THE GODDESS PATTINI AND THE PARALBE ON JUSTICE[1]

GANANATH OBEYESEKERE

We are gathered here today to pay tribute to the memory of two ladies of distinction- Mrs Punitham Tiruchelvam who is no longer with us today, and the Goddess Pattini whose cult has virtually disappeared in most parts of Sri Lnnka, both in the Buddhist – Sinhala and Hindu – Tamil areas of this nation. I did not know Mrs. Tiruchelvam personally bu[t] with the Goddess Pattini I had a long love affair for the last twenty years I have studied [t]he cult of this goddess in its historical depth and cultural spread in both India and Sri Lanka, among contemporary Hindus and Buddhists and, as we know from the evidence of the past, among other religious communities like the Jainas and Ajivakas. For one of the impressive features of religions in South Asia is that in spite of doctrinal differences and racial and language divisions there is a level of sub-doctrinal religiosity which unite disparate [c]ommunities in our region in common bonds of belief and faith. The Pattini cult expresses one such level of cultural unity, though it is by no means the only one. In Sri Lanka the Pattini cult was dominant specially in the Western, Southern, and Sabaragamuwa provinces and among the Hindus of the east coast, especially of the Batticaloa district. It is almost certain that this cult was also widely prevalent in the Jaffna peninsula prior to the reforms of Navalar. In both Sinhala and Tamil areas Pattini is propitiated in annual post – harvest rituals known as **gammaduva** in Sinhala and **Vaikaci Catanku** in Tamil. Here at these annual festivities, the texts of the cult are recited, and the goddess is propitiated in communal rituals. In the Sinhala areas the Pattini texts are embodied in a compendium known as **pantis kōlmura** - thirty five song books – many of them adapted into Sinhala Buddhism in the 15th century from older Tamil texts. In the Sinhala communities the same texts are sung while others are enacted in both comic and serious ritual dramas in the annual festivities of the **gammaduva**. One of the most powerful ritual dramas enacted here is known as **marā ipäddīma** or the killing and resurrection, which deals with the murder of the goddess' consort - Kovalan or Palanga - and his subsequent resurrection by Pattini This type of awe – inspiring dramas I label **dromenon**, borrowing that term from Greek mystery religion. Another drama that was also performed at the **gammaduva** is known as **pataha,** literally "pit" but in fact a pond or tank built by the evil - three - eyed king of Pandi. The latter is pitched on the level of comedy, but like all good comedy has a serious underlying purpose. In this lecture I want to focus on one theme that unites these two dramas - the serious drama and the comic drama - and this is the theme of justice and righteousness. I focus on this

1. This paper was delivered as the Punitham Tiruchelvam Memorial Lecture in Colombo on 21st July 1983 at the invitation of the Tamil Womens' Union Kalalaya.

theme, for though the ladies we honour today are dead, what they stand for has relevance especially for the hard times in which we are now living, both in this country and eleswhere in the contemporary world. The two ritual dramas are not only united thematically, but they are also part of a continuous narrative. The narrative of the **killing and resurrection** are familiar to most of you from its literary expression **Cilappatikaram**, but the **pataha** or tank is not, though it is also rooted in the ancient traditions of South India and Sri Lanka. Owing to limitations of time I can only briefly discuss the dramatic aspects of these rituals. I shall instead focus on the major theme-the theme of justice. In the first part of this lecture I shall deal with the **pataha** ritual drama which deals with two kings - the evil – three eyed King of Pandi (Pandya) and the good king of Soli (Cola) who is identilied with the great Tamil king, Karikala.

PART I

The stage setting for the **pataha** ritual is rather elaborate. Two people dressed in coloured robes are seated on chairs set in diagonal corners of the ritual arena. The **kapurāla** enters the arena wearing his dancing kit, his face daubed with white paint. Another dancer (his assistant) accompanying him carries in his hand two "crowns" made of coconut leaves, plantain bark and cane. The **kapurāla** struts about the arena for a while, then starts singing to the beat of the drums. After singing a few stanzas he utters a prose commentary, explaining to his audience the (rather difficult) verse, filling in parts of the narrative which the text is not too clear about, and sometimes, for convenience and to save time, paraphrasing large chunks of verse. For instance, after singing half a dozen verses he introduces himself and the other actors. His prose commentary is interspersed with the conventional "yes" of the drummer.

> **Kapurāla**: Now we've sung a few songs in this assembly here but it doesn't make too much sense. (Yes) Shall I tell you who I am? (Yes) - I am the Chief Minister of the Pandi king, ruler of the eighteen realms. (Ah) I am the one who manages all the work of the king. The king gave me this job after great thought. (Yes) - Because it is neeessary for a good minister to know exactly what the king thinks and wants. Such "calculating" ministers are wanted in the king's service.

