonging to these establishments with kindness and allowing slaves to live in families and communities and to possess property.

CHANDIMA S. M. WICKRAMASINGHE

¹²⁵ O. Patterson, *Slavery and social death* (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: Harvard university Press, 1982): 207.