

# Tamils of Sri Lanka: Historical Roots of Tamil identity\*

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Commenting on the peopling of Sri Lanka, nearly half a century ago Paranavitana,<sup>1</sup> the doyen of Sri Lankan archaeology observed that “the vast majority of the people who today speak Sinhalese or Tamil must ultimately be descended from those autochthonous people of whom we know next to nothing.” However archaeological studies during the last few decades have given solid data regarding pre – and proto-historical phases, which paved the way for the dawn of the historical phase. With regard to pre-history although available data show the presence of early man during the Palaeolithic phase around 125,000 B.P, we are on surer grounds regarding the succeeding phase, both archaeologically and anthropologically.

The beginning of this phase is dated to 34,000 B.P.<sup>2</sup> Besides their tool technology, especially the microliths, the physical make up of early man has now been identified as of the Austroloid group, progenitors of present day Veddas, Yakshas of Pali chronicles and speaking a language belonging to the Austric linguistic group. Besides the many cultural borrowings by succeeding people, their language survives in the names of plants, animals and place names.<sup>3</sup> For instance the terms of rivers with endings such as Oya, and Ganga are of Austric origin.

In the absence of tangible evidence for the presence of the Neolithic phase of pre-history, beginnings of the proto-historic phase is assigned to 900B.C., In archaeological label the culture of this phase is named as Megalithic or Iron Age. Megaliths are termed as tombs built with big stones in natural forms or roughly dressed or even a grave marked with a prodigious rude stone or an excavation in soft rocks containing human remains of the dead. Besides graves without any lithic appendage, but by virtue of certain other cultural traits, especially Black and Red ware and iron, commonly found in other types of Megaliths are also classed as Megaliths. Although the main focus of this culture, is Peninsular India, Sri Lanka is its southern most extension. <sup>4</sup> The Megalithic culture itself has four component elements habitations, burials, rice fields and tanks.

Excavations and researches carried out during the last three decades indicated that it was this culture which laid the foundation for the dawn of civilization in the Island.<sup>5</sup> This has been amply demonstrated in a recent article of Suddharshan Seneviratne,<sup>6</sup> where he made the following observations.

*“Archaeological investigations at Proto-historic habitations and burial sites indicate that Sri Lanka formed the Southern most sector of the broader, Early Iron Age Peninsular Indian techno-cultural complex. The ecofact and artefact assemblages from these sites in Sri Lanka have established that rice-cultivation, animal domestication, the horse, small scale metallurgical operations involving iron and copper, bead production, village settlements, the Megalithic burial ritual, the ceramic industry involving the production of Black and Red ware and Black ware and post firing graffiti symbols were introduced to Sri Lanka from Peninsular, or especially from South India. This chronological context (largely) obtained in the form of radiometric dates, the techno-cultural elements and their region of origin, does not in any way agree with the descriptions of the peopling of Sri Lanka narrated in the middle historic chronicles of Sri Lanka... These Early Iron Age habitats continued throughout the Proto-historic and Early historic transition, and well into the Early historic period. The association of the earliest Brahmi inscription – bearing cave shelters in and around Proto-historic burial as well as habitation sites indicated the continuation of the descendants of the Proto-historic communities into a new cultural milieu”*

The above observations sum up the role played by people of the Megalithic culture in the formation of early Sri Lankan Civilization. Besides archaeological data, genetic studies<sup>7</sup> coupled with other linguistic,<sup>8</sup> sociological data such as kinship system,

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\* *Northeastern Monthly, Northeastern Herald, 2003 August 8 – 14:* <http://www.tamilcanadian.com/article/1952>

<sup>1</sup> Paranavitana S., 1959. (ed), *History of Ceylon*, Vol. I, Part I, (Colombo), p.96.

<sup>2</sup> Deraniyagala S.U., 1997. *Pre and Proto-historic settlements in Sri Lanka*, Economic Review, Oct/Nov. 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Paranavitana S., 1959. Op. cit., Chapters II-IV.

<sup>4</sup> Sitrapalam S.K., 1980. *The Megalithic Culture of Sri Lanka*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Pune.

<sup>5</sup> Sitrapalam S.K., 1988. ‘Proto-historic Sri Lanka – An interdisciplinary Perspective’, Paper presented at the 11<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Historians of Asia, (Colombo), Sitrapalam S.K., 2000. ‘Tamils in Ancient Sri Lanka: A Multi disciplinary Perspective’, Prof. S. Vithiananthan Memorial Lecture delivered at the University of Jaffna on 16.0.2000.; Sitrapalam S.K., 2001. ‘Proto-historic Sri Lanka: A Retrospect’ Proceedings of Jaffna Science Association – Ninth Annual Sessions held on April 4 – 6, University of Jaffna, Thirunelvely.

<sup>6</sup> Seneviratne Sudharshan, 1996. ‘Peripheral Regions and Marginal communities towards an alternative explanation of early Iron Age material and social formations in Sri Lanka’, *Dissent and Ideology, Essays in honour of Romila Thapar*, (ed) Champaka Lakshmi R. and Gopal, S., (Oxford University Press), pp.364-310.

caste system<sup>9</sup> and folk religion<sup>10</sup> of the Sinhalese show that it is no longer possible to assert that authors of the Megalithic culture are the descendants of the Mythical Vijaya from North India.

Credit for the actual colonisation of the Island during the Proto-historic phase around 900 BC lies with the people of Megalithic culture who are none other than speakers of Dravidian Languages as in Peninsular India.

In other words what we hear of Elu or proto-Sinhala or Tamil are offshoots of the Megalithic culture as in the case of Tamil, Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam emerging from a common cultural base in Peninsular India. In Sri Lanka people of Megalithic culture together with the pre-historic population namely the Austric language speakers developed Sri Lankan civilization. Their exposure to the outside cultural and other influences would have been the contributory factor for the emergence of civilization in Sri Lanka around 250 B.C. Of these, introduction of Buddhism played a vital role in giving a Sinhala identity. As aptly observed by Susantha Goonetilleka<sup>11</sup> "*Sinhalisation was fundamentally a cultural process associated with Buddhism and that migration even if it did take place was of a minor kind, so as not to have left a significant trace in the Archaeological data or in demographic terms on population*". In short Sinhalization came after and not before Buddhism.

The evolution of group identities and ideologies associated with social groups represents one of the fascinating areas of historical research. It is also important to note that even in European languages the word race dates only from about the Sixteenth century and that biological definition of the term as denoting a group as distinct from other members of the species by specific physiological characteristics, is of more recent origin. Hence terms such as '*Aryan*', '*Dravidian*' to denote racial groups is totally unscientific and can be used only in a linguistic context. The form Tamil, which has an affinity to Sinhala Dameda/Demala, Pali Damila, Sanskrit Dramida or Dravida,<sup>12</sup> is used in the Sangam literature and Tolkapiyam, the earliest extant grammar of the Tamil language in the context of language, people and the land.<sup>13</sup> It occurs almost contemporaneously in literary and epigraphical sources of Sri Lanka as Damila and Dameda respectively.<sup>14</sup>

Interestingly the geographical proximity of Sri Lanka to Tamilakam is often reflected in references such as '*opposite coast*', '*further coast*' found in Sri Lankan Pali chronicles. However, unlike in the case of India, or Thamilakam or in the case of Tamils of Sri Lanka, our Island has a long history of Buddhist historiographical tradition as embodied in the Pali Chronicles, the Dipavamsa, Mahavamsa and Culavamsa. These being the works of Buddhist monks naturally enough, were permeated by a strong religious bias, encrusted with miracle and invention. The central theme was the historic role of the Island as a bulwark of the Buddhist Civilization. The reference to Tamils occur in instances where their presence affected the fortunes of the Sinhalese Kingdom. Thus they are depicted not only as people of '*false faith*' but also as aliens, invaders, usurpers and adventurers. Unfortunately we have no sufficient data from the Sri Lankan Tamil chronicles which are datable to medieval times regarding the early Tamil settlements. Tantalisingly enough Tamil works of South India have no notable allusions to the activities of the Tamils of Sri Lanka.

## II

The earliest reference to Tamil presence in Pali chronicles is narrated in relation to the capture of political power in the ancient Anuradhapura Kingdom by the Damilas. These chronicles mention only the number of years they have ruled from Anuradhapura, the whole of the Island. In dealing with Tamil rule, one could see at least two views of the Pali chroniclers, namely of the Dipavamsa<sup>15</sup> and Mahavamsa<sup>16</sup> written in the Fourth and Sixth centuries A.D respectively. Dipavamsa refers to them without the slightest indication that their rule was unwelcome.

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<sup>7</sup> Kirk R.I., 1976, '*The legend of Prince Vijaya – A study of Sinhalese Origins*' American Journal of Physical Anthropology, Vol.40, No.1, pp.91-99; Papiha S.S., Mastana S.S., and Jeyasekara R., 1996, '*Genetic variation in Sri Lanka*' Human Biology – Vol.68(5) p.735; Saha N., 1998, '*Blood Genetic markers in Sri Lankan populations - Reappraisal of the legend of Prince Vijaya*', American Journal of the Physical Anthropology, 76, pp.217-225.

<sup>8</sup> Gunawardhana W.F., 1918. *The origin of the Sinhalese language* (Colombo).

<sup>9</sup> Ryan Bryce, 1953, *Caste in Ceylon - the Sinhalese System in Transition* (New Jersey) Karunatilaka P.V.B. 1983 *Early Sri Lankan Society – Some reflections on Caste, Social groups and Ranking*, The Sri Lankan Journal of Humanities, Vol. IX, Nos. 1&2 1983 (Published in 1986). pp.108-143.

<sup>10</sup> Bechert H., 1973., '*The Cult of Skandakumara in the Religious history of South India and Ceylon*', Proceedings of the Third International Conference Seminar of Tamil Studies, Paris (Pondichery), pp.199-206.

<sup>11</sup> Goonetilleke Susantha, 1980., '*Sinhalisation: Migration or Cultural Colonialism*', Lanka Guardian, Vol.3, No.1. May 1, 1980, pp.22-29: Vol.3., No.1 May 15, 1980, pp.18-19.

<sup>12</sup> Paranavitana S., 1970. *Inscriptions of Ceylon*, Vol.I, Early Brahmi Inscriptions (Colombo), p.LXXXIX-XC.

<sup>13</sup> Zvelebil Kamil, V., 1987, '*The term Tamil*', Journal of the Institute of the Asian Studies, Vol.4< No.2, March 1987, pp.1-10; Joseph P.M., *The word Dravida*, International Journal of Dravidian Linguistics, Vol.XVIII, No.2 pp.135-136.

<sup>14</sup> Paranavitana S., 1970. Op.cit.,

<sup>15</sup> Dipavamsa, 1957, 1958 (Tr.& Ed.) Law, B.C., The Ceylon Historical Journal, Vol.VII, July and October 1957 and January and April 1958 Nos. 1-4.

<sup>16</sup> Mahavamsa, 1950. (Tr., & Ed), Geiger. W. (Colombo).