Then he goes up to the Pandi king (represented by one of the persons dressed in colourful robe) and places a crown on his head, while an attendant draws an "eye" on the middle of his forehead with red and white paint. He also goes to the other king (later revealed as the king of Soli) and places a crown on his head too. The **kapurāla** changes his role as the occassion demands. He sings all the verse, utters the explicatory dialogue, and speaks the lines of the king, the citizens, the minister, and whatever other role is required. Very often, his is a plain, impersonal running commentary that explains the action being performed in the ritual arena. The reader will be able to visualize the arena situation if he remembers the dramatic technique employed – through verse, explicatory prose, and background action.

The powerful King of Pandi, with a third eye in his forehead, had a most wonderful city built by the divine architect Visvakarma himself. It resembled a city of the gods, so large and beautiful was it. Powerful though he was, the king was also a cruel tyrant.

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

He'd acquired merit by giving alms in a previons birth
He wore a crown studded with gold and gems
The **cakravartin** Pandi king with three eyes
Was pleased with the blessed sight of his city

The City of Pandi was modelled on that of the cosmic city of Sakra or Indra. The king himself is like a god - he possesses a middle eye like Siva But he is not satisfied because there is something lacking in the city. To quote from the **pataha** text :

He thought like the great ocean
This king, lord of the earth, born of a pure dynasty
Thought he : "I am a chief of gods and a chief of kings"
He summoned his ministers to the top storey of his palace.

The ministers reading the king's thoughts say :

O mighty one, lord of the seven world systems
O warrior powerful as Sakra himself
Like Sakra himself possessing three eyes
Is it your pleasure that we build a pond?

The reason for the pond is very clear from the text. The king's city is a replica of the divine city of Indra – Sakra located in Meru, but it lacks one thing. He needs a pond to rival Sakra's. So he orders his ministers to construct a pond, a replica of the cosmic lake **anōtatta** but he ignores popular wisdom and initiate work in the unfortunate month of December (**unduvap masa**), on an unfortunate day of Mars (Tuseday) which also coincided with another unfortunate day, the fourth day of the lunar fortnight. Then he summons people to work on his project. At this point in the drama several small boys representing workmen, enter the stage carrying toy mammoties The suffering they undergo are described in graphic detail. Let me quote one stanza where the people complain.

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

At this point the singing is interspersed with more action. A chair is brought into "mid arena" where the **pataha** is being dug by the boys (workmen). The king of Pandi comes up from his seat in the corner of the arena and sits on the chair. The **kapurāla** now takes on the voice of the king, that is, he speaks the lines the king would have spoken. "These are idle workmen, they should be impaled on an **ula** (a pointed iron stake thrust into in the anus as a punishment in Kandyan times) No inquiry necessary". The **kapurāla** quickly changes roles and is now simply the narrator: taking a small stick (representing the stake), he places it under the king's chair: the audience thoroughly enjoys the fun.

In spite of the efforts of workmen there is still no real progress in the construction of the pond. So the great **cakravartin** king now decides to summon the kings of the eighteen realms to work. Seventeen kings arrive and the **kapurāla** (priest) introduces each of them to the audience. For example the king of Urumusi or Ormuz is impersonated by the **kapurāla**. Since **uru** is the Sinhala word for pig, the **kapurāla** comes on all fours, grins showing his teeth like a pig, and then approaches Pandi. Several attendants cover the head of Pandi with a white shawl so that he does not see unclean sight. Other kings are introduced in a thoroughly outrageous manner. For example, the **kapurāla** says that no one is allowed to enter within the palace wall of the king's city – then he places his foot on Pandi's buttocks implying that this protuberance is the palace wall. There is a lot of similar horseplay as deliberate desecration of the king's person takes place. The divine king is the object of vulgar parody.

The text – soon takes on a serious tone The kings of the eighteen realms are also put to work and suffer as badly:

> Even the kings who lived in the shade of goodness
> Didn't have a thing to eat the live long day
> They draw loads of earth and heap them on both sides
> They suffer terribly like rounded – up cattle.

The arena is a bustle of activity, with a dozen of boys representing the kings and their followers digging the pond. While this is going on, **kapurāla** continues with his songs, prose commentary, and action. Explaining the songs to the audience he says that there is one part of the pond that is not cut. This is the work allocated to the king of Soli (**Cola**) but he has refused to come. King Pandi is wrathful over this insult. He writes a letter promptly, ordering ths king of Soli to arrive lest he, Pandi, like a glowing torch in his anger, wreak fearful reprisal.

