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UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON REVIEW

The University of Ceylon was established on the 1st July, 1942, by the fusion of the Ceylon Medical College (founded 1870) and the Ceylon University College (founded 1921). It has at present Faculties of Oriental Studies, Arts, Science and Medicine. Its seat is temporarily in Colombo, but it will be moved to Peradeniya, near Kandy, as soon as its new buildings are ready for occupation. The University has taken over from the Government of Ceylon the publication of the Ceylon Journal of Science, which will be developed as its chief means of contact with Scientists elsewhere as soon as paper supplies enable issues to be published more frequently and regularly. The University of Ceylon Review has been founded in order to make similar contact with scholars in literary subjects, to provide a medium of publication for the research in those subjects conducted in the University, and to provide a learned review for Ceylon. The Review will normally be published twice a year, in April and in November. The price of a single copy is Rs. 2.50.



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Editors
J. L. C. RODRIGO
O. H. DE A. WIJESEKERA

Some Political Conventions and Social Customs of the Sinhalese

The Convocation Address delivered at King George Hall, Colombo,
on 15th November, 1945.

“IT will not be a sin to address as Gods Kings of my lineage” wrote Rāja Siṃha on 5th Sept. 1652 to the Dutch Company, and General Stuart in 1799 addressed Rāja Adirāja Siṃha as “God of the Island of Ceylon.” Originally the Gāminī, the Leader of the Community, was elected, and till the last the consent of the people of Uḍu Nuvara and Yaṭi Nuvara was essential to the recognition of a new King; but with the introduction of the Mauryan *abhisēka* from Asōka’s Court he became invested with the divine attributes proper to a Rāja. He was as much a God to the Siṃhalese as the Emperor of Japan is to his subjects. His appearance on ceremonial occasions was skilfully stage-managed to excite the proper reaction among those privileged to be spectators, and the officer who wrote the diary of Andrews’ second embassy thus described his sensations on such an occasion . . . “A scene the most extraordinary I may say the most marvellous, that faried fancy could well picture. Never at the moment of warmest delusion was spectacle so strange, so altogether magical, painted to my fancy.” When, after everyone had been worked to a high emotional pitch, the King vouchsafed a reply, “The tone of voice conveyed unusual sensations” he wrote. “It seemed to issue as from some concavity and was not attended by any motion on his part. When he spoke he did not otherwise appear to do so than that a sound was heard to come from about the Throne.” Everything about him was wrapped in mystery. Even among Chiefs not all ranks were permitted to set eyes on the Ran Kaḍuva, the emblem of Kingship which was girt round him on assuming his regnal name. Offences against him were more than breaches of human law, they were transgressions against a religious cult. To touch his person was sacrilege, which explains Knox’s village gossip that Rāja Siṃha punished with death the courtier who placed his hands on him when the King was in danger of drowning. “Your people up to this hour worshipped the King as Father and God” exclaimed Baṇḍāranāyaka Mohundiram in heated protest at Eknāligoḍa’s outrageous behaviour towards his betrayed master. The sanctity extended to the royal possessions, which were distributed for safety

among persons of various castes and classes, and there was no suggestion of misappropriation by anyone. So scrupulous were his subjects that long after Srī Vikrama's removal from his Kingdom, they handed in to the Accredited Agent of the British Government the money which they had collected as an offering to him on his marriage. All tusked elephants being royal property, to kill one ranked as a heinous offence.

Corresponding to these high privileges were his obligations, among which absolute truthfulness ranked prominently. "I do not have more than one single word" wrote Buvanaika Bāhu on 12 Nov. 1545 to the Magnifico Dom João de Castro; even the Europeanised Vijayapāla described himself in 1642 as "a god of lords, who speaks the truth." The King's commands were couched in terms "ever speaking the truth" the Ministers impressed on Brownrigg. His word once given could not be changed; "Kings of my position do not break their royal word" wrote Rāja Siṃha in 1641, and this was echoed by Pusvellē Disāva in 1811. . . . Maha Vāsali yedichcha dayak kavādāvat varadinnē nāta . . . What the King vouchsafes can never fail. To suggest a variation was tantamount to an act of treason.