In dealing with the same events, the Mahavamsa demonstrates a major change of attitude. Here Buddhist ideology is stronger and importantly, it is tied up with racial prejudice. Tamil rule of the Pre-Christian period is viewed as a completely alien factor in the politics of Sri Lanka. Sena and Guttaka are said to have been sons of a mariner trading in horses (*assanāvika*), emphasizing their foreign origin.<sup>17</sup> As in Dipavamsa, the author of the Mahavamsa while referring to the rule of Sena and Guittaka admitted that they ruled righteously (*rajjam dhammēna Kārayum*) for twenty two years in the second century B.C.<sup>18</sup> Elara is described as a Damila who came from the Cola country and ruled for forty four years in Sri Lanka.<sup>19</sup> The just and humane nature of Elara's rule with popular legend is emphasised in the Mahavamsa. Although he was a non Buddhist, he is said to have followed the traditional practice of offering alms to Buddhist monks. He is also credited with repairs of a Buddhist Temple which he had damaged accidentally.

However, the author of Mahavamsa says that Tamils under him desecrated stupas and other places of Buddhist worship. Moreover a sizeable segment of Mahavamsa is devoted to Dutthagamani, who is the hero of the Mahavamsa. Dutthagamani during his campaign in Sri Lanka is said to have fought with Thirty two Tamil Kings. Mahavamsa asserts that Tamils were slain in large numbers. The account of the war is brought to a close with Buddhist Monks consoling the King who felt remorse at so much carnage. Only one and a half human beings have been killed, say the monks, for among them there was only one who had taken refuge in the "*Triple Gem*" and another who had observed the five precepts.<sup>20</sup> The rest who were non-believers and persons of sinful conduct are likened to beasts. Leaving aside the un-Buddhist nature of this view, here one could see total condemnation of the Tamils.

Thus the Mahavamsa story of Elara – Dutthagamani war makes it fairly clear that this pro-Buddhist, anti-Tamil attitude is super imposed on a situation which did not call for such an attitude. Elara was a patron of Buddhism and was not fighting a Tamil war. Sinhalese generals led his army and so also there were Tamil generals in the army of Dutthagamani. There was also no conceivable difference between troops fighting on the two sides. Dutthagamani's war was a war of unification twisted to serve an ideology which was perhaps prompted by different circumstances. Moreover Bhalluka is mentioned in the Mahavamsa as a nephew of Elara and landed at Mahatittha with a force of sixty thousand men to help Elara in his battle against Dutthagamani. Nevertheless he arrived only on the seventh day after the last rites of Elara were over and Dutthagamani had killed not only Bhalluka but also all his men.<sup>21</sup>

Sixty years after Elara there came another invasion in the reign of Vattagamani. The Five Tamils rulers who dislodged Vattagamani temporarily are referred to as Damilas who landed at Mahatittha with troops.<sup>22</sup> After dislodging Vattagamani, Tamil rule had lasted for fourteen years and seven months. They are Pulahattha, Bāhiya, Panayamāra, Pilayamāraka and Dāthika (103 – 89 B.C). Two Tamils again figure during the rule of queen Anula (48 – 44 B.C).<sup>23</sup> One was Damila Vatuka, a foreigner (*annādēsika*) who ruled for one year and two months. The other was Damila Nilaya, and Mahavamsa calls him as a palace priest ruling for six months only. Thus if we calculate the rule of Tamil kings at Anuradhapura, in terms of years from the reign of Devanampiya Tissa (250 B.C. – 210 B.C.) they have ruled nearly eighty two years, thus making one third of the early historic period ending with the beginning of the Christian Era.

Chulavamsa<sup>24</sup> again mentions Tamil rule in Anuradhapura by the Pandyas for a period of Twenty Seven years. They are Pāndu (429 – 434 A.D) his son Parinata (434 – 437 A.D) his brother Khudda P~rinda (437 – 452 A.D.) Tiritara (452 A.D.) Dāthiya (452 – 455 AD) and Pithiya (455 A.D.) There is no specific reference in the chronicles either to the faith of these rulers or to the monasteries that benefited by their donations but inscriptions which record these benefactions to Buddhist monasteries afford evidence that they supported the Buddhist religion.<sup>25</sup> They were overthrown by Dhatusena, another hero in the Sinhalese tradition. It was at this time that an anti – Tamil feeling entered Sinhalese nationalism, probably the result of a quarter of a century of Pandyan rule and probably restricted to the clergy. Dissatisfied Princes going to Thamilakam for military support to aspire for Kingship of the Island has also been recorded in Pali chronicles. Before seventh century, only three instances of mercenaries being invited to Sri Lanka are recorded in the chronicles. Each occasion was separated from the other by about two centuries. This practice is first recorded in the reign of Īlanāga (33 – 43 A.D.) who is said to have captured the throne with foreign mercenaries.<sup>26</sup> Two centuries later Abayanaga (231 – 240 A.D brought over Tamil soldiers to fight enemies.<sup>27</sup> Nearly

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<sup>17</sup> Mahavamsa., Op.cit., Ch.XXI. v.10-11.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.,Ch.XXI.v.13-14.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.,Ch.XXV. v.75.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., Ch.XXV. vv.109-111.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., Ch.XXV. v.v.76-80.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., Ch. XXXIII., vv.55-61.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., Ch.XXXIV. vv.18-27.

<sup>24</sup> Culvamsa, Vols. I-II 1973 (Tr & Ed) Geiger, W (Lond) Ch. XXXVIII vv ii. 29-34

<sup>25</sup> Paranavitana. S., Op.cit. 1959. pp.293-294.

<sup>26</sup> Mahavamsa., Op.cit., Ch.XXXV. v.v.14-45.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., Ch. XXXVI. vv.45-53.

two centuries later Moggallana I (491 – 508 A.D.) returned from India with mercenary troops to capture the throne from his brother Kassapa I.<sup>28</sup>

### III

Earliest epigraphic records namely Brahmi inscriptions dateable from 3<sup>rd</sup> Century B.C numbering more than thousand are scattered in most parts of the Dry Zone and are often quoted as concrete archaeological evidence for the early colonisation of the Island by early Aryan settlers. However the study of these inscriptions during the last few decades had necessitated a revision of this view. Firstly, as mentioned earlier, they are in close proximity to Megalithic cultural sites. Secondly, non-Brahmi symbols found on them offer a close similarity to that of the graffiti marks found in the Megalithic pottery. Thirdly, the study of the palaeographical features of the Brahmi script, which is the mother of later Sinhala-Tamil script, exhibit two layers.<sup>29</sup>

The earlier layer has forms similar to that of forms of Thamalakam such as *a, i, ma, la, la, l, ra, na* which are designated as Tamil-Brahmi. Viewing the peculiarity of these forms in vogue in Thamalakam from those of North India as evident from inscriptions of Asoka, Buhler has classified this as Southern Brahmi. It was named as Dravidi or Tamil.<sup>30</sup> P.E. Fernando<sup>31</sup> while concurring with Buhler and Karunaratne, has argued for an existence of an earlier form of script in both Thamalakam and Sri Lanka before the introduction of North Indian Brahmi probably associated with Buddhism during the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.

Moreover, Fernando while claiming that “*the Brahmi script of Thamalakam and Sri Lanka represent the earlier tradition of script said that these records were carved by scribes of one and the same school and if so, it has to be assumed that a school of scribes, differing in several respects from those who carved the inscriptions of Asoka was existing in South India and Sri Lanka and was practising its art in these regions even before the time of Asoka*”. With the introduction of North Indian Brahmi forms, early forms were gradually supplanted as Karunaratne has indicated.

Excavations at Anuradhapura and Akurugoda have shown the presence of typical Tamil Brahmi form *la* which is not found in North Indian Brahmi.<sup>32</sup> So also another form *na*, peculiar to Tamil-Brahmi has been found at Akurugoda on the coins.<sup>33</sup> These are clear evidences for the presence of Tamil-Brahmi forms before it went out of vogue with the introduction of Northern Brahmi associated with Buddhism. This is clearly seen in palaeographical features where the earlier and later forms continued in usage for some time till earlier forms went out of use by the beginning of the Christian era. Early Dravidian forms too suffered a similar fate as that of early Brahmi characters by losing their identity around this time.

Use of early Brahmi in Northern Sri Lanka is also evident from the presence of Brahmi script on potsherds discovered at various places in the Pūnakari region<sup>34</sup> and Kantarodai.<sup>35</sup> The seal from Anaikkodai, with the title *Kōvēta, Kōvētam*, datable to 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. is again a proof for the use of Brahmi in Northern Sri Lanka.<sup>36</sup> Thus it is evident that the people of both the regions divided by the Palk Straits were in the same cultural zone so much so that they adopted a common script during pre-Buddhist days.

The distribution of Brahmi inscriptions do give a different picture from that of Pali chronicles which speak of a unified Sri Lanka with Anuradhapura as capital for many centuries. However, the find spots of these inscriptions show that there were as much as 269 minor chieftaincies all over the island. <sup>37</sup> Because of the resources Anuradhapura would have pre dominated, as evident from excavations. These chieftaincies remind us of similar state formation in Thamalakam where chiefs or Kurunilamannars ruled over various parts of Thamalakam. This is also further reinforced by the internal evidence of these inscriptions, which mention the role of *Parumakans, Vēls, Ays, Gamani* and *Raja* as heads of these chiefdoms. Of these most important is the title *Parumaka*, which occurs in a quarter of inscriptions which number more than thousand.

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<sup>28</sup> Culavamsa.,Op.cit.Ch.XXXIX, v.v.20-22.

<sup>29</sup> Fernando P.E., 1989, ‘*The Beginnings of Sinhala Script*’, Education in Ceylon – A Centenary Volume I, Colombo.

<sup>30</sup> Buhler J.C., 1904. Indian Palaeography (Indian Antiquary, Vol.XXXIII.)

<sup>31</sup> Fernando P.E., 1989, ‘*The Beginnings of Sinhala Script*’, Education in Ceylon – A Centenary Volume I, Colombo, pp. 19-24.

<sup>32</sup> Wimalasena N.V., 1998, “*A New Chronology for the letters appearing on the pottery found near the place in the citadel of Anuradhapura*”, Paper presented for the section E of the Sri Lanka Historical Association on the occasion of the Multi – Disciplinary International Conference on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Independence of Sri Lanka Feb. 23 – 25, p.27; Weisshaar H.J., Roth H., and Wijeyapala W., (ed) 2001., *Ancient Robuna – Sri Lanka – German Archaeological project in the Southern province*, Vol.3. Verlag Philipp Vonzabern – Mainz Aru Rhein, pp.1-496.

<sup>33</sup> Boparachchi Osmand and Wickremesinghe Rajah, 1999, *Rubuna – An Ancient Civilization Re-visited, Numismatic and Archaeological Evidence on Inland and Maritime Trade* (Nugegoda- Colombo), pp.56-99.

<sup>34</sup> Pushparatnam P., 1993, *Pūnakary Tolporulāyvu*, (University of Jaffna Publication), (in Tamil).

<sup>35</sup> Krishnaraja S., 1998, *Tolliyalum Jalppanat Tamilar Panpattut Tonmayum* (Jaffna), (in Tamil). pp.51-58.

<sup>36</sup> Ragupathy P., 1987. *Early Settlements in Jaffna – An Archaeological Survey* (Madras), pp. 202 – 203.

<sup>37</sup> Gunawardana R.A.L.H., 1982. ‘*Prelude to State: An Early phase in the evolution of Political institutions in Ancient Sri Lanka*’, The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities, Vol.III, Nos. 1 & 2, pp.1-39.