> If you do not come to work tomorrow
> You will be soundly beaten, so be prompt.

He sends a dispatch through a messenger gifted with words. The emissary is a "small boy" who is given the **sannasa** ("letter"), that is a piece of tender coconut leaf (**gok**). The **kapurāla** carries the boy in his arms and walks to the other end of the arena where the king of Soli dressed in yellow, is seated. He places the boy on his shoulders and sings the songs

of the text. Then the **kapurāla** places both boy and **sannasa** on Soli's lap. The **kapurāla** continues his singing while Soli reads the letter. These songs state how the king of Soli, undaunted by the threats of Pandi, lops off the nose and ears of the emissary and orders that he be fed excrement and urine and sent back to the king Pandi. The **kapurāla** carries the child ("emissary") in his arms across to the other side of the arena, where the king of Pandi sits in his stiff majesty.

The king of Pandi, squirming under this insult, marches into the country of Soli with a huge force. Meanwhile messengers inform Soli that the king of Pandi is at his gates but Soli, quite undeterred, is determined to vanquish the proud king. He blows a tremendous blast from his conch, and his friend Sakra, hearing this, creates a devastating downpour that lasts seven days. Back in his own city the king of Pandi, deeply chagrined, decides to pay back in kind. He curses the country of Soli to be without water for seven years and seven months. His wish is fulfilled. So great is his power that the country of Soli, is devastated by drought, famine, and pestilence. There is a whole text known as **solipura sāgataya** (famine in the kingdom of Cola) that deals with the waste land created by the curse of an unrighteous monarch.

The ritual drama of **pataha** focusses largely on the evil king Pandi. But what about the good king of Soli or Cola? The Sinhala tradition has a series of texts dealing with Soli who is explicity identified with the great South Indian king Karikala. I have not seen enactments of the Soli texts but there is little doubt that they were also performed as a ritual drama. Thus two dramas were probably enacted: one dealing with good king of Soli and the other with the evil three eyed Pandi. Karikala does not build a pond to imitate Sakra but instead raises the bunds of the Kaveri river for peaceful and productive irrigation purposes The kings of the eighteen realms also participate in this, but they are treated with utmost courtesy and respect Soli-Karikala lacks a divine eye; he also heeds popular custom. The completion of the **Kaveri** project is celebrated with water sports, described in a text known as **diya kcli katāva.** The once desolate land of Soli is now full of prosperity and a series of beautiful stanzas describe the river swarming with fish and blooming with lotuses, symbolic of purity; and a joyous populace sporting in the waters. Let me quote a few of these stanzas;

Lotuses floating in the water
White water lilies and lotus blooms
Blue lilies and blue moss
Loitered in the waters.

The ripples darted to and fro
Drops of rain gently touched
The blue lilies swaying
And straying in the water.

Hurt by the harsh sun
Petals dived underneath
There touching each other
They circled and eddied.

The drummers proclaimed the message:
"In order to sport in the river
Come in all your chariots
And decorate your streets"

The noble folk that day
Proclaimed the message to the people
Who heard it all
And gaily decked the streets.

Smiling without shyness
With high spirits and gay company
Girls frolicked in the river
Carefully avoiding the waves.

Then Karikala noble lord
Stood before the hundred kings
He spoke gentle words to them
And gave them permission to sport.

This image of prosperity and the picture of a joyous populace sporting in a river replete with fish must be contrasted with the previous drought in Soli and the depletion of fertility in that kingdom Thus, underlying the themes sketched earlier is a more widespread, universalistic message of the myth: the just king serves the common weal and brings prosperity to the human community, while the actions of the evil king creates a wasteland and destroys fertility and prosperity. This is a theme almost everywhere associated with traditional kingship; it appears in Sophoclean drama, in Shakespeare's **Macbeth,** and in all traditional polity. It is expressed as a profound wish in a popular Pali "prayer" (trans. Hocart 1931. p. 27).

Devō vassatu kālēna
Sassa sampatti hetu ca
Pīto bhavatu lōkō ca
Rājā bhavatu dhammikō.

Let the god rain in due time
who promotes the welfare of crops;
and let the world rejoice and
let the king be just.

