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**The Coming of Brahmin Migrants:
The *udra* Fate of an Indian Elite in Sri Lanka**

By

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"One must be very humane to say, 'I don't know that,' to afford ignorance."
Friedrich Nietzsche, aphorism 229 in *The will to Power*.

Introduction

This essay is about my own ignorance and the ignorance of most Sri Lankans, including scholars, about the presence of Brahmins in Sri Lanka and my growing awareness, as a result of recent research, on their historic role in kingship and society in our Island. My ignorance was based on a certain *fact*, the fact that there was no evidence of Brahmins here in the twentieth century and no real evidence for their presence in the nineteenth century either, except in the Tamil speaking areas of the East where there were non-Brahmin *kurukkals* officiating in a few Hindu shrines³ and also in Jaffna where they were fully established as Brahmin temple priests.⁴ One therefore assumed, as I foolishly did, that this absence was due to the influence of Buddhism that had little tolerance for Brahmanism in general and Brahmins in particular. Of course we knew that there were Brahmin *pur hitas* in the courts but one thought of this as an occasional presence. Furthermore, Brahmins tend to be lampooned in Buddhist *J taka* tales and indeed in Sri Lankan collective ritual dramas performed until very recently in most parts of Sri Lanka. But in my ignorance I missed the point that not only Brahmins but also merchants and Hindu gods who tried to enter Sri Lanka, and indeed kings, are also lampooned in these rituals; in spite of these enactments, merchants and Hindu deities were omnipresent in Sri Lankan society and history. Historical texts and chronicles written in Pali and Sinhala do not provide much information; and except for noting the occasional presence of *pur hitas*, there is little evidence in them to show that ordinary Brahmins were an important presence. But my own ignorance gradually dissipated when over the last ten years or so my assistants and I began to collect palm leaf manuscripts written by "local intellectuals," mostly literate villagers, on imagined or real historical events or *vitti*. These manuscripts are for the most part unpublished and broadly known as *vitti pot*, "books on past events."

In addition to *vitti pot* there are related texts such as *band ravaliyas* or histories of aristocratic families that are simply a Sri Lankan version of family genealogies that are found in many cultures but here put down in writing. They provide us invaluable information on the history and social organization of the new post-fifteenth century kingdoms of Kotte and Kandy supplementing the better known historical chronicles. However, *band ravaliyas* also contain stories or *vitti* about ancestors who had come from Tamil Nadu into Sri Lanka, and hence these texts consist of what one might label "mixed genres." For example, an important body of texts I shall refer to in this work is known as *kadaim pot* or boundary books that delineate the boundaries of the imagined nation, the provinces and the districts contained therein. These

1. Paper presented at the inaugural 'Contributions to Contemporary Knowledge Lecture Series' organized by the Faculty of Social Sciences, South Asian University, New Delhi, 31st January 2013 held at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

2. This paper attempts to correct a popular prejudice about the Brahmin presence in Sri Lanka. I have used diacritics only when absolutely necessary. Note that I have used different versions of popular spelling of Brahmana: Brahmin, Brahmins, Brahmana and Bamunu. The separate usages should not lead to misunderstanding. I refer to two key chronicles, *Mah vamsa* and *C lavamsa*, and in my references I use chapter and verse headings instead of page references. Because of the preliminary nature of this paper I shall be grateful for suggestions and comments via email: sekere@princeton.edu

3. Dennis B. McGilvray, *Crucible of Conflict: Tamil and Muslim Society on the East Coast of Sri Lanka*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2008, see 84-86 on "Virasaiva Kurukkals: A non-Brahmin priesthood."

4. According to Mahadevan, Tamil Nadu has had a long tradition of Brahmin Gurukkals (Kurukkals), see Thennilapuram P. Mahadevan, "On the Southern Recension of the *Mah bh rata*: Brahman Migrations and Brahmi Paleography," *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies*, (EJVS), 2008, 33.

are also mixed genres, in the sense that boundary books sometimes give short or synoptic accounts of important ancestors and events (*vitti*). There is an extensive but mostly unpublished collections of these differing types of texts in multiple archives (in temples, private collections, in government archives and in foreign museums).