Paranavitana<sup>38</sup> while acknowledging them as a class of nobility and pioneers of village settlements all over the Island, concludes that “*The foundations of the economic, political, religious and cultural institutions which they laid stood firm for centuries and still remain so for those of the present and future generations to build up*”. Sudharshan Seneviratne<sup>39</sup> would associate them with the earliest political elite of the country.

Now coming to the origin of the word *Parumaka*, Paranavitana<sup>40</sup> and others derived it from the Sanskrit word *Pramukha* which was adopted in Pali as *Pamukho/Pamokkho* and Sinhalese *Pamok*. A linguistic analysis shows that the above Pali and Sinhala forms are derivations from Sanskrit *Pramukha* and not *Parumaka* of the Brahmi inscriptions. Because Sanskrit *Pra* becomes *Par* or *Para* and not *Paru* in the Prakrit language as in the case of Sanskrit *Priya* becoming *Piya*. This only proves that the Sinhalese *Pamok* and the Pali *Pamukho/Pamokkho* are derived from the Sanskrit *Pramukha*. Hence it is very likely that *Parumaka* is the derivation of the Dravidian word *Parumakan* or *Perumakan*.<sup>41</sup> The antiquity of this term is vouchsafed in the earliest Sangam literature of Thamilakam where it occurs as a title meaning ‘*chief*’, a leader. The feminine form *Parumakal* also occurs in these inscriptions. However, it is noteworthy that this form persists as far as the 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D. as *Ma Parumaka* or *Maha Parumaka* as the title of the Sinhalese King. Thus the addition of *ma* to *Parumaka* again shows that the King himself was originally the primus inter pares among *Parumakas*.

Presence of the forms *Veḷs*<sup>42</sup> and *Āy*<sup>43</sup> is again a pointer to that as in Thamilakam, in Sri Lanka as well, a political hierarchy developed along similar lines. Similarly, as in Thamilakam, one would notice the presence of various clans such as *Baratans*, *Utiya*, *Cholas*, *Tiya* which occur in these inscriptions as *Bata/Barata*, *Uti/Uttiya*, *Cuda*, *Tissa* respectively.<sup>44</sup>

Tamil identity is further evident in the study of place names of these inscriptions. Although many of the original Tamil forms were either Prakritised or got submerged in the development of the proto-Sinhala language, more than fifty percent of these place names in the Brahmi inscriptions point to their Tamil origin.<sup>45</sup> They are *ati* (place from where one hails), *Kuti* (settlements), *Kottai* (fort), *Matai* (stream), *Pati* (city/village), *titi/pitti* (raised ground), *Katu* (place), *Natu* (city/village), *Kotu* (submit), *Āvi/Vāvi* (place with water resources), *kam*, *kāmam* (village), *Karai* (beach/boundary) *kal* (rock), *kiri* (hillock), *kuṭā* (territory surrounded by sea on three sides), *kuḷi* (pit/water reservoir), *vayal* (field), *maṭu* (pond), *malai* (mountain), *talai* (land/hilly region), *toṭuv~i* (touch/reach), *Nakar* (town), *pattinam* (city), *Puram* (Metropolis), *Palli* (Buddhist/Jaina settlement), *ār* (human-settlement), *Kaṭavai* (path/threshold), *Vil* (low shaped pond), *pāy* (place), *Kulam* (tank), *Kummi* (cluster/heap), *Tanai* (pastures for cattle), *Pukarani* (water resources).

The antiquity of the Tamil identity is also borne out by the fact that some words of the Sangam period are still in common use among the peasantry of Jaffna such as *aitu*, *atar*, *utu*, *uwa*, *vantārē*, although they have fallen into disuse in Thamilakam. An endearing expression used in addressing a female child as Mahanē (son) which is mentioned in Tolkapiyam, is met with in ordinary usage among the people of Jaffna.<sup>46</sup> A Tamil poet from Sri Lanka is said to have adorned the Tamil Sangam of Madurai. He is *Īlattupātan Tēvanār*.<sup>47</sup> Seven of his poems are included in the Sangam anthologies such as *Akanānūrū*, *Kuruntogai* and *Narrinai*. He may perhaps have lived in the first century B.C., as he appears to be one of the earlier poets of the Sangam age.<sup>48</sup> It is only in the above context one has to analyse the form ‘*Dameda*’ occurring in the earliest Brahmi inscriptions of Sri Lanka in five instances dateable to 3<sup>rd</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> century. They are two inscriptions from Periyapuliyankulam in the Vavuniya district, one in Seruvavila in the Trincomalee district, one in Kuduvil in the Amparai district and one in the ancient capital city of Anuradhapura in the Anuradhapura district.

<sup>38</sup> Paranavitana S., 1970, Op.cit.p.IXXIV.

<sup>39</sup> Seneviratne Sudharshan, 1992, *Pre-State chieftains and servants of the state – A case study of Parumakas*, The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities, XV (1 & 2), pp.99-131.

<sup>40</sup> Paranavitana S., 1970, Op.cit., p. IXXIV.5

<sup>41</sup> Sitrapalam S.K., 1986/87, ‘*The Title Parumaka found in Sri Lankan Brahmi Inscriptions – A Reappraisal*’ The Sri Lanka Journal of South Asian Studies, No. I (New Series), pp.13-25.

<sup>42</sup> Sitrapalam S.K., 1990, ‘*The form Velu (Vēl) of Sri Lankan Brahmi Inscriptions – A Reappraisal*’, Perspectives in Archaeology, Leelananda Prematilleke Festschrift (ed) Seneviratne Sudharshan et.al. Dept. of Archaeology, University of Peradeniya (Talagama) pp. 89-94.

<sup>43</sup> Sitrapalam S.K., 1988, ‘*The title Aya of Sri Lankan Brahmi Inscriptions – A Reappraisal*’, Summary of the paper submitted to the Archaeological Congress, (Colombo).

<sup>44</sup> Velupillai A., 1980, ‘*Tamil Influence in Ancient Sri Lanka with special reference to Early Brahmi Inscriptions*’, Journal of Tamil Studies, Vol. 16 < Dec. 1979, pp.63-79 and Vol.17 June 1980, pp.6-19.

<sup>45</sup> Pushparatnam P., 2001, *Tamil place names as gleaned from the Brahmi Inscriptions of Sri Lanka – Kaveri*, Studies in Epigraphy, Archaeology and History, Professor Y. Subbarayalu Felicitation Volume, (ed) Rajagopal S., (Chennai), pp.343-366.

<sup>46</sup> Paranavitana S., 1970, Op.cit., pp.43-45.

<sup>47</sup> Akanānūrū, 1961. (ed) Kācivicuvanāthan Cettiyaar, Mu, Thirunelvely vv.88,231,307; Kuruntokai 1962 (ed) Cōmacuntaranār, Pō.vē, (Thirunelvely), v.v.19,343,360; Narrinai 1962(ed) Cōmasundaranār, Pō.vē.(Thirunelvely) v.366.

<sup>48</sup> Paranavitana S., 1959, Op.cit., p.43.

When Paranavitana edited these inscriptions there were only four inscriptions mentioning 'Dameda'; subsequently one was discovered at Seruvavila. Paranavitana while referring to this form 'Dameda' made the following observations:<sup>49</sup>

*"All these inscriptions are in the old Sinhalese language, the vast majority of the persons who had them indicted must have been of the community known as Sinhala.*

*"But this name does not occur at all in them, for the good reason that as almost every one in the land was a Sinhalese, it was not sufficiently distinctive to refer to a person by that designation. But where a donor named in an inscription belonged to an ethnic group other than the Sinhalese, we find the ethnic name, associated with his personal name"*

Before going into the arguments of Paranavitana, it is necessary to mention about the inscriptions bearing the form Dameda. A Tamil trader Visakha is mentioned as Dameda Vanijha gapati visāka in the two inscriptions at Periyapuliyanakulam.<sup>50</sup> An inscription from Seruvavila<sup>51</sup> mentions a donation of a cave to the Buddhist Sangha jointly by 'Bata Mahasiva and Gabapati Dameda'. The inscription from Kuduvil,<sup>52</sup> although it is fragmentary yet mentions a cave of a Tamil lady named Tisa (Dameda Tisaya lene) who is said to be the wife of Tamil traders. They are ancient traders of Dighavapi as brought out by the reference as 'Dīgavāpi porana v~ni jhana'. A terrace used by the Tamil trading guild, 'Dameda gabapatikana Pasade' is mentioned in the inscription at Anuradhapura.<sup>53</sup> In this inscription names of five traders are also mentioned. In these inscriptions reference to 'Dameda' indicate their group consciousness, besides giving their linguistic identity.<sup>54</sup>

They have used Prakrit, to inscribe these inscriptions, as Prakrit was the lingua franca of the regions where Buddhism spread. Even in Southern India especially, in Andhra (a Dravidian language speaking region) where Buddhism had its hold Prakrit was the language of the inscriptions. Hence in the light of archaeological evidences, it is no longer valid to argue that the name *Sinhala* does not occur at all in them for the good reason that almost every one in the land was a Sinhalese. The real flaw in Paranavitana's argument is the identification of the language of the inscriptions, more correctly the language of Buddhism with ancient Sinhala. The study of Brahmi inscriptions shows that monastic language of Prakrit gradually spread to the population over a period of centuries, a process similar to the process of Sanskritisation.<sup>55</sup> In fact, as Siran Deraniyagala<sup>56</sup> says, "It is probable that elite dominance was the prime factor responsible for the suppression of the earlier base language of Sri Lanka by Prakrit". Bilingualism is not without parallels and there are cases when the original character of the language had been changed or displaced through contact or bilingualism when the language is supported by political power and religion.<sup>57</sup> At this juncture it is pertinent to quote Geiger<sup>58</sup> who studied the Sinhala language in depth. He has divided its development into three phases.

They are: Sinhalese Prakrit (3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C – 4<sup>th</sup> century AD), proto-Sinhalese (4<sup>th</sup> century AD – 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D) Sinhalese proper (after 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D). Elu, is the original language from which the later Sinhalese developed. However, data from the Brahmi inscriptions show that the Elu would have been either old Tamil or a dialect of Tamil. In the light of the evidence from the Brahmi inscriptions it is now evident that the proto-Sinhalese speakers, namely the Elu speakers came into contact with Prakrit, the language of Buddhism. This process of bilingualism gradually gave way to monolingualism, the development of the Sinhala language by 8<sup>th</sup> century AD. This is corroborated by palaeographic features as well as the presence of Dravidian forms in these inscriptions as indicated above.

The above evidences show that the form *Sihala/Sinhala* denoting a particular linguistic group was absent during the time of Brahmi inscriptions. Even in the Pali sources there are no references to '*Sihala*' denoting either a totemistic group or a clan. Tantalizingly enough, it originally denoted the land and only later a particular linguistic group. Commenting on this form *Sihala*, G.C. Mendis<sup>59</sup> observed that "Thus it is clear that this name was not in common use in Ceylon either for the Island or for the people even up to

<sup>49</sup> Paranavitana S., 1970, Op.cit. pp.LXXXIX-XC.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.28. In.Nos.355-356.

<sup>51</sup> Seneviratne Sudharshan, 1985, *The Baratas – A Case of Community integration in Early Historic Sri Lanka*, James Thevathasan Rutnam Festschrift 1985 (ed) Amerasinghe A.R.B and Sumanasekera Banda, Sri Lanka UNESCO National Commission (Ratmalana) pp. p.54. footnote 17.