The question we now should pose is this: What is the historical and social significance of the **pataha** ritual, of the evil Pandi and the opposed texts of the good Soli and how are these texts related to the myths and ritual dramas of the goddess Pattini? Let me present an extremely condensed view of my argument which I have examined in great detail in my book **The Cult of the Goddess Pattini.**[2]

Briefly stated it is this: scholars who have worked in the Indianized kingdoms of Southeast Asia have shown that the capital of the king – be it in Cambodia or Sri Vijaya or any of the ancient Burmese and Siamese kingdoms – was a replica of the cosmos and the king himself a divinity, residing in the **axis mundi,** the sacred center of the universe, generally identified with Meru. However practically no evidence is available on the views of ordinary

2. G. Obeyesekere The Cult of the Goddess Pattini. Chicogo and London: University of Chicogo Press, 1984.

people who had to give their time and labour to the construction of works that brought little public good The source of these ideas of kingly divinity were originally Hindu and were exported to Southeast Asia where they were articulated with indigenous Southeast Aslan notions. There was I believe a process of feed-back involved; Hindu ideas influencing Southeast Asian conceptions and these conceptions in turn influencing Hindu ideas as a result of continual cultural interchange. It is clear from our texts that these ideas were operative in the history of Sri Lanka also. Paranavitana has discussed the influence of these conceptions in the reigns of Vattagamani Abhaya (89-77 BC); and Kassapa I (473-491 AD). However it is in the reign of Parakramabahu I (1153 – 1156 AD) that these conceptions became specially dominant, no doubt influenced by both Hindu and Southeast Asian conceptions A reading of chapter 79 of the **Culavamsa**, entitled "The laying out of the gardens and the like," merits futher examination by historians and archaeologists. For example, Parakramabahu named one park Nandana, which is one of the parks in the Tāvatimsa heaven. Indra himself sports there and **cakravartins** spend time in it after their earthly demise. Another garden was named Māhāmēghavanuyyana, "the garden of the huge clouds"; yet another was called Rājanārāyana after Visnu, and so forth. The sea of Parakrama, or Parākkrama-samudda had in its midst an island "resplendent with a superb royal palace" (**Culavamsa** 1953: part 2, 116-18). "The king also had a canal constructed called Gambhīra (the deep) which started at the flood escape called Makara of the Parakrama samudra". (Culavamsa, 1953, part 2, p. 120). Makara of course, is the mythical dragon in Buddhist thought. One of the king's tanks or ponds was named **anōtatta**, the mythic lake whose waters can resurrect the dead. **Anōtatta** is also the pond which the evil Pandi tries to replicate in his city.

Parakramabahu's great achivement was that he could combine the cosmic symbolism of the divine king with the more practical agricultural and hydraulic constructions of his predecessors. But this fusion was **not** possible after Sinhala civilization moved to the South and West where there was abundant rainfall. Consequently irrigation works on the dry zone model were redundant. Divine kings living in their cosmic cities could no longer cover up their grandiose conceptions in the guise of irrigation enterprises. This comes out very clearly in our texts. Pandi with his third eye is a god living in the cosmic city. People are forced to construct a pond for this king but they obviously resent it The king's pond – identified with the cosmic lake **anōtatta** is contemptuosly referred to as a **pataha** or pit. The evil king lives in splendid isolation in his divine palace unmindful of the sufferings of the ordinary people. The public resentment comes out clearly in the outrageous lampooning of the divine king The king's person was sacred; yet in the drama the priest desecrates it. We know that the conceptions of the sacredness of the king was literally applicable to Kandyan kings. Also parodied in these texts is the abject ceremonials people had to perform when they sought audience with the king. In the text known as **The Killing and Resurfection** (which is enacted later on in the same festival) Kovalan – Palanga – confronts the king of Pandi but he refuses to pay him the customary prostrations. He tells the king instead;

Only to the Buddha and the Sangha
To my teachers and parents dear
Even though you call me thief
I' ll not worship anyone else.

The implication is clear; the measure of ceremonial worship is that given the Buddha. But Buddha worship does not require abject prostrations; and any worship (such as those accorded to Kandyan kings) should not and ought not surpass that accorded to the Buddha

It is also evident that ordinary people had another model of kingship which they held in high esteem; this is embodied in the good king of Soli (Karikala) who is explicitly identified in Sinhala texts as embodying the Asokan ideals of kingship, and the Buddhist ideal of **dasa rāja dharma.** If the King of Pandi has built a city for his personal glory not so with the king of Soli who raises the bunds of the Kaveri for the public good. If the justice of Pandi is unrighteous; the justice of Soli is exemplary. The texts gave many examples of the self – sacrifices and righteousness of Soli who moves among the people and is solicitous of their welfare.