What is missing in the more formal historical chronicles is amply demonstrated in the event books (*vitti pot*). Many of them deal with waves of migration from South India to Sri Lanka and the incorporation of migrants into Sri Lankan society and polity and eventually into the Sinhala-Buddhist scheme of things. But these foreign migrants are not only indigenized but they also bring with them their own gods and religious practices that eventually become part of the mainline beliefs of Sinhala Buddhists. Most of the gods, magical practices and folk rituals of Sri Lanka have their origin in South India, but transformed and often enough given Buddhist validation and significance.

All historical chronicles pose problems of interpretation, and the *vitti pot* are no exception. Thus our texts deal with stories or narratives of migration and these are in the form of myths. But myths can and do express historical realities that invite interpretation. The great chronicles of Sri Lanka are no exception. For example, no serious historian, except those who belong to the lunatic fringe, would say that the saint (*arahant*) Mahinda, the son or brother of Asoka, flew through the air and landed in the mountain of Mihintale when the Sinhala king Tissa was hunting deer. The myth says that Mahinda converted the king to Buddhism, and the place of the hunt was simultaneously converted into the first Buddhist monastery in the island. Nevertheless, historians do believe that Sri Lanka was converted by Asoka's missionaries. And the myth of the place of conversion indicates a profound historical truth, that is, hunting is a devalued Buddhist activity and the place of the hunt becomes a place where *ahimsa* or non-hurt must prevail. Thus, very few Buddhist kings engaged in public hunting turning their backs, as it were, on the *ksatriya* ideal of the hunt.

I cannot get into details on the manner in which these popular texts were constructed and you will have to take on faith what I examine here, and await my fuller work on this subject. I will however mention one methodological problem that emerges in these texts (and indeed in all historical chronicles) and that is the distinction between the time period in which a particular text was written and the period to which it refers. Thus we have texts probably written in the 15th century that refer to events much earlier, and this context problems of interpretation arise in relation to the *written text* and the *reference text*; that is, the distinction between the period a text was written and the period that the text refers to. An example: we have many texts written after the 15th century that deal with the existence of erstwhile Tamil communities in different parts of Sri Lanka but the reference text says that these migrations took place during the reign of a king known as Gajabahu who the historical chronicles say lived around 114-136 CE (Gajabahu I) or around 1132-53 (Gajabahu II). In this case the reference text gives a pedigree and mythic history to these later migrations. This particular reference text has no true historical validity but there are examples in our collections where the reference text is historically quite plausible. Yet in other instances, as in the examples I shall soon mention, the written text and its reference are identical, that is, the text describes events that are contemporaneous with its narration.

Brahmins in the Boundary Books of the Matal District

The first realization of my ignorance came with our study of two important palm leaf manuscripts (*puskola pot*). The first was commissioned by Vijayapala, the king of Godapola in Matale and the elder brother of Rajasinha II (1635-1687) of Kandy. The second was compiled over a hundred years later during the reign of Kirti Sri Rajasinha (1747-1782), a direct descendant of the Madurai Nayakas. The reign of Kirti Sri was the period of Dutch control over the maritime provinces of Sri Lanka, but it was also a period of relative peace, and hence the king was more interested in knowing about the prominent families in the area. I also suspect he was interested in them for tax collection purposes. Both texts have the same title as *Matal Kadaim-pota*, "the boundary book of Matale," the large district south of present day Kandy. For purposes of convenience I shall refer to the two manuscripts as M1 and M2. In