<sup>52</sup> Paranavitana S., 1970, Op.cit, p.37. In.No.480.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.7, In.no.94. Sitrapal S.K., 1998, *Tamil House Holders Terrace Inscriptions at Anuradhapura – Readings in Social Science*, Essays in Honour of Dr. S.K.S Nathan, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka, (Colombo), pp.1-19.

<sup>54</sup> Sitrapal S.K., 1996-1999, *The form Dameda of the Sri Lankan Brahmi Inscriptions – A Historical Assessment*. The Sri Lanka Journal of South Asian Studies, No.6 New Series, pp.48-72.

<sup>55</sup> Goonetilleke Susantha, Op.cit., 1980, p.29 and pp.18-19.

<sup>56</sup> Deraniyagala S.U., and Abeyratne M., 1997, *Radio carbon chronology of Iron Age and Early Historic Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka*. Revised Age Estimate (Abstract) Paper presented at the 14<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the European Association of South Asian Archaeologists, Rome 7 –11. July 1997.

<sup>57</sup> Rulien Merritt, 1975, *A Guide to the languages of the world* (Stanford University Press), pp.58-70.

<sup>58</sup> Geiger W., 1938, *A Grammar of the Sinhalese language* (Colombo)

<sup>59</sup> Mendis G.C., 1965, *The Vijaya legend*, Paranavitana Felicitation Volume (ed) Jayawickrema M.A. (Colombo), pp.263-279.

the beginning of the Fourth century A.D., when both the chronicles (*Dipavamsa* & *Mahavamsa*) end. In fact the name *Sibala* or *Simbala* is popular in Ceylon only in later Pali and Sinhalese writings... *Simbala* was originally the name of the Island and people got their name from it many centuries later”.

Of the Sri Lankan sources, the form *Sibala/Simbala* appears as the name of the Island for the first time in the *Dipavamsa* dateable to 4<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.<sup>60</sup> Among the earliest epigraphic sources, it appears along with *Damila* as the name of the Island in the Nagarjuni Konda inscription of India dateable to 3<sup>rd</sup> Century A.D.<sup>61</sup> Hence the Vijayan myth of *Mahavamsa* is part of the process of the development of the Sinhala language acquiring a separate identity from that of Tamil language around 6/7<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

#### IV

In the light of the above discussion it is now evident that Tamil as a distinct linguistic group had a long history on the Island as confirmed by linguistic, literary and epigraphic sources. Pali chronicles do make mention of Tamil kings of the Island and according to the *Mahavamsa*, Duttha gamani is said to have fought with 32 Tamil kings in his bid to unite the country. The perusal of the Brahmi inscriptions do further confirm the existence of local chiefs (Parumakans) who later became kings, as well as local kings such as *Vēls*, *Ays*. Some of them because of north Indian cultural penetration adopted titles such as *Gamani*, *raja*.

The recent study of Pushparatnam<sup>62</sup> has brought to light several specimens of coins dating back to pre-Christian era. These coins have been discovered at Pallikkuda, Mannittalai, Virap~ndyan munai and Kantarodai. These have hut or temple and the Srivatsa symbols. They are different from those issued by the Pandyas on the mainland. He concludes that these are the issues of the local kings. Some of the square coins have bull symbols and these have been discovered at Kantarodai, M~tōṭṭam, Vallipuram, Anuradhapura, Pōnakari and Akurugoda in the south.<sup>63</sup> Here one could see a bull in both standing and reclining posture on a pedestal. A coin with a Brahmi legend ‘*Siva*’ with Nandipada symbol also has been discovered at Kantarodai.<sup>64</sup> Even Lakshmi plaques discovered in thousands have been assigned to Tamil rulers of Anuradhapura by Parker in the last century.<sup>65</sup> A typical coin with a legend ‘*Nākabbbmi*’ on the obverse and ‘*Polam*’ in the reverse assignable to 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. discovered at Uduthurai in northern Sri Lanka has been taken as an evidence for the rule of Naga kings in the north.<sup>66</sup> At this juncture it may be interesting to note that the Brahmi inscriptions found in Periyapuliyankulam in the Vavuniya district do indicate the rule of Naga chiefs as in other parts of the country.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, both literary and archaeological data further confirm the Naga hegemony over the northern Sri Lanka.<sup>68</sup>

Recently Bopearachchi<sup>69</sup> in the course of his archaeological work has discovered coins dateable to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. in Akurugoda, in southern Sri Lanka, written in Brahmi. These have been read as *Utiran*, *Tasapijan*, *Kapati Kajapan*, *Mahācātta*, *Malakatisaha*, *Cudaṇakasa*, *Cuda-Samaṇaka*, *Barata-Tisaha*, *Guttaha*, *Caṇanākarāca*.<sup>70</sup> Although one cannot be sure that all these are issues of local Tamil chiefs, leaving aside a few, it may be conjectured from the statement of the *Mahavamsa* that Dutthagamani of Rohana fought the 32 Tamil kings, these might have been issues of the local Tamil kings. One of the issues has legend ‘*majjima*’, which is a Prakritisiation of Tamil ‘*minavan*’.<sup>71</sup> Interestingly enough, the symbol of the fish is also found in the Brahmi inscriptions of Rohana, especially in the inscriptions of Ten brother kings.<sup>72</sup> The legend ‘*Majhi-ma-raja*’ also occurs in the Henanagala inscription in the Batticaloa district.<sup>73</sup>

The above survey indicates that the Tamils as a distinct linguistic group have maintained their identity from the early centuries of the Christian era. There were widespread Tamil settlements. They enjoyed political authority both in the Anuradhapura

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<sup>60</sup> Dipavamsa, Op.cit, Ch.9. v.i.

<sup>61</sup> Gohale Sobhana, 1980, ‘*Sri Lanka in Early Indian Inscriptions*’, James Thevathasan Rutnam Felicitation Volume (ed) Indrapala K., Thirunelvely, p.29.

<sup>62</sup> Pushparatnam P., 2002, *Ancient Coins of Sri Lankan Tamil Rulers*. (Puttūr) Sri Lanka, pp.73-81.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.p.76-81.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.p.60.

<sup>65</sup> Parker H., 1981, *Ancient Ceylon*, Asian Educational Services, (New Delhi). (Reprint). p.94.

<sup>66</sup> Pushparatnam P., 2003, *Naka Dynasty as Gleaned from Archaeological Evidences in Sri Lanka*, Proceedings of the Jaffna Science Association, Tenth Annual Sessions held on April 3-5, 2003, University of Jaffna, Thirunelvely, pp. 107-145, (p.117)

<sup>67</sup> Paranavitana S., 1970, Op.cit, In.no.338.

<sup>68</sup> Sitrapalam S.K., 1993, *Jalppanam Tonmai Varalaru*, Thirunelvely, pp.1-168.

<sup>69</sup> Bopearachchi Osmand and Wickremesinghe Rajah. 1999. Op.cit.pp.56-59.

<sup>70</sup> Pushparatnam P., 2002, Op.cit, pp.33-69.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.p.54.

<sup>72</sup> Paranavitana S., 1970, Op.cit, pp.42-50.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. no.406.

kingdom and in other regions. Besides this they played a significant role in the trade between Thamalakam and Sri Lanka. Although the sea traffic between the two regions led to the penetration of cultural influences from Thamalakam, in course of time Sri Lankan Tamils developed their distinct social and cultural institutions. The data of this period provides evidence for Tamils professing and patronising Buddhism, although the larger portion of the population were Hindus. The Hindu affiliation of the Tamils is corroborated by the Pali chronicles and Brahmi inscriptions.<sup>74</sup> There was a close contact between the Buddhist centres of Thamalakam and Sri Lanka. In fact heretical schools of Buddhism in Sri Lanka derived their strength and inspiration from the Mahayanist centres of Thamalakam. Mercenary troops brought from Thamalakam probably continued here.

## V

The dynastic instability of the Anuradhapura kingdom paved the way for more and more intervention of ruling dynasties of Thamalakam unlike in the earlier period. This has been aptly summed up by K.M. de Silva<sup>75</sup> as follows:

*“With the rise of three Hindu powers in South India – the Pandyas, Pallavas and Colas – in the fifth and sixth centuries A.D., ethnic and religious antagonisms bedevilled relations between them and the Sinhalese kingdom. These Dravidian states were militantly Hindu in religious outlook and quite intent on eliminating Buddhist influence in south India. In time south Indian Buddhism was all but wiped out by this aggressive Hinduism, and as a result one supremely important ‘religio-cultural link between south India and the Sinhalese kingdom was severed. Besides, the antipathy of these south Indian states to Sri Lanka, normally whetted by the prospect of loot, was now for the first time sharpened by religious zeal and ethnic pride. One important consequence flowed from this: the Tamils in Sri Lanka became increasingly conscious of their ethnic identity, which they sought to assert in terms of culture and religion, Dravidian/Tamil and Hindu. Thus the Tamil settlements in the Island became sources of support for south Indian invaders, the mercenaries a veritable fifth column: Sri Lanka from a multiethnic polity, became a plural society in which two distinct groups, lived in a state of sporadic tension”*

During the 7<sup>th</sup> century, rival parties in the succession disputes and civil wars resorted to raising mercenary forces from India. Mercenaries who came in the 7<sup>th</sup> century were exclusively Tamils but towards the latter part of the 10<sup>th</sup> century they included a substantial number of Canarese and Keralas. Tamil and other Dravidian mercenaries who were brought to the Island in considerable numbers from time to time and settled on the Island and became a factor in politics and society. Peace and stability in the kingdom depended to a certain extent on their loyalty and cooperation. During the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the Culavamsa gives five instances when Tamil troops were brought over to participate in power struggles of local princes.<sup>76</sup> Although the backing of Indian rulers is not recorded except in the case of Manavamma (684 – 718 AD), who received troops from the Pallava king Narasimha varman, it is very likely that such support was forthcoming. Some Tamil generals like Potthakuttha, Potthasala and Mahakanda were given high offices by the Sinhalese kings. Potthakuttha even acted as kingmaker for a brief period.<sup>77</sup> Although Tamils had become militarily distinctively important in the country, they seem to have fallen in line with cultural traditions of the Anuradhapura kingdom. These generals are credited with having made extensive donations to Buddhist temples.<sup>78</sup>

The 8<sup>th</sup> century, which saw dynastic stability in the country, appears to have been relatively free of Indian troop movements. With the 9<sup>th</sup> century however, Sinhalese rulers were called upon to face an entirely new situation – i.e. an open attempt to bring Sri Lanka under the political hegemony of south India. The first to try this were the Pandyas whose invasion caused great devastation to the country.<sup>79</sup> Culavamsa describes the invaders as ‘plundering devils’. They were joined by some Tamils who were resident in the country. A counter-invasion in support of a Pandya prince by Sena II was successful and he was able to place his nominee on the Pandyan throne. Pandyan were now called upon to meet the threat of the Colas and Sri Lanka began a policy of active collaboration with Pandyas against the Colas. Invasions and counter-invasions followed throughout the 10<sup>th</sup> century. At the end of it Sri Lanka became a province of the Cola Empire.