Ordinary people then had two models of kingship and conceptions of righteousness by which they measured actual kings. Knox for example records the public gossip of the time regarding Rajasingha II of Kandy who also got people to construct a tank (1681, p. 72). Baldeus mentions the public complaint against Rajasingha I who summoned corvee labour to build the fortification of Kotte. Here also people complained about being forced to carry loads on their heads (Baldeus 1673, p. 7). A similar complaint was made against Jayavarman VII (1181 – 1200) of Cambodia. The last king of Kandy Sri Vikrama also built a pond – the present Kandy lake. This once again had cosmic significance and was called the **Kiri muhuda** (the milk ocean) while the wall outside was the **ahas paura** (rampart of the sky). The eight sided **pattirippuva** or octagon in Kandy had a similar cosmic significance; the king lay at the centre of the eight directions of the traditional Sinhala compass from where he watched the procession of the Palace of the Tooth Relic.

While people were resentful of the cosmic aspirations of kings and had another model of righteous kingship (the Soli-Asokan ideal), nowhere is rebellion advocated. Righteous order must not be restored by force, but through divine intervention. This is where the goddess Pattini comes in. It is she who must destory the evil king's might and end the drought in Madurai to pave the way for Soli-Karikala to raise the bunds of the Kāveri river. Thus according to another Sinhala text, the **Amba Vidamana** or "shooting of the mango" (also enacted as a ritual drama) the god Sakra asks the goddess Pattini to be reborn in the human world in the form of a mango in the orchard of king Pandi. The king sees this wonderful mango and wants to pick it but none can bring it down. Sakra comes down to earth as an old beggar and shoots the mango; the juice falls on the middle eye of Pandi and obliterates it Thus Pandi's source of power – the middle eye – wherein resides his Śakti is blinded. The frightened king places the golden mango in a casket and floats it down the **Kāvēri** where it is recovered by a merchant prince and his wife. Soon, instead of the mango, there emerges an infant girl who is adopted by the merchant and his wife. This was the goddess in her final human incarnation.

The tradition of the goddess' conception in a mango, the blinding of Pandi's middle eye, the adoption of Pattini by the merchant are shared by both Sinhala Buddhists and Hindus of the east coast. However among the Hindus, it is a hermit, not the god Sakra who shoots the mango. It is virtually certain that this form of the myth is borrowed by the east coast

Tamils from the Buddhists. The rest of the story of the goddess' life in both Hindu and Buddhist versions is remarkably close to the great Tamil - Jaina epic the **Cilappatikaram.** In Buddhist Sri Lanka, as I said earlier, the key section of this story is enacted in a ritual drama known as "the killing and resurrection". This is not enacted in the east coast; there the key event enacted is the marriage of the goddess and her consort Kovalan. In the east coast the life of the goddess is recited during the May festival from a text known as **Kannaki Valakkurai** (Kannaki's prosecution of justice). Once again you will notice that the Pattini myth transends doctrinal differences and is rooted in common traditions shared by Hindus, Buddhists and Jainas.

Let me now come back to the theme of the lecture. In her last human incarnation the goddess Pattini, marries Kovalan, but since she is a goddess, she does not have sexual relations with him. Kovalan however deserts Pattini and enjoys unabashed sexuality with the courtesan Madevi (or Matavi), from whom he has a child Manimekalai. He squanders his wealth on the courtesan, and then, repentant and broke, he comes back to Pattini. Pattini and Kovalan accompanted by Pattini's servant, Kali, go to Madurai to sell the anklet. Pattini stays in a cowherd's settlement while Kovalan (Palanga) goes into the city of Madurai; where he is betrayed by a goldsmith who accuses him of stealing the queen's anklet. Kovalan (Palanga) is summoned before the king and protests his innocence. The queen of Pandi also states that Kovalan is innocent, but the king does not pay heed to her. Ultimately he is executed as a thief by the king of Pandi Pattini comes in search of her husband and resurrects him by the power of her chastity. She then goes up to the king, and accuses him of violating the ten principles of kingly justice. As she tears out her breast and strikes it on the ground, fires engulf the city destroying the evil king and the city itself. The fire also envelops the street of goldsmiths and destroys evil people, but spares the good - including the queen of Pandi. Then a god named Sātā in Buddhist texts, and Cittalai Cattan in Hindu texts, asks her to cool down and calm the fires of Madurai. She does this and rains fall and douses the fire. Justice is restored and along with it comes the resumption of rain, and fertility and the common weal.

The question I now ask is; What is the nature of justice enshrined in these texts that we have thus far discussed?