M1, the king of Godapola goes to a place called Ragganvatta in the Four Korales (another distinct district) where he constructed an octagonal building (*pattirippuva*).⁵ He stayed there for nine months and unable to defeat the foreign enemy (the Portuguese), he summoned the people (actually the chiefs representing the people) of forty eight *korales* in the low country for enlisting in his forces (A *korale* is one of the many administrative divisions within a *dis vani*, a large district under a governor or *dis va*, answerable to the king.) But because the chiefs refused to muster forces to serve in his army the king executed them. The unfortunate chiefs probably had a good reason because much of the low-country was in Portuguese control, and it would have been difficult to muster an army from that region. Further, many Sinhala people were already serving in the Portuguese armies as lascarins. Faced with this dilemma, the king then summoned Alahak n Mohott la and asked him: who are the residents of the upper-Matale district? Alahak n says there are only three (chiefly) families there and he lists them along with two Vādda families and then mentions several other Vādda families, including five female Vāddas, guarding the frontier in the lower part of the district. The chiefly informant then gives a list of Brahmin families, and it is this list that produced my initial intellectual jolt: “Prince Ari ha who went on the mission to bring the Srimah -bodh nvahanse from the Madda Desa in India, met Great King Dharm soka, from whom he obtained the Srimah -bodh nvahanse [the sacred *b dhi* tree], the chiefs (*mudalihuru*) who accompanied were S madanta-Br hmana-r la, Sr vi u Br hmana-r la, Sr r ma Br hmana-r la, Solamgri Br hmana-r la, Kotudeyiya Br hmana-r la, Sr danta Br hmana-r la who came from Sr danta Desa region.” The text then mentions several non-Brahmins who went to Madda-desa, and then refers to a Brahmin known as V dand Br hmana-r la (“The Br hmana gentleman from the village of V danda”). There are three other names that might or might not be Brahmanic: the Vrame varaya called M di, Vanab hu V ramesvaraya, Jayakot Pan itaya (and their servitors). Then the original settlements of these Brahmins in the Matale district are mentioned. Thus S man da [Sonadanta Br hmana-rala] was placed in charge of N gapa alama (not the South Indian village of N gapa inam but a Sri Lankan village in this district, the name suggesting migrant families originally hailing from N gapa inam in South India). Sr vi u Br hmana-r la settled in Aluvihara, Sr r ma Br hmana-r la settled in Ratvatta, Kotudeyya Br hmana-r la settled in Kotuvegedera. Sr danta Br hmana-r la built a *d gaba (st pā)* in the south and enshrined the relics brought by him and settled down in Monaruvila while V dande Br hmana-r la settled down in V bodapola, M div V ramesvaraya settled down in M dipola.⁶ It is implied in the text that their descendants are now in the villages mentioned above.

The classic description of the bringing of a branch of the tree under which the Buddha achieved his Awakening (Enlightenment) is in the *Mah vamsa* chapter eighteen which mentions King Dharmasoka entrusting his minister Ari ha to be responsible for the arrangements.⁷ The next chapter describes the group of eighteen persons from royalty, eight from ministerial families, eight from among Brahmins and similar numbers from families of traders and cowherds who along with the nun Sanghamitt sailed from Tamalitti (now Tamluk in the mouth of the Ganges) and then to Sri Lanka. However, except for Sanghamitt , the *Mah vamsa* does not mention the names of the others who accompanied the *b dhi* tree. Abeyawardana who edited and translated M1 says that although later texts that deal with the *b dhi* tree mention Brahmin names, none of the ones mentioned in M1 are found in any previous text.⁸ However, it should be stated that many families in the Matale district as well as some kings of the Kotte

5. A *pattirippuva* is an eight sided building representing the traditional eight directions of the universe. Often a *pattirippuva* is a temporary construction when the king is outside his capital as in the present case. Symbolically the king receives his guests in the *pattirippuva* when as *bh pati* he sits in the center of the eight directions of the universe.

6. This is one of the few *vitti pot* that has been translated by Abeyawardana who has a good scholarly summary of the historical information on the bringing of the *b dhi* tree to Sri Lanka. See H.A.P. Abeyawardana, *Boundary Divisions of Sri Lanka*, Polgasovita: Academy of Sri Lankan Culture, 1999; see 212-216 for a translation of *M tale Kadaim Pota* and 111 for the discussion of the Brahmins.