However events of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries left a deep mark on both the social and political fabric of the country. The Culavamsa<sup>80</sup> too, has vague reference to ‘the many Damilas who dwelt (scattered) here and there’ in the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The movements of troops between Sri Lanka and south India led to an increase in the number of Tamils resident in Anuradhapura and its environs. In the reign of Sena II we hear of Demela adhikāri named Mahasattana for the first time.<sup>81</sup> References to dues from Tamil allottees (Demel Kūli) for the first time in the records of the 10<sup>th</sup> century may mean that by this time Tamil settlers

<sup>74</sup> Sitrapalam S.K., 1990, *The Brahmi Inscriptions as a source for the study of Puranic Hinduism in Ancient Sri Lanka*, Ancient Ceylon, No.7. pp.85-109.

<sup>75</sup> Silva K.M. de, 1981, *A History of Sri Lanka*, (Oxford University Press), pp.20-21.

<sup>76</sup> Culavamsa, Op.cit XLIV, vv.70-73, V.94, V.125, V.152, XLV.vv.18-19, XLVI 33-39. XLVII, vv.33-36, 46-57.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.XLV. v.19, XLVI, 19-24.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. XLVI. v.v.19-25.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., Ch.L. v.v.12-36.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. Ch.L. v.15.

<sup>81</sup> Paranavitana, S.O p.cit.p.372.



on the Island were becoming numerous so as to necessitate the levy of a separate impost from them.<sup>82</sup> In the 10<sup>th</sup> century, for the first time, there are references in the Sinhalese immunity grants to Tamil allotments (Demel kaballa) land enjoyed by the Tamils (demelat valademin) and village land belonging to Tamils (Demel gam bim) which make it clear that these were areas set aside for this group of people, and it is likely that special regulations were operative in them.<sup>83</sup>

Moreover, Tamil loan words mainly relating to administrative ranks and military service which occur often in the texts of Sinhalese inscriptions, testify to a presence of a considerable number of Tamils living on the Island during this period.<sup>84</sup> They were concentrated in important administrative centres, market towns, harbours and other strategic centres. Most Tamils in the Anuradhapura kingdom were Hindus while others were Buddhists. Religious institutions of the Tamils were established and supported chiefly by the mercantile communities. Apart from two principal shrines at Māntai and Trincomalee, there were some minor shrines at Anuradhapura and other localities.

Some Saivite ruins, aptly termed the Tamil ruins, have been unearthed in a section of the northern quarter of Anuradhapura.<sup>85</sup> These ruins consist of Saiva temples, and residences for priests, with some lesser buildings scattered here and there. Some of these are Sivalinga temples while some others are dedicated to Kali, the mother goddess. Several stone lingas too have been unearthed in different places in this sector. Judging on the basis of the style, these temples are dateable to either 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. This is further confirmed by Tamil inscriptions discovered among these ruins which are also dateable to the same period.<sup>86</sup> While two of these refer to the donation to these temples, the third inscription records a building of a Buddhist temple known as Makkōthaippalli by the Nānku Nāṭṭu – Tamilar.<sup>87</sup>

At this juncture, it is important to note that the Mahavamsa written during this period (6<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.) reflects the Sinhala Buddhist identity. The Mahavamsa's 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> chapters present a myth, which forms a central element in Sinhala ideology. In other words, the Vijayan myth represents the political ideology of the state.<sup>88</sup> Especially after 7<sup>th</sup> century prerequisite conditions matured making it possible to link Sinhala identity with Buddhism and to present Tamils as opponents of Buddhism. Myths have been created to explain the term *Sihala/Simbala*, which originally denoted the Island and thereby an ethnic identity of the Sinhalese was linked with this form. Kings of Anuradhapura became kinsmen of Buddha and the Island became dhammadipa where only a true faith of Theravada Buddhism could flourish.

Concepts that only Bodhi sattvas (future Buddhas) could become kings of the Island gained currency in political terminology. This process of Sinhalisation has been brought out well by Coningham<sup>89</sup> who excavated Anuradhapura. He observed that:

*“By progressive Sinhalisation they resisted the attempts by the South Indian states to assimilate the Island. In such circumstances the Indo-European-Buddhist nature of the Island may have been stressed by kings and Buddhist communities in order to preserve sovereignty. This emphasis would have resulted in the gradual spread of a monolingual in place of bilingual one. Certainly geneticists have suggested that the Sinhalese are more closely related to South Indian populations than to North Indian groups”*

It is very likely that besides the Tamils in the Rajaratta kingdom who gradually lost their identity as evident from Tamil inscriptions and other Hindu remains in the core of the Sinhalese kingdom, the rest of them concentrated in present north-eastern provinces, which in course of time became their traditional homeland.

P.A.T. Gunasinghe<sup>90</sup> made the following observations about this trend:

*“From the 7<sup>th</sup> century onwards, there gradually developed a situation in the Uttaradesa (Northern Sri Lanka) which was to prove of some importance in the future for the gradual Tamilisation of the region. The Culavamsa records that when Sirinaga came with Tamil troops to attack Silameghavaṇṇa, he first occupied Uttaradesa, where he was attacked and defeated. Manavamma spent the early years of his life in hiding (linavuttika) from his rivals, living in the Uttaradesa, and when he invaded the country, from south India, he first attacked the Uttaradesa*

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<sup>82</sup> Indrapala K., 1969, 'Early Tamil Settlements in Ceylon', Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, New Series, Vol.XIII. p.55.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p.57.

<sup>84</sup> Vithiananthan S., 1980, 'Tamil Influence on Sinhalese Culture', Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference Seminar of Tamil Studies, January 1974, Vol.2 (ed).pp.194-199. Vithiananthan S., (Chunnakam).

<sup>85</sup> Bell H.C.P., 1892, *Archaeological Survey of Ceylon*, Annual Report (Colombo), p.5; Bell H.C.P.1893 *Archaeological Survey of Ceylon*, Annual Report (Colombo), p.05.

<sup>86</sup> Indrapala K., 'Two Inscriptions from the Hindu Ruins', Anuradhapura Epigraphia Tamilica. pp.1-5.

<sup>87</sup> Indrapala K., 1968, Anurātapurattilulla Nānku Nāṭṭar Kalvetṭu, Cintanai, I, No.4, Jan, 1968, pp.31-35.

<sup>88</sup> Gunawardana R.A.L.H, 1979, *The people of the lion, The Sinhala Identity and Ideology in History and Historiography*, The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities, Vol.V, Nos. 1 & 2 , p.14.

<sup>89</sup> Coningham R.A.E., Allchin F.R., Batt C.M. and Lucy D., 1996 'Passage to India - Anuradhapura and the Early use of the Brahmi script' Cambridge Archaeological Journal, Vol.6, No.1 April 1996, p.94.

<sup>90</sup> Gunasinghe P.A.T., (N.d) *The Tamils of Sri Lanka - Their History and Role* (Colombo), pp.21-22.

*In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, when the Pandyan king Sri Mara Sri Vallabha attacked Sri Lanka, he, as shown earlier, first attacked the Uttaradesa. It would seem, therefore, that by the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the Uttaradesa was less under the control of the king at Anuradhapura, and had become a place of refuge for rebels. Invaders such as Mānavamma and Sri M~ra probably attacked the Uttaradesa first because it was easier to subjugate the northern sector rather than the better defended western sector, i.e. the route from Mannar to Anuradhapura. The comparatively looser control of the king at Anuradhapura over the Uttaradesa is confirmed by the Culavamsa, which says that the chiefs of the Uttaradesa rebelled twice during the reign of Mahinda II (777 – 797 A.D.)”*

The legends of Ukkiracinkan Maruthapuravalli and Yalppadi of northern Sri Lanka, and Ādakasavunthari - Kulakkōddan of Eastern Sri Lanka have gathered a kernel of history of this process. Nevertheless, unlike in Sinhalese history, whatever the literary sources available for the history of the Tamils are of medieval times. However, the recent archaeological researches in the north show that early state formation from chieftaincies to kingdom followed the similar pattern of the south, as evident from inscriptions<sup>91</sup> and coins<sup>92</sup> discovered here. Although Pali chronicles would maintain that north and the eastern region of Sri Lanka formed part of Rajarata and Rohana kingdoms respectively, excepting for occasional references, we don't have substantial evidence for these regions forming part of the centralised administration of the Anuradhapura kingdom. The difficulties of communication and the absence of a strong bureaucracy were the factors, which were detrimental for a centralized state.

As in the case of rival claimants of the Sinhalese rulers seeking help from Thamilakam to establish rule in the Anuradhapura kingdom, in northern Sri Lanka too, a similar phenomenon is recorded in Yālppānavaipavamālai.<sup>93</sup> For, it says that Ukkiracinkan after having lost his kingdom went to the north (Thamilakam) and brought an army and ruled the northern Sri Lanka from Katiramalai in the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (795 A.D.) Later his capital was transferred to Cenkatakanagar, which is most probably Cingainagar. The rise of Pandyas under Sri Mara Sri Vallaba paved the way for the Pandyan invasion in the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D. That it reached Anuradhapura through the north, instead of going through Mahatittha, as usual in the case of invasions from Thamilakam, itself shows that Tamils in the north would have played a key role in this invasion as well. Inscriptional evidence is also available for the Cola invasion and their activities in the north in the 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D.<sup>94</sup> Recent explorations in northern Sri Lanka have brought to light various types of coins assignable to a date between 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D., presumably issued by the political authority of the northern region.<sup>95</sup> They are either square or round and could be grouped under three headings:

- (a) obverse fish between two lamps; reverse, elephant
- (b) obverse bull between two lamps; reverse, elephant
- (c) obverse bull or elephant; reverse horse a fish.

The Cola victory during the time of Parantaka is also attested by their issue of Uraka coins and Ilakkasu.<sup>96</sup>

## VI

The rise of the imperial Cola line in the last quarter of the 10<sup>th</sup> century in Thamilakam is another landmark in the history of this country.<sup>97</sup> The nature of their invasion was very different from earlier ones. Anuradhapura was sacked and the capital was shifted to Polonnaruwa, which was named as Janan~tha Mangkalam after the epithet of Rajaraja I. The Island became the ninth province of the Cola empire, named as Mummudiccōlamandalam and was ruled by the viceroy who according to epigraphic sources was Cola Ilankēsvaratēvar. Their rule lasted for nearly 70 years. The administration was modelled on the lines of Thamilakam. Tamil inscriptions discovered in various parts of the Island such as Polonnaruwa, Madirigiriya, Padaviya, Trincomalee, Kantalai, Manankeni, Nilāveli, Māntai, Kayts and Jaffna vouchsafe this.

However, the highest concentration of Tamil inscriptions is in the Trincomalee district. This shows that Trincomalee harbour played an important role in the activities of the Colas in Sri Lanka. During the period of the Cola rule Tamil influence on the politics, society and culture of the Island were felt in greater measure than ever before. A large number of officials, soldiers, merchants and artisans came to Sri Lanka. Cola officials and others set up several Hindu temples, which were endowed with revenues and other forms of wealth. Names of a few of these have been preserved in the texts of inscriptions. Rājarāja Isvaram and Thiruvirā misvaram were the two temples that had come up at Māntai. One of the temples erected by the Colas at Padaviya was Iravikula mānikkāisvaram.

<sup>91</sup> Sitrapalam S.K., 1993 Op.cit, pp.1-265.

<sup>92</sup> Pushparatnam P., Op.cit. 2002.

<sup>93</sup> Yālppānavaipavamālai, 1953 (ed) Sabanathan.kula., (Colombo), p.13.

<sup>94</sup> Parnavitana S., 1959. Op.cit, pp.344-351.