The epic and the popular ritual and mythic sources are all interrelated in terms of a powerful theme that permeates all versions of the Pattini myth; the notion of the king's justice. This comes out in the Sinhala-Buddhist versions of the myth. The rationale for Pattini's birth in the golden mango of the Pandi king's orchard is to destroy that king's assumption of divinity by blinding his middle eye. The king of Pandi is evil; opposed to his model of kingship is that of Soli (Karikala), the good king, ruling according to the dictates of royal justice **(dasa rāja dharma)** and emulating the paradigmatic case of Asoka In the myths and ritual dramas of Pandi and Soli evil triumphs, if only temporarily. This triumph of evil is a realistic appraisal of what must have occurred time and again in the history of South Asian kingdoms - the rule of despotic kings out of touch with popular opinion and people's conceptions of royal justice. This theme of justice is an ancient one, and versions of it are found in older South Indian literature. From about 8 century A. D. till the

17 century A. D. there developed a vast body of popular literature in Tamil, Telegu, Kannada and Malayalam generally dealing with this theme. Almost always the good king is Karikala but the evil three-eyed king is variously named as Trinetra Pallava, Trinetra Navalocana, or Mukhari. In these popular South Indian texts also the middle eye of the evil king is obliterated.

For the purposes of convenience I shall label this notion of righteousness as "rational justice". Soli's justice is rational in so far as it is directed to the public good; Pandi's is irrational because it is directed towards personal self-glorification. When rational justice fails, divine intervention must occur; but the justice of the goddess Pattini is also rational, since it destroys evil but spares the good. The end product of the goddess' wrath is to create the resumption of a just social order and concomitantly, the resumption of rain and fertility. These notions are fully rooted in the Pattini cult – in the Sinhala and Tamil versions and in the **Cilappatikaram** itself. However, historically, in South India and in parts of Sri Lanka, the Pattini cult has been transformed into the Kali cult. For example in my research in Kerala, I discovered several texts which describe the life of Pattini; but Pattini is identified with Kali. When this happens there is a concomitant change in the conception of justice; a change from what one might call a rational or righteous justice into a vengeful or "irrational" conception of justice. Let me illustrate this with two examples from the Kerala texts and one from Mulaitivu.

1. In one myth the goddess Kali or Devi goes to Pandi's kingdom and resurrects her husband from the dead. Then she attacks the Pandian kingdom and destroys it entirely, and even kills the innocent queen.

2. Aother text describes in thirteen lines how she cuts up the goldsmith into smaller and smaller pieces.

She gave the pieces of the flesh to demons and then went to the city of Pandi. The king summoned his army of twelve thousand soldiers to fight her. But Kali kil ed all twelve thousand and drove back the king. She entered the palace, seized the king, cut his throat, and wrapped his head in silk and gave it to the demon Kanta Karanan. Then she went up to Queen Perundevi and tore out one of the queen's breasts and threw it on one of the crossroads where the streets of goldsmiths and merchants' (cetti) met; there arose the temple of Mutturaman. Then she tore out the queen's tongue and threw it there; the deity of the Mutturaman temple sprang forth. The goddess appeared before the temple and gave half a boon. Then she went to the Kailasa (Siva's abode) and hung the head of the Pandyan on the left of the head of the demon Taraka. Finally she went in Kotunkolur (Cranganur), and consecrated her husband (his image) there. She established herself there also. In both there texts Kali destroys the city and people with her army or by herself-never with her breast.

3. Similar accounts are found in Sri Lankan Hindu Tamil texts outside the Batticaloa district. Consider this text from Mulaitivu recorded by Hugh Nevill in 1888:

She (Kali) now called the 6000 Pandians outside the Palace, and they obeyed her. She then announced that they were condemned to death and ordered them to strip off their royal ornaments. Then she forced them to stand upon all fours like cattle, and in degrading posture, and addressed them saying that they had committed three crimes, for each of which they merited death She now assumed her own divine and terrific aspect, and as Kali herself, stood before them. She had huge teeth like a lion, protruding eyes like eggs, a trident in one of either hands, right and left; and in the others a garotte, a spear and two knives.

Then she made the Pandians stand in one row, and pierced their bodies with her tridents, and plucking out their bowels, she hung them as garlands on her neck. (Nevill 1888, pp. 21 - 22).

Elsewhere it is said that "she pierced the belly of Muttumalai will her trident thought she was five months with child, and garlanded her neck with her bowels", and so forth (Nevill 1888, p. 22).