7. Wilhelm Geiger, translator, *The Mah vamsa*, London: Pali Text Society, 1980, 18: 3.

8. Abeyawardana, *Boundary Divisions*, 113.

period also make the claim that their ancestors accompanied the *b dhi* tree to Sri Lanka. It seems as if the Matale Brahmins not only claim that they came from Madda-desa, the area of the Buddha's dispensation but the *descendants* of these Brahmins are now in this district. Madda-desa in Sri Lankan topography of the period mostly refers to the area of the present-day Buddha Gaya in Bihar and not to be confused with the contemporary Madhya Pradesh. While we can discount the *claim* made in the ancestral myth, there is little doubt that the king's informants were *pointing out* the people living in the district, including the descendants of the Brahmins although their current names are not mentioned in the text.

By contrast M2 does not list the Brahmins as a collectivity as defined in M1 but mentions ten Br hmanas, none of whom make any direct reference to the mythic ancestry of the Brahmins of M1. Only four families have even indirect connections with the *b dhi* tree:

1. "Sonaka Br hmana R la who came from Madda-desa lives in the village of Hulangamuva." It is difficult to identify the ancestor of this Brahmin but my guess is that he is a descendant of S man da Br hmana R la who settled down in N gapa alama.
2. According to M2 a woman named Br hmana Ran Mänik , daughter of K puru Br hmana R la resides at Ratvatta. She is surely a descendant of Sri Rama Br hmana R la because she has inherited the village of Ratvatta originally belonging to her ancestor. However note that this text does not make any claim that her ancestors came from Madda-desa. However, the male member of that line seems to have at least retained the name of his ancestor: "Sri R ma Br hmana R la resides in Ätipola." It may be that the three families mentioned above did retain their ancestral myth of having come with the *b dhi* tree but what is striking is that the author of M2 does not mention that claim. What emerges from the preceding account is that some of the most distinguished Sri Lankans such as the Ratvattes to which former Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranayaka and her daughter, former President Chandrika Bandaranayaka, originally belonged to this line of Brahmin settlers.
3. M2 says that V dan e Br hmana R la lives in V u apola and this is the second Brahmana Rala whose name is unchanged, implying a continuous family tradition. The only difference is that M1 mentions the Brahmin's village as *V bodapola*, not *V u apola*, but these must surely refer to the same village; such differences are often the result of pardonable errors of copyists.
4. A new set of Brahmin dignitaries however have emerged in M2. Thus the "son of Hirugot Br hmana R la is settled in Käppi ipola." This family might well be the ancestors of the very distinguished family of Käppi ipolas, one of whom led the great rebellion against the British in 1817-1818. Hirugot is an old usage meaning Suryagotra or Rivigotra, namely Brahmins claiming descent from the sun. However one of them appears to be in poor straits: "the son of Hirugot Br hmana R la lives in the *m karal hena* at Kahagala in the Sat Korale." Unhappily in spite of solar origins Hirugot's second son is really poor because he lives in a *hena* (a swidden plot) and grows long beans (*m karal*). It should not surprise us that this son has moved from Matale to another large district known as Sat Korale which had important harbors that might have tempted Hirugot's son to seek a more hopeful future. M2 mentions other non-Brahmin families who have moved from Matale to the Sat Korale. On the other hand, Välipattu Br hmana R la of Kahandiva in the Sat Korale has moved to the village of Veragama in the Matale District. It seems that there is considerable movement of Brahmins depicted in M2.
5. An extremely interesting case is that of "son of Sa dagot Br hmana Rala [who] lives at Pahindena-Galagama." Sa dagot means "moon *gotra*" and probably belongs to a group that contrasts itself to Hirugot. These *gotras* could also imply that Brahmins or those who claim to be Brahmins were adopting well known dynastic names associated with Sri Lankan and South Indian kings and/or with Br hmana *gotras* coming down from ancient times.
6. The daughter of Kalahagala Br hmana R la is married to Ka dulava Herat Band ra, implying that this Br hmana woman is married to a distinguished Sinhala aristocrat whose extensive properties are listed in the text. Their children would obviously belong to the Herat Ban ra family. M2 has