<sup>95</sup> Pushparatnam P., 2002, Op.cit. pp.96-99.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., pp.99-106.

<sup>97</sup> Pathmanathan S., 1980, *Cola Rule in Ceylon (993 -1070)*, Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference Seminar of Tamil Studies, January 1974, Vol - II. (ed), Vithianathan.S., (Chunnakam), pp.19-35.

Vānavanmāthēvisvaram, identified as Siva Devale II is the finest and oldest of the surviving Hindu monuments in Sri Lanka. Among the Buddhist institutions in the Island Velham Vihara or Naththanarkovil in the Trincomalee district was supported and maintained by Cola officials and others.

Colas introduced into Sri Lanka Saivism in its most developed form. The forms of ritual, temple worship and temple organisation in shrines set up in the Island were modelled on those of the Tamil country. With regard to the architecture of Siva Devale II, Paranavitana<sup>98</sup> observed that, “*Siva Devada II is the only monument at Polonnaruwa constructed entirely of stone and is in a satisfactory state of preservation. It is also the earliest in date of the monuments now preserved at Polonnaruwa and is the representative example of the Dravidian architecture at its best*”. The Cola bronzes unearthed from ruins of structures include images of Nataraja, Siva as Somaskanda murti, Siva as Batuka Bhairava Visnu as Bhōgasth~na mōrti, statues of Sarasvathi, Lakshmi, Chandrasēkarar, Pārvati, Sikhiv~hana Skanda, Ganesa Balakrishna and Saiva hymnists.

Sivaramamurthy<sup>99</sup> citing an example from the jatās of Nataraja, notes how meticulously artist had followed the ethos of T̄c̄vāram and concluded by saying that “*Ceylonese contribution to the study of Nataraja form has in quality far exceeded the quantity obtained by excavation or discovery*”. Special significance is the bronze image of dancing Nataraja in Arthan~risvari form discovered at Abhayagiri vihara at Anuradhapura<sup>100</sup> and the bronze image of K~raikk~l Ammai~r from Polonnaruwa.<sup>101</sup> Stone images of Daksin~mōrti, Saptam~trk~s, Ganesa, Nandi and Sivlalingas also have been found here.

Cola influence on the coinage of medieval Sri Lanka is considerable. Sinhalese rulers of Polonnaruwa period adopted some features of the Cola administration. Cola influence on kingship and administrative terminology was conspicuous. From the Cola conquest onwards Tamil became the language of official records and it retained that position until the establishment of the colonial rule. Mercenaries such as Vēlaikkārās also began to play an important role during the time of the Colas, besides the Tamil mercantile communities such as Nanādēsis, Valañciyar, nakarathhār and Thicai āyirattu aijnjōttuvar. These mercantile communities participated in the internal and external trade of the Island and set up mercantile towns.<sup>102</sup>

The overthrow of the Colas and reassertion of Sinhalese power did not mean the extermination of Tamil influence. Thus K.M. de Silva<sup>103</sup> observed that, “*the inevitable result of the Cola conquest was the Hindu-Brahmanical and Saiva religious practices, Dravidian Art and Architecture and the Tamil language itself became overwhelmingly powerful in their intrusive impact on the religion and culture of Sri Lanka*”.

The increase in numbers of Tamil community, their general affluence and the influential positions they held in the militia and administration made this impossible. Indeed, Sinhalese royalty was intermixed with Tamil blood and Buddhism penetrated by Hindu influence. Parakramabahu I, the great architect of the Sinhalese revival, was a grandson of a Pandyan prince. Tamil and Kalinga queens were numerous and Tamil and Kannada mercenaries were widely used. The enthronement of the Kalinga dynasty was beneficial to the interests of Tamils. They were Hindus and closely connected in India and with the Colas by marriage. Activities of the Kalinga ruler Magha was partly responsible for weakening of Sinhalese power. This indirectly helped the establishment of the Jaffna kingdom.

Now, coming to events in North-Eastern Sri Lanka, they became predominantly Tamil-speaking regions with the withdrawal of Cola power in Sri Lanka. Referring to the areas of Tamil settlements, Indrapala<sup>104</sup> observed that,

*“Four main areas of settlements could be seen in this period. One is in the north-eastern littoral, another is in the western region or what is now known as the North Western Province and the other two are in the region of the old capital Anuradhapura and the new capital of Polonnaruwa. Tamil settlements appear to have been widespread in the western region and in the north-eastern littoral more than in the other two places”*

Finally he added that,

*“The north-eastern littoral has yielded more Tamil inscriptions and Saiva ruins providing definite evidence of Tamil settlements in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In addition, Tamil chronicles furnish for the first time some information relating to these settlements. The transformation of the present Eastern Province into a Tamil area may well be said to have begun in the eleventh century”*

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<sup>98</sup> Paranavitana S., 1973, *The Art and Architecture of the Polonnaruwa period*, The Ceylon Historical Journal. Vol.IV, p.79.

<sup>99</sup> Sivaramamurti C., 1974, Nataraja in Art, Thought and Literature (New Delhi) pp.372-373.

<sup>100</sup> Lakdusinghe Sirinimal, *A unique Ardhanari Bronze from Sri Lanka*. Kalyani, Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Kelaniya, pp.56-60.

<sup>101</sup> Polonnaruwa Bronzes, (N.D) Published by Archaeological Department, Colombo.7, p.20.

<sup>102</sup> Indrapala K., 1971, *South Indian Mercantile Communities in Ceylon 950-1250.*, The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies, New Series, Vol.I., No.2 July - Dec.1981, pp.101-113.

<sup>103</sup> Silva K.M. de, Op.cit.p.73.

<sup>104</sup> Indrapala K., 1970, Op.cit, pp.55-57.

Except for incidental activities of Vijaya Bahu I and Parakramabahu I, northern Sri Lanka was virtually free from any Sinhalese intervention in these regions. However the Magha invasion of Polonnaruwa in 1215 A.D. with 24,000 Tamils, Kerala and Kannada troops hastened the decay of Polonnaruwa kingdom and paved the way for the consolidation of Tamil rule in the North-Eastern provinces.

Disintegration of the Polonnaruwa kingdom during early years of the 13<sup>th</sup> century led to the rise of two kingdoms, the Tamil kingdom of Jaffna in the north, and the Sinhalese kingdom which embraced the central highlands and the south-western low lands and a number of autonomous or independent chieftaincies known as the Vanni.<sup>105</sup> Magha who occupied Polonnaruwa consolidated his power with the support of mercenaries from south India and administered northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka for a period of 40 years (1215 – 1255 A.D.) The kingdom of Jaffna, which had its origin under Magha, soon came under Javaka rule. Chandrabhanu, an invader from Malaya peninsula, succeeded in gaining a foothold in the north and after the demise of Magha he conquered most of the territories formerly subject to Magha with the support of armies raised from the Tamil kingdom of south India.

The Javaka kingdom, which comprised the Jaffna Peninsula and the lands extending from Mantai to Trincomalee on the mainland, came under the orbit of Pandyan influence. Jatavarman Sundara Pandyan under whom Pandya power attained the zenith of its splendour, claimed in the inscriptions issued from his seventh year to have levied a tribute of gems and elephants from the ruler of Sri Lanka – Chandrabhanu.<sup>106</sup>

Later when Chandrabhanu defied the Pandyas, Virapandya invaded his kingdom, defeated Chandrabhanu and raised his son to the throne. Javaka rule in northern Sri Lanka was of short duration and power soon passed into the hands of the generals and chieftains who came from the Pandya kingdom. This is evident from the recent explorations in northern Sri Lanka. Here many types of coins symbolizing emergence of independent authority have been collected. They have on the obverse the bull on a pedestal in between lamps and the crescent and on the reverse fish in between lamps. Some coins have fish on their obverse as well.<sup>107</sup>

## VII

The withdrawal of Sinhalese power and its push towards the southwest having capitals at Dambadeniya, Yapahuwa, Kurunagala, Gampola, Kotte and Kandy, the region between the kingdom of Jaffna and power centres of the Sinhalese kingdom led to growth of jungle.

This facilitated the growth of independent chieftaincies known as Vanniyas. Chieftaincies of the Vanni, primarily confined to the dry zone had evolved by the 13<sup>th</sup> century. These chieftains could be classified into five broad groups, namely:

- (1) The chieftaincies of Jaffnapatnam.
- (2) The principalities of Trincomalee.
- (3) The chieftaincies of the Mukkuvars
- (4) Sinhalese Vanni.
- (5) The chieftaincies of the Veddas.

The first three of these groups were dominated by Tamil feudal chiefs called Vanniyas. Chieftaincies of the Vanni, which had their origins in the military and the administrative system of the Polonnaruwa rulers, began to play a crucial role in the politics and administrative management of the country since the dissolution of the Polonnaruwa kingdom. During the time of Magha, his allies and supporters secured power in most of these chieftaincies.

The Mukkuvar who served in his armies settled in the eastern and western coastal regions. Military fiefs granted to their leaders became the nucleus of the Mukkuva chieftaincies of Batticaloa and Puttalam. Pandya invasions of the Island during the late 13<sup>th</sup> century led to fresh migrations from south India and resulted in the conquest of the Vannies of Northern Sri Lanka by military leaders in the service of Ariyaccakaravarthi.

Towards the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Ariyaccakaravarthi who belonged to the family of Brahmin generals from Cevvirukkai Nadu in the Pandyan Kingdom became the rulers of the Tamil kingdom in Sri Lanka. His successors asserted their independence and consolidated their power as the Pandyan power declined during the early 14<sup>th</sup> century. Nallur was the capital of this kingdom.

This was also known as Cingainagar. At the time of their accession they bore consecration names such as Cekaracacekaran and Parar~jasekaran. They had a special emblem Bull '*couchant*'. The figure of the Bull was designed on the flags and banners. The royal seal consisted of the Bull '*couchant*' and the expression Cçtu. The legend Cçtu and the figure of the recumbent Bull were

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<sup>105</sup> Indrapala K., 1970, *The Origin of the Tamil Vanni chieftaincies of Ceylon*, The Ceylon Journal of Humanities (2) July 1970, pp.111-140.

<sup>106</sup> Rasanayagam S., 1926, *Ancient Jaffna* (Madras), p.38.

<sup>107</sup> Pushparatnam. P.2002. Op.cit.

embossed on their coins as well. The capital city of Nallur was adorned with royal palaces and temples and is referred to in the Tamil, Sinhalese and Portuguese sources.<sup>108</sup>

The Ariyaccakkaravarthis were powerful both in the sea and on land. For, Iban Batuta who visited the Island in 1344 A.D says that he had seen hundreds of ships of the Ariyaccakkaravarthis in the Coromondal coast.<sup>109</sup> They controlled the pearl fisheries, and had a sort of monopoly over the foreign trade of their kingdom. As regards the political conditions in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, Sinhalese historical writings assert that in terms of wealth and military power the ruler of Jaffna was the foremost among the rulers of Sri Lanka.

The expansion of power of Jaffna kingdom in the 14<sup>th</sup> century towards the south is also confirmed by the Kottagama Tamil inscription.<sup>110</sup> K.M. de Silva<sup>111</sup> has the following comment on this state of affairs.