Note the contrast with the Pattini texts. In the Pattini texts, the goddess is an angry deity but this anger is directed against evil people alone; it spares the good. In all these texts people implore her to calm down and she listens and pays heed to their pleas She even revives the cow that was slaughtered to make a drum for her. By contrast when the Pattini cult is assimilated with the Kali cult in South India and in Mulaitivu, the deity becomes irrationally punitive and vengeance take the place of rational justice. Furthermore the seat of Pattini's justice is her breast; in a psychological sense, it is the source of both wrath and compassion and also love. When Pattini is transformed into Kali, the breast symbolism also disappears; which means that compassion disappears and wrath reigns supreme.

There is good reason then for us to lament the death of Pattini – if not the goddess, at least that of her cult – in Sri Lanka. But though the cult is dead the myths of the goddess are with us, and these myths like all great religious myths transcend their rootedness in a specific social structure and historical time and place. When people of South Asia enacted the great dramas of the Pattini cult they were talking in terms of parables. They were seeing the actual world of real kings in terms of parable – like models of mythic kings and divine kings and they fitted historical reality into this model. I call these models for measuring reality "myth models". Take the case of the death of the innocent Kovalan (Palanga) by the evil Pandi. This event is a part of a larger myth model of the goddess' justice enacted in ritual drama. When an actual case of unjust death occurs on the orders of an actual king, people will see that specific death in terms of the myth model of the death of Kovalan. The particular case of injustice is then given general significance and meaning. This is what powerful myth models do for people living in traditional societies. They facilitate "conscience – ization", by treating the specific in terms of the general, and helping people see the injustice and suffering inflicted on others as something inflicted on themselves. When myth models break down, as they have happened in our society, and especially in middle class society, "conscience - ization" also falls. We then shrug our shoulders, ignore the injustice done to others, and think (erroneously) that it will not happen to us. We shut our nice middle class doors on the rest of the world and also shut out our conscience.

PART II

When I initiated my research on the Pattini cult in the middle fifties it was still posible to witness the ritual dramas of the cult, but the cult was clearly on the decline. Ten years later these dramas were no longer enacted, and only drastically amended versions of the Pattini festivals were (sporadically) performed. One reason for the demise of these ritual is simple, the cooperative labour resources required to undertake the organization of the festival necessitated a small relatively homogenous village with a stable authority structure. In the fifties these conditions no longer obtained in Sri Lankan villages owing to radical demographic expansion and patterns of internal migration. You may heve read in the newspapers about a recent U N D P. report that highlights a feature of modern Sri Lankan society, namely this: unlike in many parts of Asia people do not move into the capital city but seem to prefer migrating into villages. Many social scientists praise this social pattern since it has kept the city of Colombo relatively uncrowded, but for my part I wish people would move into this misbegotten city and leave the villages relatively uncluttered. In my view the effect of this pattern of inter-village migration was to destroy the kinbased homogenous nature of traditional village society and produce different groups of villagers competing for scarce resources. The changes in village society as a result of these migrations can be somewhat crudely summarized as follows :

1. Inital migration from one village to another was through marriage ties, or through kinship connections. In fact, even migration to Colombo was also initially based on a similar pattern.

2. In the sixties and after things had changed: the population explosion produced a generation of children of migrants, and there was increasing competition for village resources Moreover outsiders, who had no kin ties with the village also began to move in, for a variety of social and economic reasons. The effect of these social conditions was to radically alter the pattern of traditional village society, and produce division, social conflict and economic crime in village society.

3. Finally in recent years village society in almost every part of Sri Lanka, has spawned a troublesome social problem; unemployed youths, often literate but with little awareness of traditional culture. Everywhere in village Sri Lanka these youths are organised into bands of hooligans and thugs, in the service of local **kassippu** dealers, and also of politicians of every political party in the nation. If Knox writing in the mid-seventeenth century could say that Sinhala people never stole this is not true of the late twentieth century. Theft is endemic in village society, and within recent years there has been a drastic increase in physical violence, including self inflicted violence. The major problem of crime in Sri Lanka is **not** primarily an urban problem; it is primarily a village problem.

Though the social reality of contemporary villages is as I have sketched, this is not the way the village is percived by contemporary elites and city dwellers. Colombo elites, even educated persons, still naively believe in the myth of the harmonious village. The middle class myth model of the harmonious village is the very opposite of the social reality of contemporary villages. It is a fantasy of the urban middle and upper classes who have a

personal need to uphold a myth of a harmonious world that is radically at variance with the rather drab and impersonal existence of the city. Historically these views stem from Western Romanticism, which unhappily seem to thrive in the erstwhile colonies long after it has been discarded, in the west.