an interesting account of this same Br hmana R la who uprooted trees and cleared the forest for a swidden plot (*h na*) known as *goyi-äla h na* ("farm land by the stream") indicating that the plot was near a stream or *äla*. This plot was given to a farmer to cultivate but the farmer's daughter eloped with a man of the *rodiya* (*cand la*) caste, the lowest of the low. Because of this incident the Br hmana R la gave the farmer a new plot on the *other* side of the stream (*äla*). The implication is that from the Br hmana's point of view the former plot has been polluted by the terrible marriage of the farmer's daughter with a *rodiya*. In spite of this unlawful marriage there is no reference in M2 to any punishment inflicted on the errant couple.

The *Vitti Pot* (event books) on the Vanni Incursions

There are dozens of texts on the visitations of *ksatriyas*, merchants and Brahmins from South India to Sri Lanka. In general, they land in the coastal areas of the north and many of them settle in the forested region known in Sri Lanka as the Vanni, the large but sparsely populated region that came into being with the decline of the great civilizations of the north after the 12th century. As in South India, the Vanni was divided into 18 regions, 18 being a standard number having no practical reality in respect of the arrangements on the ground. Some settle down in the area in the Puttalam district that even to this day is known as the *demala hat pattuva*, "the seven sub-districts (*pattu*) of Tamils." The primary focus of these texts is on a group known as the Malalas or Mallas who are pushed out of the place known as Malakk va (Malakkara?) by the Maravars, the latter of course well-known as warrior groups inhabiting the Ramnad. The primary focus of these texts is on the Malalas who claim to be a *ksatriya* group belonging to the *riyavansa*, "the noble lineage." Although they came from Malakk va and were pushed out from there owing to their conflict with the Maravars, their myths of origin say that they came from a place associated with the *b dhi mandala*. We know that there were Buddhists in South India and it is possible that they had replicated the *b dhi man ala* there just as the Sinhala kings did when the branch of the *b dhi* tree was planted in Anuradhapura. Or it is more likely that the idea of the *b dhi man ala* was to legitimize the Malalas as Buddhist, albeit living in Hindu country. Almost all the texts we have say that five Malalas were princes and two of them were monks. The monks were associated with, or supposedly founded, the great monastic centers of Totagamuva and Vidagama in today's Southern and Western provinces. True enough these are fictions but powerful ones providing symbolic validation and legitimacy for many distinguished migrants originating mostly from South India and speaking *demala* ("Tamil," namely South Indian languages or perhaps even Oriya and Bengali; occasionally even the Portuguese were referred to as *demala!*). Their journey is depicted in terms of a myth that is found in many texts of migration, namely, their voyage over several kinds of seas, as the following example from a folk play illustrates:

The boat has come to the Great Sea, friends,
On the Great Sea it is now.
The boat has come to the Deep Sea, friends,
On the Deep Sea it is now.
The boat has come to the White Sea, friends,
On the White Sea it is now.
The boat has come to the Red Sea, friends,
On the Red Sea it is now.
The boat has come to the Black Sea, friends,
On the Black Sea it is now⁹

In the Malala myth also the ship crosses these seas and stops at a few known places in South India, such as Ayothipa inam (in the Salem district) and several unknown places among which is Mahicina, supposedly on the Coromandel coast. Unhappily the persons who composed these texts had little