*“By the middle of the fourteenth century the Jaffna Kingdom had effective control over the north west coast up to Puttalam. After the invasion in 1353 part of the four Korales came under Tamil rule and thereafter, over the next two decades, they probed into Matale district and naval forces were dispatched to the west coast as far South of Panadura. They seemed poised for the establishment of Tamil supremacy over Sri Lanka and were foiled in this, primarily because they were soon embroiled with the powerful Vijayanagara Empire in a grim struggle for survival against the latter’s expansionist ambitions across the Palks Straits*

*Indeed the impact of South India on the Tamil Kingdom of North was not restricted to culture and religion but deeply affected its political evolution as well, for it was drawn irresistibly into the orbit of the dominant South Indian state of the day”*

However, Alakakonara, a great dignitary of Dravidian extraction in the service of the Sinhalese king put an end to this domination. However, this kingdom was subjugated by Parakramabahu VI, in the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and it came under the sovereignty of Kotte kingdom for a brief period of 17 years (1450 – 1467 A.D.) In the 16<sup>th</sup> century Cankili (1519 – 1561) allied himself with Sinhalese rulers in their attempts to resist Portuguese expansion in Sri Lanka. Under his successors the kingdom declined steadily and it became a Portuguese possession in 1619 A.D.

The administration of the kingdom of Jaffna was modelled on the lines of a similar system, which was in vogue in south India. The peninsula was divided into four provinces namely Valikamam, Vatamarācci, Tenmarācci, and Pachilappalli. While the division of Pūnakary, PallavarāyanKattu, Iluppaikkadavai, Mātoṭam and the Island of Mannar came under its direct rule, the Vanniyar chiefs of Panankaman, Mēlpattu, Mulliyavalai, Karunāvalpattu, Karrikkattumūlai and Tennamaravādi acknowledged the sovereignty of the kings of Jaffna. According to the Vaiyāpādal, the kings of Jaffna had their strongholds at Vālveti and Mullia Valai, the core of the Vanni chieftaincies in the mainland.<sup>112</sup> It is very likely that in case of difficulties in the Peninsula these would have been used as a safety valve.

However the Vanniyaars and other traditional ranks wherein the Peninsula these would have been used as a safety valve, summoned twice a year to Nallur for the ceremony of Varisai. The Vanniyaars of Trincomalee were subject to the sovereignty of the rulers of Jaffna until the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In the subsequent period they came under the influence of Kandy. The Vanniyaars of Batticaloa were mostly independent until the establishment of Dutch rule in the eastern coast. The chieftains of Puttalam were theoretically subject to the authority of the Sinhalese rulers.

It was during the period of the Jaffna kingdom perhaps that the Tamils of Jaffna developed their agricultural and trading activities ensuing a steady income for themselves and the state. This solid and stable political and economic structure led them to develop unified social structures and customs as evident from the systems of caste and the traditional law, land customs known as Thesawalamai codified by the Dutch in 1707 A.D. The strength of the Jaffna settlements has been the concentration of population and their density. This has enabled them to develop viable economic relationships among themselves and has encouraged regional specialisation and exchange of commodities and services. Thereby the economy of Jaffna, which was exclusively subsistence agriculture, became diversified and commercialised after the 15<sup>th</sup> century when Jaffna became incorporated into the expanding Indian Ocean economy. Kings of Jaffna being ardent Saivites patronized both Hinduism and culture. There was a Tamil academy at Nallur.

The political division of the country and the drift of the Sinhalese power towards the south during the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century paved the way for the two distinct systems of administration based on two languages namely Sinhalese and Tamil. Nevertheless, political segregation of the country did not result in total segregation of the two linguistic groups. Tamils continued to live under Sinhalese rule although they did tend to be concentrated in the north and the east for religious and

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<sup>108</sup> Kailāyamālai 1939 (ed) Jambulingam Pillai (Madras), Yālpāna Vaipavamālai, Op.cit., Kokila Sandesa, 1906 (ed) Perera.P.S. (Colombo), Queyroz Fernaeode, Op.cit.

<sup>109</sup> The Rehla of Ibn Battuta, 1953 (Tr & Ed), Husain Mahdi (Lond). pp.211-217.

<sup>110</sup> Rasanayagam S., 1926 Op.cit., p.364. Pathmanathan,S., 1978, *The Kingdom of Jaffna, Part I*, (circa.1250-1450), (Colombo).

<sup>111</sup> Silva, K.M. de., Op.cit.p.85.

<sup>112</sup> Vaiyāpādal, (1980), (ed) Nadarajah, K.C. (Colombo), v.v.56-57.

cultural reasons. Besides, Tamil influence on the Sinhalese culture and vice versa from the beginnings of the history of Sri Lanka Tamil, influence was considerable with the occupation of the Island by the Colas.<sup>113</sup>

Later developments have been summed up as follows,<sup>114</sup>

*“The author of the old commentary of the Sidatsangara, the only extant grammar of the Sinhalese language, says that the interpretation of one of its rules has to be made by the application of the method recognised in the Virasoliyam, a treatise on Tamil grammar which is ascribed to the eleventh century. We find the study of Tamil formed a feature of Pivirivana education from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries. Sri Rabula of Totagamawa (fifteenth century) was an acknowledged master of the Tamil language. It is mentioned in Dambadeni period that a Sinhalese king included Tamil in the course of studies followed by him. Tamil influence was strong in the court of Parakramabahu VI (1412 – 1468) and later in the court of last four kings of Kandy. There have been instances of Tamil authors who were patronised by the Sinhalese kings. Sarajotimalai, a Tamil work on astrology was composed under the patronage of Parakramabahu IV. In Sinhalese works on astrology and medicine, Tamil influences are most clearly discernible”*

Sandesa literature<sup>115</sup> and the Munneswaran inscriptions of Parakramabahu IV<sup>116</sup> as well as the Trilingual inscription at Galle<sup>117</sup> testify to the role of Tamil in the western littoral.

## VIII

It is normally held that when the Portuguese landed here in 1505 A.D there were three kingdoms namely Kotte, Kandy and Jaffna. But the perusal of the Portuguese sources, and indigenous sources show that prior to the European conquest of Sri Lanka there was a plurality of polities in the Island. The account of the Portuguese historian Fernao de Queyroz<sup>118</sup> in this respect is remarkable as this provides an indication of the political conditions that prevailed in the Island during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is evident from his account that the Island was politically divided into four kingdoms, namely those of Kotte, Sitavake, Kandy and Jaffna and a number of kinglets or principalities collectively known as the Vanni when the Portuguese came to the Island.

The Portuguese, although they had brought the Jaffna kingdom under their political over lordship by 1619, did not however, interfere much with the internal administration of these areas. They did not have the resources or the ability to do so and constant hostility to them in Sri Lanka from local people and leaders gave them little time to devote their attention to the proper supervision of internal matters. Therefore, Tamils of Sri Lanka during the time of Portuguese rule experienced only a change in higher levels of political management while in all other spheres they almost continued to experience hardly any change in their usual form of activity. One notable and lasting change that should be referred to that came with Portuguese rule over the Tamils could be best seen in the religious sphere – Catholicism.

When the Dutch replaced the Portuguese as rulers of coastal areas of Sri Lanka by 1658, Tamils too came under a new master from the west. Dutch introduced a better organisation and system of management than the Portuguese over the areas occupied by the Tamils. But even they did not make any fundamental changes with regard to the society or life of these people, though they were generally more efficient and systematic masters than the Portuguese. As there was a problem in ascertaining the laws of the country the Dutch made some genuine attempts to do so by codifying the laws and customs of the Tamils of Jaffna into Thesavalamai.

Thus in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, Tamil speaking territories of the North and the East maintained their administrative separation from the rest of the Island even though the Portuguese and the Dutch ruled over the entire maritime distinct of the Island. While the Tamil Vanni chieftaincies of northern Sri Lanka such as Tennamarav~dy, Panankāmam, Mēlpattu, Mulliyawalai, Caricatūmōlai and Carun~wal pattu acknowledged the over-lordship of the Portuguese and the Dutch, the Tamil chieftains of Trincomalee such as Tirukkon~malai, Tampalak~mam, Kottiy~ram and Kattukkulam and Batticaloa district such as Mattakkalappu, Paluk~mam, Pōrativu, N~tukatu, Pan~mai and Camm~nturai before they came under the administrative control of the Dutch, nominally acknowledged, the over lordship of the Kandyan kingdom.<sup>119</sup> The during this time the Island was also divided into two linguistic zones is attested by the testimony of European colonial historians and administrators.

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<sup>113</sup> Vithiananthan S., 1980. Op. cit.

<sup>114</sup> Paranavitana S., 1959. Op. cit. p.44.

<sup>115</sup> Ratnaika C.N.R., 1945, *Glimpses of the Social, Religious, Economic and Political conditions of Ceylon from the Sandesas*, M.A., Thesis, (Unpublished), University of Ceylon.

<sup>116</sup> Pathmanathan S., 1974, *The Munneswaran Tamil Inscription.*, JRAS (C.B) N.S. Vol. XVIII, pp.66-69.

<sup>117</sup> Paranavitana S., 1928-1933, *The Tamil Inscription on the Galle Trilingual Slab*, Epigraphia Zeylanica, Vol.III, pp.1928-1933.

<sup>118</sup> Queyroz Fernao de, 1930, *The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon* (Tr) Father Perera, S.G. (Colombo), p.32.

<sup>119</sup> Pathmanathan S., 1995, *Ethnic Identities in Medieval Sri Lanka - Tamil Political and Social Formation*, Uppsala Studies in the History of Religions, 2 pp.33-48.

Commenting on the provenance of the Tamil and Sinhalese languages the Dutch Predikant, Philippus Baldaeus who was in the Island during the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century asserts,<sup>120</sup>

*“It is to be observed that in Ceylon they not only speak the Cinghalesche but also the Malabaarsche languages, the former from Negombo to Colombo, Caleture, Berbering, Alican, Gale, Belligamme, Matura, Donders etc. But in all other parts of the Island which are contiguous to the Coromandel coast, Malabaarsche is the prevailing language. I have heard it often asserted by the inhabitants of Jafna patnam that, that part of the country was times past peopled from the Coromandel coast and hence the dialect of their fatherland (which is situated so close to Ceylon); the probable accuracy of this account is borne out by the circumstance, that in the interior of the country as Candy, Vintane, Ballaney etc, the Cinghalesche is the only language generally spoken”*

The above view is also corroborated by the Governor Rijklof Van Goens account dated 1675.<sup>121</sup> Referring to Batticaloa he made the following comment:

*“And since all the inhabitants of Batticalo (both in customs, religion, origin and other characteristics) together with those of Jaffnapatnam, Cojjaar and on Westward right over to Calpenty and the Northern portion of the Mangul Corle inclusive, have been from the remotest times and are still now Malabaars, divided into their tribes, and very unwillingly mix with the Cingalese, Weddas or others outside their tribes, as also the others are not willing to do with these, they are up till now to be considered no otherwise than that they form with those of Jaffnapatnam, Cojjaar, and a people separate from the Cingalese, and have up till now remained pretty well in their freedom; having accepted of their free will the Company’s protection only in order to protect themselves against the cruelty of the king of Candi, wherefore it behoves us not to leave them in need or to delay if we do not wish to see them presently stand exposed to the same cruelty; since otherwise we have to expect from this rich, populous and fertile territory yet many fruits both temporal and spiritual”*

Taking the above factor into consideration, the Dutch for administrative purposes divided their maritime possessions into six units. They are Colombo, Jaffnapatnam, Galle, Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Calpetty and Puttalam. Of these Jaffnapatnam, Trincomalee and Batticaloa divisions embraced the present day Tamil speaking North-Eastern provinces. Besides this the Dutch also divided their possessions into three units namely Colombo, Jaffnapatnam and Galle for judicial purposes and brought the present day Tamil speaking North-Eastern province under the jurisdiction of the Jaffnapatnam.