Where does the problem of popular justice come into the changed social reality of Sri Lankan villages? If the old myths are no longer operative, what has happened to popular ideals of righteousness? To focus on this problem let me give you the results of two research projects – one conducted in the late 60's and the other being conducted right now.

In the first research I placed research assistants in three major shrines where people come to practice cursing and sorcery. These shrines located in different parts of the country are extremely popular and large numbers of people come there to curse their ememies and bring about their death or destruction. One unanticipated finding of the research was as follows: we found that a vast majority of the people came here out of a felt sense of injustice. Someone had done them wrong – assaulted them, stole their property, violated the honor of their wives or daughters and so forth. Respondents identified the perpetrator of the wrong as a thug, **kassippu** dealer, or someone in cahoot with such persons. In interviews people expressed dissatisfaction with the normal institutions of justice: the courts were viewed as remote, expensive and ineffectual. The police they felt, often ignored the complaints of the poor: and they were terrified of them, since respondents felt they were in league with local thugs. Traditionally, when similar problems arose they would be settled by village leaders but this leadership no longer obtained. I do not know whether these people were correct in their assessment of our institutions of justice. What is impressive, however, is the public perception of the failure of these institutions. Given this situation, people now resorted to the one outlet left for them – divine justice. They came to the sorcery shrine not only to seek vengeance but also to see that justice be done.

The deities of the sorcery shrines will not help a client if his cause is not just. Even in our own troubled times, when human institutions fail, people seek the help of the gods as arbiters of justice. But who are these deities, of what shape and form are they constituted? For sure they are no longer the old deities like the goddess Pattini who resides in Tusita heaven, according to Buddhists, awaiting future Buddhahood. These are dark deities, of terrifying visage, and armed with weapons of violence, apt symbols of our own times. In my most reeent research I am impressed by the rise of, once again, the dark deity of ancient South Asian religion – the goddess Kali.

One of the impressive features of social change in our society today, is the rise of shrines for Kali and a multitude of priests and priestesses of the Kali cult. The Kali cult has totally superceded the Pattini cult at least among Sinhala Buddhists. There are major shrines for this deity in the city of Colombo and even when these shrines are run by Hindu Brahmin priests, over 80% of the clientele are Sinhala Buddhists. For these paople she is no longer the servant of Pattini, but a major deity in her own right. She is also popular with modern urban elites. An advertisement two weeks ago in an English newspaper has her picture armed with weapons of violence and trampling her male consort. Beneath the picture the following caption appears:

"Let us help you through potent witchcraft to eject undesirable occupants of houses, to summon back your departed within 3 days. Consultation daily at Ratnaloka Clinic excluding Thursdays. Maha Badra Kali Bewitching Headquarters, Wewelwatte, Ratnapura."

Maha Badra Kali gives a further clue to some disturbing features of the contemporary Kali cult. People nowadays propitiate Kali in her two major manifestations: Badra Kali who will act on your behalf if your cause is just: and as Sohon Kali – Kali of the graveyard – who may abdicate her moral judgement if you have sufficient faith in her This major shift in the public image of the deity among Buddhists at least, indicates that a concomitant and disturbing shift has occurred in the moral values of our society. Nevertheless for the vast majority of people who visit Kali shrines the old conviction still hold: unless your cause is just, the deities will not help you. What is therefore impressive is that though that deities like Pattini are dead, the old conceptions of justice, the idea that righteousness must prevail in the world, is alive and well in the minds of many ordinary people. This is something that rulers, then and now, in this nation and in other notions, have not understood; particularly those rulers who like the three eyed King of Pandi, bedazzled with their own glory live in splendid isolation out there – somewhere – in their cosmic cities.

REFERENCES

BALDEUS, PHILIP

1972 A True and Exact Description of the Great Island of Ceylon, translated from the Dutch by Pieter Brohier. *Ceylon Historical Journal* 8 (1-4), July 1958 – April 1959.

CULAVAMSA

1953 Culavamsa. Parts 1 and 2, translated by Wilhelm Geiger. Colombo; Government Press.

HOCART, A. M.

1931 The Temple of the Tooth in Kandy. London: Luzac (published for the Government of Ceylon).

KNOX, ROBERT

1681 An Historical Relation of the Island of Ceylon in the East Indies. London: Richard Chiswell.

OBEYESEKERE, GANANATH

1984 The Cult of the Goddess Pattini. Chicago and London: University of Chicago press.

NEVILLE, HUGH

1888 The Story of Kovalan. *Taprobanian* February 1888, pp. 16 – 22.