9. E.R. Sarachchandra, *The Folk Drama of Ceylon*, Colombo: Department of Cultural Affairs, 1996 (second edition), 89.

conception of the geography of the region. At some point in their travels they pick two other groups in their separate sampans, these being the merchants (*he i*) and Brahmins (*bamunu*). They are represented as coming in groups of seven, another standard number and with them come various merchant and service groups. Some of these listed are: Ko Va uva, the ship builder for the merchant prince Semasinha of Telingapura (Telugu city), Pali gu Irugal Va uva (crystal-worker), Samukka Va uva (spyglass maker), bharana Ba ala (goldsmith), Kapuru He iya (camphor merchant), Vettila He iya (betel merchant), P kku He iya (arecanut merchant), Sunnambu He iya (lime merchant), Adu He iya (maker of shackles?), the potter Mäti Liyana Pan ita (the pandit who decorates pots), Sankhan da Guruva (conch blower), T la Viridu Suddan vali Viriduva (bard of melody, eulogy and praises), N agam Panikkiya (director of plays), Däli Samann Cakravartiya (specialist in trimming and shaping of beards) and Suddahaluva (purifier, washer-man).

While the ships containing the three main groups were approaching Sri Lanka, there occurs a huge storm at sea and the three ships parted and lost contact with one another. I think the symbolism of the storm indicates that the *k atriya*s, merchants and Brahmins are separate groups. The three groups land in different parts of the north-western coast, near present day Puttalam.

The sampan of the Demala He is (Tamil Merchants) reached Kudaramale; from there they came to K rad va and lodged at Velparappuva. The sampan of the Mallas landed at Mutupantiya and having heard that He is were lodging at Velparappuva, they also went to Velparappuva. The sampan of the Brahmins reached naolond va and they too went to Velparappuva. The three groups assembled, fired guns in the air, created fivefold musical din, blew conches and engaged in festive sports in jubilation, and began to sprinkle gold.

Their meeting together, I think, suggests that *k atriya*s, merchants and Brahmins although separate, express a unity on another level, and this unity is represented in the Sinhala reformulation of the Hindu *varna* scheme that I shall discuss later. When the three groups of migrants land in Sri Lanka the myth shifts and focuses on the main Malala group of seven *k atriya* nobles from Malakk va. They are met by a Vädda chief (a minister or *mantri*) who acts as interpreter and who takes them to king Bh venekab hu of the S ryava sa (solar dynasty) in his palace at "Sitavaka-Kotte" after paying homage to the great Vi u shrine at Munnesvarama. The Malalas give the king "appearance gifts" (*däkum*) and in return Bh venekab hu gives them lands and maintenance villages mostly, but not exclusively, in the area of the Vanni. Some are also given important titles and positions in the kingdom. Interestingly these migrants are given Sinhala aristocratic names, and in effect divested of their *k atriya* status and converted into the Sinhala aristocratic class (*ban ras*). The merchant settlements are not as clearly defined but they seem to have been dispersed over a wider area. Their leader Semasinha is a merchant prince known in Sinhala tradition as a *sit no* and he and his retinue are given lands in Siyana Korale, that is, in the very area of Sitavaka and close to the port of Colombo. Because of our interest in Brahmin migrations, let me now consider the fate of the seven Brahmins. One text known as the *Vanni Vitti* ("Vanni events") puts it thus:

The Br hmana group that tarried at the ford of Mutupantiya [in naolondava according to a text known as *Vanni Vitti*] presented two elephants after establishing the *d v le* for god V sudeva (Vi u) on Munnessarama cliff and received for their skills the villages of Bamun vala, Bambara-gedara, Br hmanagama, Bamunu-gedara, Bämini-golla, Bamun -ko uva, tana-vatta, Divulgas-pi iya, Kalgaha, Mirihan-pi iya, Konan ttava, -eliya, M gula, Ganväräla and M munuva; the Brahmin pur hita presented a golden quail as an appearance gift and got Hatalis-pahana with boundaries demarcated, five villages of Nikav gama as well as previously owned Tambavi iya with boundaries marked by stone slabs in which the *p na n la* (sacred thread) was engraved [Some of these places are located near present day Hal vata (Chilaw), south of Puttalam and others are in the traditional Vanni].