The King was the Father of his people; "You are my children" said Srī Vikrama to the Mudaliyārs in attendance as he stood on the landing stage at Colombo ready to leave the country as an exile. In the administration of Justice he was the final Court of Appeal. He alone could pass sentence of death, after the members of the highest Court, the Maha Naḍuva, had found on the facts. He was responsible for protecting the country against foreign aggression. But what brought him closest to his people was his responsibility for maintaining inviolate the Sirit Chāritra of the country, that Custom which was above the King and which regulated the relations not only between rulers and ruled but also among the people themselves. When Nārēndra Siṃha infringed Sirit by presenting a King's jacket to his favourite drummer, Visuvē Panikkiya, Rammalaka Adikār tore it off the man's back and the Ministers tried and fined the King for the offence.

But the power behind the Throne was the Sabhāva of Pradhāna Radalavaru, Council of Great Chiefs. The King's actions and words were the expression of their decisions, and it was they who could make innovations in Sirit, as Āhālēpola once reminded the King, when objecting to an order he had received. In cases of extreme gravity, the leaders of the Sangha were summoned to its deliberations.

Immediately round the King were the few professional soldiers, about 300 Maduvē Ātto who mounted guard at the Palace, the skilled Gooriah and Malabar personal Guards, and the Malays. The general militia was a purely defensive body: a man serving for two weeks at a time and finding himself in food; he was not expected to travel more than a certain distance from his

home, with the result that wide patriotism was replaced by a narrow though intense local feeling. The arrow, spear and sword were his weapons; firearms were few and in case of war were issued from the Āyuda Gē to which they were returned in due course; some of these dated from Portuguese times. The only cannon were a few captured from the Dutch and English. For want of lead, bullets were generally made of iron. There was no sulphur and very little saltpetre in the country, and powder was badly prepared in wooden mortars, generally under the supervision of European prisoners, who surreptitiously drank the arrack issued for the mixing. When Davie surrendered the King had only 700 pounds available: it was transported in hollowed lengths of the Kitul palm carried by two men slung from a pole. Not weapons but leeches and mosquitos were mainly responsible for the deathroll of an invading Army.

There was an elaborate judicial system and Srī Vikrama's Ministers are now proved to have had a strong sense of justice; Milleva Disāva once rebuked British Officials with the remark that justice should be as the Sun: it must shine on all alike. A judge was expected to be not only dignified and patient, but (and this applied even to the King) studiously simple in dress, so that inexperienced suitors might not be overawed. Chiefs gave their evidence seated and without the sanction of an oath, for a Chief would not deliberately state what was untrue. The basis of punishment was the economic loss resulting from the crime. The Siṃhalese took no pleasure in causing pain, and torture as known in the West was not practised. In some cases mutilation was the recognised penalty; the man who robbed the King's Treasury might have a hand cut off, but such punishments were almost unknown since the middle of the eighteenth century. A sentence of death was very rare: the numerous such sentences passed towards the end of Srī Vikrama's reign were a last effort to arrest the flood of treason. A Chief was entitled to be executed by the sword: his eyes were not bandaged and no block was used. Where impaling or hanging was ordered, the criminal was first stabbed in the back with a dagger. Anatomising the corpse was never practised, but it was refused burial and abandoned to the vagrant dogs. Drowning was the manner of death reserved for women and there was much agitation when the British substituted hanging, which was considered peculiarly disgraceful. The convicting judge attended to see his sentence executed; where whipping was ordered the number of strokes was left indeterminate, the judge stopping the infliction when he considered the punishment adequate.