Its courts of justice exercised jurisdiction in the northern and eastern part of the Island from the limits of Puttalam and Mannar to the river Koemene or koembekeroy (Kumbukan Oya), which separates the country of Batticaloa from that of Matura (Matara).<sup>122</sup>

It is in the light of the above background that one has to view the observations of Hugh Cleghorn<sup>123</sup> who served as colonial secretary to the first British governor of Sri Lanka, namely Frederick North in 1799. He observed that,

*“Two different nations, from very ancient period, have divided between them the possession of the Island. First the Cingalese inhabiting the interior of the country, in its Southern and Western parts, from the river Wallouwe, to that of Chilow, and secondly the Malabars, who possess the northern and eastern districts*

*These two nations differ entirely in their religion, language and manners. The former, who are allowed to be the earlier settlers, derive their origin from Siam, professing the ancient religion of that country*

*Besides these two nations, Mohometans from the coast of India, are spread in great numbers everywhere along the coast; they are beyond all comparison, the most industrious, and useful class of inhabitants, but being the last settlers, they are regarded not only as strangers but are moreover very unwisely and unjustly exposed in the European settlements to very high captitation tax and other particular imposts”*

The British took over the administration of Sri Lanka from the Dutch in 1796 and became the first European power to unify the Island in 1815. As a colonial power of the industrial age, their rule over the Island was markedly of a different nature from those of the first two colonial powers in many ways, including the degree of centralization, unification and consequent ability to introduce social and economic changes. Even Tamil speaking territories of the North and East were constituted as two separate provinces when the British reorganised the administration of the Island. At first, both the northern and the eastern provinces incorporated the Sinhalese jungle districts. In 1873, however, the Sinhalese districts adjoining Tamil areas were detached to form a new province and the Northern Province became a homogeneous Tamil province. The Eastern Province extended from Trincomalee southward to Pottuvil and incorporated Tamil Hindu and Muslim villages, as well as a small minority of Sinhalese on the jungle fringe.

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<sup>120</sup> Baldaeus Philippus, 1682, *A True and Exact Description of the Island of Ceylon*, Ceylon Historical Journal No.7 July 1958 - April 1959, Nos.1-4 p.287.

<sup>121</sup> *The Batticaloa and Panawa Territories as described by Governor Rijklof Van Goens in October 1675*, J.R.A.S.(N.S.), Vol. II, Part II 1929, pp.368-69.

<sup>122</sup> Pieris Ralph, 1954, *Administration of Justice and of Revenue on the Island of Ceylon under the Dutch Government*, (The Cleghorn Minute - Introductory note) J.R.A.S. (N.S.) Vol.II, Part II pp.125-152.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.pp.131-132: Nadaraja T., 1960, *New light on Cleghorn’s minute on Justice and Revenue*, J.R.A.S. (N.S.) Vol. X. pp.1-28.

A significant point to be noted is that even when the British ruled over the whole of Sri Lanka they recognised the distinctiveness and separateness of the areas in which Sri Lankan Tamils mainly lived from those of the Sinhalese. These Tamil-populated lands were treated as separate administrative provinces from those provinces, which were composed mainly of the Sinhalese people. The British also allowed continuance of customs, laws and institutions and minor officials peculiar in these Tamil-peopled areas to remain in vogue so long as they were not in diametric opposition to their essential policies or practices.

This administrative attitude of the British make it clearly evident that to them although the whole of Sri Lanka was under their complete control, the people of the Sinhalese areas and the people of the Sri Lankan Tamil areas were two distinct elements of the same island's population. The recognition of the Tamil identity of these North Eastern provinces by the British is also confirmed by the successive census taken in these regions starting from 1827, 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911, 1921, 1946, 1953, 1963, 1971 to 1981. The recognition of such a distinction by the British authorities grew even clearer when they began to introduce gradually political or constitutional innovations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and even later.

The impact of the colonial rule has been summed by Arasaratnam<sup>124</sup> as follows:

*“The Tamils of Sri Lanka experienced successive colonial rule from the Portuguese, Dutch and British. Although their culture and socio-economic system faced inevitable changes under colonial rule, Sri Lankan Tamils retained their religious beliefs, social structures and their traditional power hierarchy. Economic changes introduced by the colonisers were readily absorbed into the existing social structures, but the units of family and caste remained entrenched in the traditional social system. They continued to maintain economic and cultural ties with their ancestral homeland, South India, throughout colonial period, but they also began to develop their own identity and cultural characteristics, distinct from that of South India. They absorbed various aspects of their colonisers' culture and Christianity became an integral part of Tamil culture. It also became an initial venue for the growth of Tamil literacy”*

However British rule and the missionary activity in the north led to a Hindu renaissance in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as in the case of India. The pioneer of this movement was Arumuga Navalar, who by sheer coincidence hailed from Nallur, the seat of the kingdom of Jaffna.<sup>125</sup> Although this movement gave a Tamil and Hindu identity late in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to Tamils in Jaffna, they were accommodated in the larger horizon of Tamil nationalism. Moreover with the spread of education, the consciousness of an all-Island Tamil speaking community bound together by the mother tongue was beginning to evolve in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Nevertheless, the Hindu renaissance movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in a similar vein triggered off a similar movement in southern Sri Lanka, which gave way to Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. Both these movements were the precursors of nationalism in Sri Lanka, which unlike in India took the form of a Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, a sophisticated form of the Mahavamsas' Sinhala-Buddhist ideology. The effects of this could be seen in the journey towards self-government and later a demand for separate state among the Tamils during the post-Independence era. Thus a sense of Tamil identity, which prevailed over a long time contributed to the rise of a feeling of Tamil Nation. Finally, it should be noted that since I have dealt with only a historical roots of the Tamil identity, I have omitted the history of the hill-country Tamils who have distinctive social and cultural elements. Their migration to Sri Lanka from Thamilakam started from the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continued to do so well into the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

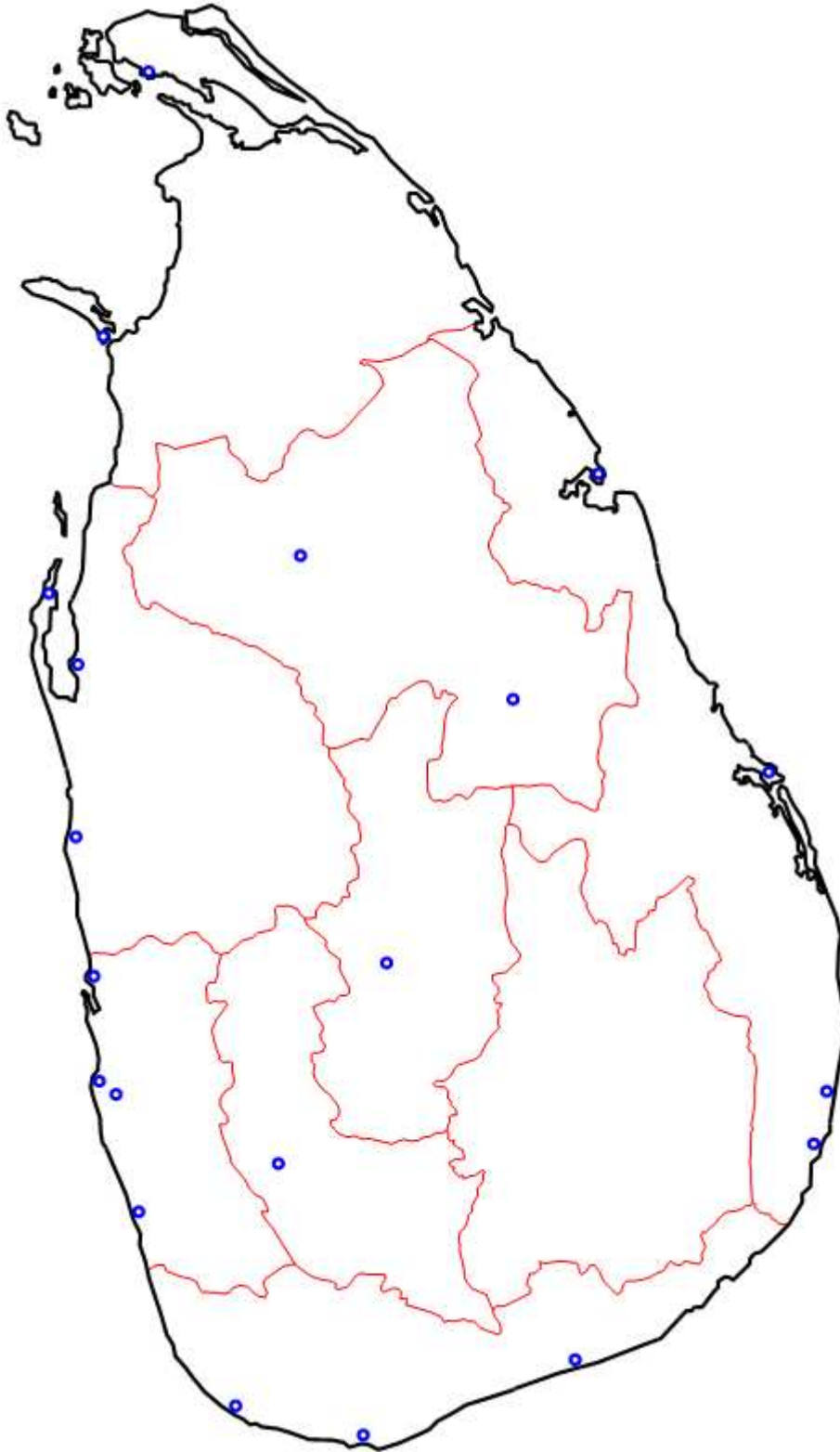
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<sup>124</sup> Arasaratnam S., 1994, *Sri Lankan Tamils under the Colonial Rule, The Sri Lankan Tamils Ethnicity and Identity*. (ed) Manogaran C. and Pfaffenberger (Boulder, Colorado West view Press) pp.28-53.

<sup>125</sup> Sitrapalam S.K., 1994, *Hindu Revivalism in Northern Sri Lanka during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A Historical Perspective*, Journal of the Institute of Asian Studies, Vol. XI, No.2 March 1994, pp.1-19.



# Frequency of Dravidian Titles in the Brahmi Inscriptions of Sri Lanka



	North	North/Central	Western	Central	East	South East Central	South West Central	South		
	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>H</b>		
<b>Parumaka</b> <i>(Perumakan/Parumakan/Parumakal)</i>	25	160	114	42	40	27	16	54	478	64.7%
<b>Cuda or Cula</b>	4	16	18				1	10	49	6.6%
<b>Naga</b>	7	36	20			3	1	8	75	10.1%
<b>Aya and Abi</b>		16	5		10	4	8	42	85	11.5%
<b>Velu (Vel)</b>	2	8				1	2		13	1.8%
<b>Uti/Uttiya (Utiyan)</b>	4	15	6						25	3.4%
<b>Bata/Barata (Baratan)</b>	7	5	2						14	1.9%
									<b>739</b>	<b>1</b>