In the King's presence everyone rested on his knees, with head covered and feet bare, and no one wore a sword. A Chief's sword and gun were carried for him by two attendants. Everyone remained standing while the King's business was being discussed, and the Governor did so when the Adikārs read

their reports. When he appeared in public no one could stand on a higher level than he, and hence the doors of the houses on either side of the eroded streets in the capital were closed when he went out in his palanquin. Srī Vikrama declined to enter Brownrigg's chariot because the coachman on the box, Jonathan Fudge by name, would occupy a seat higher than his own. Within the environs of Maha Nuvara no mortal save the King would be accompanied by drums, which otherwise were reserved for the Gods. It was round those drums that the Gampola Perahāra case was fought, with its sequel in the Riots of 1915.

In making appointments he consulted the Adikārs, and the approval of the Mohoṭṭālas of a Province was essential in the case of a Disāve adipati. To this high dignitary, once a feudal Prince, was entrusted the Great Banner of the Province, which was guarded day and night by men of the Atapattu within the Guardhouse in front of his residence. He also received a number of koḍituvakku, the local cannon, which he was entitled to fire on first entering his Province. His emoluments were various and substantial, including villages with the services of their inhabitants, and his authority was almost that of a King, but without the power of life and death. The appointments within the Province were in his gift and in respect of each he was entitled to a fixed Bulathurula, a fee usually tendered with betel leaves, the universal token of courtesy and respect; this term has been grossly misrepresented and misunderstood.

For rewarding distinguished service there was nothing corresponding to Western Orders of Chivalry; instead the King conferred a Garu Nama, name of Honour; a noteworthy case was the name Karunādipati conferred by Vimala Dharma Suriya in 1699 on the Dutch Company's Governor. A strip of gold with the name engraved thereon was fastened round the recipient's brow, but this did not constitute a portion of his costume. He would also be given lands, and may be an elephant, horse, sword, gold chain or tuppatti, but money was not an acceptable gift. The land of the Country was in the King's charge; it was never sold but was employed to remunerate officials, who received no salaries, and was freely granted on condition of Rāja kāriya. Everything needed for the Royal establishment, down to banana leaves, was supplied in kind, with a small quantity of specie which was mainly required for foreign transactions.

Rice cultivation was everyone's preoccupation and round it had grown a religious, social and economic ritual. The Sinhalese cultivated for subsistence and took little interest in trade, but any surplus would be exchanged for cloth, salt and dried fish; there was a limited quantity of coffee, jaggery and cardamons, wild honey, wax and buffalo ghee, the sale of which brought the villager a trifle in cash. The one commercial product of importance was areka nut, the trade in which was the King's monopoly; he did not exploit

the gems from the Akara, which were vested in him; foreign interests prevented trade in the cinnamon which grew wild; and there was no market for the abundant timber of the forests. The state of trade was reflected in the dearth of gold and silver which could only be obtained from abroad in exchange for produce. Money occupied as small a place in the life of the community as it did among the Egyptians who built the Pyramids. Professional money lenders consisted of a few Moors, later joined by some Malabars, who all charged such heavy interest that the King was obliged to pass restrictive orders. Advances could be obtained from the Ara Mudala, Treasury, which charged 20%.

Cart roads and wheeled traffic did not exist, and the highways were narrow tracks which were cleared to the width of nine feet when a great person travelled, with ferries where the rivers could not be forded, and ēdanḍu consisting of a couple of logs over the lesser streams. The only carriage seen at Maha Nuvara was the state coach drawn by four horses which had been presented to the King, till in 1817 Āhālēpola brought a one horse gig from Colombo; its appearance roused much indignation for at the Capital only the King could use a horse or a palanquin. Though poets sang of the Ruler as "Lord of our horses and elephants and men," in the absence of a local equine breed cavalry did not form a unit of the Sinhalese army. Horses were a much desired luxury; the best came from Arabia and Persia, and the importation was strictly controlled by the British for political purposes; to sell a horse to one who was not a British subject was punishable by transportation for seven years. Very few were privileged to use a palanquin, of which there were 5 or 6 varieties; even a Disāva could not enter one till he crossed the river round the Capital. There was strong popular feeling on the subject and when in November 1810 the Basnāyaka of the Saparagamu Maha Saman Dēvālaya appeared in one at Baṭugedara, the angry populace broke it in pieces and the Disāva in addition fined the Basnāyaka for his presumption. Horses were ridden without stirrups, the animal being led by two attendants.

Owing to the nature of the tracks, elephants were little employed for conveying goods; that service was supplied by pack oxen, each carrying two bags slung across its back and walking in single file. Mat bags were preferred to gunnies as the latter when soaked with rain damaged the contents. Human labour however was mainly relied upon all over the country, and there was a detailed organisation for providing what was needed in the King's service. The long distance load in mountainous country was forty pounds. The British experimented with asses on the Ruvarālla road, but without success.

Generally speaking, travelling was done on foot and none travelled for pleasure save the pilgrims; in their case the greater the hardships the higher the Merit acquired. Officials were supplied with cooked food by those who

were liable to the service, but everyone else took their food and cooking vessels with them. There were no inns and on all the tracks Ambalam served as resting places. These consisted of little more than a roof on wooden posts, but sometimes, as may be seen still at Godamune, it would be a substantial building. It served the villager as a place of meeting, and both the Gamsabhāva and the District Chief conducted inquiries there. A Chief's house was built in the form of a court, the front presenting a blank wall with one entrance and the rooms opening on to the court yard, where generally was the well. The walls were of mud, some at the palace being five feet thick. Roof tiles were reserved for religious edifices and the residences of the most favoured, and roofs were generally thatched, the floors being daubed with the well known mixture of cowdung and clay, the one recognised protection against termites. The windows were very small, and as carpentry was little practised, doors were formed by splitting trees with wedges and smoothing each half with adzes to supply one plank. These were fitted into sockets above and below, for hinges were not known; doorhandles and locks at the palace were damascened with gold, probably by Indian craftsmen. Furniture was limited to a few baskets and cots, with possibly one or two stools, as everyone sat on mats; the palace walls were painted with hunting scenes which the British have covered over with whitewash. Illumination was supplied by clay or metal lamps, the wick being fed with *kekuna* oil, as coconut oil was scarce. Kitchen utensils included besides the village-made pots, a few metal platters from India. Food was eaten off a banana leaf, and was mainly vegetarian, though goats and fowls were in favour at the Palace. The average man tasted no meat save occasionally some dried venison or the flesh of the wild boar, with the much appreciated dried fish brought from the coast; the killing of river fish was frowned upon.

Social customs rendered impossible dinners after the European manner. In 1815 at the Ball given by the Governor, the Chiefs would not partake of supper as they could not eat where beef was eaten. Two years later when Āhālēpola entertained British officials at his home, cooks were fetched from Colombo; the guests, each with a loaded pistol in his pocket in case of any emergency, enjoyed the good food and abundant champagne, while the host sat apart and watched them, joining in with frequent toasts. The nearest approach to a public dinner was a Dhānaya given to Bhikkhus, such as the great people were expected to provide. At the Palace four varieties of rice, thirty one curries, and twelve of *avulpat*, cakes, formed the menu. Such a repast, the guests declared, brought great Merit to the host, for food it is which gives colour to the face, comfort and strength to body and mind, and increase of years. They then chanted their thanks, in that perfect intonation which can only be acquired by many years' training . . . "May he be born in the six realms of the Dēvas; when reborn among men, may he obtain all desirable

wealth . . . gardens and fields, gold and raiment, pleasant food and drink, and well-being like that of a Prince of the line of Maha Sammata; may he behold the Maitri Buddha, and by giving ear to his teaching be brought into the path leading to Nirvāna."

As a general rule the Sinhalese did not drink intoxicants, though there was a little secret distillation, apparently learnt from Portuguese prisoners; the coconut tree in Sinhālē was too rare to be tapped, but the abundant kitul supplied toddy which was a valuable preventive against malaria and also provided the jaggery sugar which everyone used. Cane sugar was rare and the candy from Bengal was in demand among the Palace ladies. Indoor amusements, besides games like dominoes, were few, but with the growth of the Malay colony at Katukelē the use of European cards and gambling spread fast. A complaint before the Magistrate on 27th June 1817 brought to light the fact that Ajuta playing for heavy stakes had been carried on at Eknāli-goḍa's house throughout the previous night, and a Moor who had joined complained that he was cheated by using marked cards.

Domestic service as found today is a British institution, the corresponding service among Sinhalese being supplied by Dāsaya, slaves, as the word has been unhappily translated. As in India and various other countries a judge could hand over a defaulting debtor to the creditor to serve him till the claim was satisfied, and during the period of this bondage the creditor was responsible for the Dāsaya's maintenance. The transaction did not adversely affect the debtor's inherited status, his right to acquire and dispose of property, or his competence to give evidence. As the Commissioners of Enquiry sent out from England recorded on the 25th of July 1829, "In no part of the world is slavery in a milder form than here. Cruelty to a slave is scarcely known and in general they are treated more as adopted dependents of the family than menials." The case of Appu Rāla is well known; his mother had sold him as a boy to settle a debt of eight pagodas, but in due course his abilities and character compelled recognition and Sri Vikrama, with characteristic liberality of mind, created him Disāva. Had other countries been able to adopt the Sinhalese attitude, the world would have escaped much human suffering.

The teaching of letters, which was never sold, was the responsibility of the Sangha, and this saved its members from being parasites on the public whose liberality maintained them, but there was no provision for teaching girls. In the opinion of the observant John Davy the standard of literacy here under Sri Vikrama, judged by the ability to read and write, was no lower than in contemporary England. Of higher learning there was little beyond the study of the Buddhist scriptures, though there was a noteworthy increase of scholarship under the Sangha Rāja's influence in the latter half of the eighteenth century. The multiplication of palm leaf books by causing them to be

copied was a meritorious act which was much applauded. Numbers were represented by *Lit lakunu*, a list of which was printed by Johannes Ruel at Amsterdam in 1708; they were employed in the translation of the Ordinances of 1843, but for practical purposes are now displaced by the so-called Arabic notation, which originated in India.

Public Hospitals had ceased to exist. There was no State medical organisation, and the villagers depended on their own knowledge of simples and drugs, which was considerable; botanical observation had reached a noteworthy stage; for instance the Sinhalese recognised seventeen varieties of mushrooms and twenty-two of talā, basil. They also distinguished the different virtues of the different parts of a plant—root, bark, leaf or fruit. Certain families claimed to be specialists in various diseases, but they did not practise their art as a means of living. Their remuneration was left to the gratitude of the patient. The King's *Bēt Gē* formed an important establishment and a Moor family which brought the lore of the Indian hakim was admitted therein. Paune Maistrigē Abera's father treated the King's men who were wounded at Vak Oya and was rewarded with a gift of lands. "Suggestion," stigmatised as "devil dancing" was efficacious in certain types of sickness.

Art, which had reached such a high standard at Anurādhapura, had almost ceased to exist, though occasionally a noble piece of sculpture was still produced. Painting, exclusively on wall spaces, was in a happier state, thanks to the encouragement of the South Indian dynasty, and Vihāra walls were the public picture galleries. Many years had to pass before Englishmen began to understand Eastern painting, but even in 1818 stray individuals vaguely realised that they were against something great. Ran Giri Dambulla so moved Major Hook, who was hardly a cultured man, that, to quote his words, he "issued that most positive order to prevent delapidation or injuring any of the beautiful ornaments which adorn this Masterpiece of Priestcraft, Superstition and Credulity. It is without exception the grandest production of human labour and ingenuity of the kind which any of us have ever seen." Owing to the lack of precious metals, the use of which was almost confined to Court circles, the goldsmith had no scope except under royal patronage. Little ivory was available, for elephants were not killed: no fragment of it was wasted and fan and dagger handles, hair combs, and the decorations on the doorways of shrines often show much artistic skill. Carpenters tools were lacking and there was little woodcarving. The Kinnaras preserved good inherited designs in mat making; European prisoners had introduced embroidery but the sempster could not depend on his needle for a livelihood where all men and most women employed garments which did not need sewing. Keppetipola led his men to fight the British, wearing a *tuppotti* round his waist and a kerchief round his head, with bare feet.

Singing, which was appreciated and encouraged, like music, cannot be judged by European standards, but the skill of the drummers was noteworthy. Professional men dancers, who preserved an age-old tradition, were always sure of an understanding and critical gathering, while at Dēvālayas like Saparagamuva and Boltumbe there were women dancers. Kaluhāmi, dancing before Rāja Simha at Alut Nuvara, so charmed him by her grace that he gave a gift of lands to her family group, the Uḍagedara Ilangama. The women dancers at the Palace would not perform before the public.

The Sinhalese took for their moral Code the Buddha's teaching, which penetrating deep within all classes, consciously or unconsciously influenced their everyday lives. As for religion, if that word connotes a belief in spiritual beings, they adopted a modified form of Hinduism, attributing the welfare of the world to certain Gods, whose favour could be secured by the promise of gifts and the advocacy of saints. Behind these was a background of even more archaic, and sometimes gloomy, beliefs, combined with a system of Hero worship under which new Saints, chosen on the basis of popular suffrage, could be added to the Calendar. Kivulēgedara Mohoṭṭāla, whose determined struggle against the British ended with his execution on 18 Dec. 1818, figures there.

Of the four National Festivals, the first is the Alut Avuruddha, New Year, which goes with the Hindu Calendar. The second is the Āsala Keliya, when the gods paraded in triumphant Perahāra, and no King would dare to interfere. The third is Katti Mangalya, the Festival of Lights; and lastly, the Alut sāl Mangalya, the Festival of the Harvest, when the year's toil of an agricultural race was rewarded with well-filled atuvas and bissas; the Gods had blessed the crops, and to them in grateful acknowledgement is offered the choicest of the store. A birthday is not an occasion for special rejoicing, but on the Full Moon of Vesak every one remembered the Teacher and in his honour placed scented flowers before his likeness, serene in perfect Peace.

The Conventions and Customs thus briefly touched upon reveal a life which amidst high ideals, is curiously lacking in many respects. Such a verdict is symptomatic of progress, a term the connotation of which has always been a baffling problem, perhaps never more so than today in the welter of ideas, inventions, emotions and desires. One hundred and sixty of our young men and women, blessed with an education impossible of attainment a hundred years ago, will soon leave this Hall, starting their life careers at the apex of an intellectual crisis in the Island's history. From their ranks will come the leaders of the country. A gifted few will leave their mark in science and the industries. More perhaps have resolved to devote their lives to making this country a better land in which to live. Political changes have brought to them opportunities such as their forbears never had, and they

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must think of a wider world than in the past. Let them strive to make it a happier world for everyone.

Sinhalese children are not taught to say prayers before going to sleep, but a Bhikkhu recites a hymn or two; here is one of those hymns, in translation, over which they might well ponder.

Let all creatures be happy and prosperous ; let them be of joyful mind
All beings that have life, be they feeble or strong, tall, of mid
stature, or short, minute or vast,

Seen or unseen, dwelling afar or near, born or awaiting birth.

Let all creatures be joyful.

Let goodwill without measure prevail throughout the world, above,
below, around,

As a mother's love, who, while her life lasts, watches over her
child, her only child.

P. E. PIERIS.