Note that several place names are prefixed with the term *bamunu* while one is named Bāmini golla, that is “Brahmin women” and in other texts the term is *bāmini gam*, “villages of Brahmin women.” We possess yet another text with an almost identical title, *Vanni Vittiya* (“the Vanni event”), and it begins with the seven Brahmins and their spouses landing in Karaduva (Karaitivu,) and from there they “showed themselves before the Sitavaka Palace at Mun ukon apola” and having presented *dākum* (appearance gifts) to the king they asked for land. One Brahmin gave a blue silk cloth to the Sitavaka palace (that is, the king residing there). The local king of Mun ukon apola is grandiosely identified as “the divine great king Edirisuriya residing in his great palace of Mun ukon apola in D vamādā.”¹⁰ As far as this text is concerned, it seems as if the seven Brahmins came directly to Mun ukon apola whereas the Malala princes were sent to Bh venekab hu in his capital at Sitavaka-Kotte. Mun ukon apola (the place shaped like the top-knot) is no longer marked in maps but we located it and found it to be a steep and secure fortress in the present Kurunagala district. Many *vitti pot* mention this place and its king Edirisuriya or Edirimannasuriya. In our view the “Sitavaka palace of Mun ukon apola” refers to the palace where Bh venekab hu of Sitavaka resides whenever he visits Mun ukon apola, the important small kingdom within his domain. This simply means that when the king came from Sitavaka to Mun ukon apola, a *gaman m lig va* (“travel residence”) known as Sitavaka was established for him, a temporary palace named after the capital constructed during royal visits.

An interesting account of a Brahmin visitation comes from a section tucked at the end of the boundary book *Srilak ka a ayuru pota* (“the boundary book of Sri Lanka”), that is, one of a series of texts that deal with the boundaries of the Island and the villages thereof. It tells of an illness of King Pan ita Par kramab hu who, says the text, became king of Jambudroni (Dambadeniya), the seat of kings after the decline of the Polonnaruva kingdom. This is without doubt Par kramab hu II (1236-1270), the second king of Dambadeniya who, this text says, suffered from an illness known as *hena d sa* (“lightning illness”). *Hena d sa* is most likely an illness as a consequence of being struck by lightning which in Sri Lanka is considered a consequence of some awful karma. Or if *hena d sa* is interpreted metaphorically it could simply mean “deadly illness.”¹¹ Three of the king’s ministers went to a Brahmin village in Kimbulvatpura (Kapilavastu), the birth place of the Buddha, and invited seven Brahmins to Dambadeniya to cure the illness of the king. A long list of the magical cures and accomplishments of the Brahmins after their arrival in Sri Lanka is given in some detail followed by the *y ga-h ma*, the various rituals for curing the king’s illness. Then the text gives an account of the lands given by the grateful king to the Brahmins. Let me give a few examples: the eldest Brahmin was given the sowing extent of seven *amunas* of rice land in Kirigala and twelve *amunas* in Lindapitiya, each *amuna* in today’s reckoning being about 250 kilograms of seed paddy. Some Brahmins were given villages or *nindagam* with such names as Bamunugama (Brahmin village) and Bamunuko uva (Brahmin fort or Brahmin garden); another who got a *Br hmanahala* settled in the village of Damunupola. *Br hmana hala* was perhaps a technical term for the *nindagamas* (maintenance villages allocated by a king) in this case given to Brahmin settlers. These would be analogous to *brahmadeyas* in the Indian scheme of things. However, that seven (the standard number once again) Brahmins came from Kapilavastu is historically improbable in terms of the realities of this period, although we know from the work of Thennilapuram Mahadevan that there were continual movements of Brahmins from the north of India to the South and one could expect them to go further

10. *Vanni Vittiya*, my manuscript copy.

11. Senarat Paranavitana says that in his twenty second year (that is, in 1258) Par kramab hu II suffered from an incurable disease which made him stammer. See S. Paranavitana, “The Dambadeniya Dynasty” in *University of Ceylon, History of Ceylon*, vol. I part II, Colombo: Ceylon University Press, 1960, 613-35 (625). This information is based on a Sinhala manuscript *Alutnuvara D v laya Karav ma* (“The construction of the shrine at Alutnuvara”) according to Amaradasa Liyanagamage in *The Decline of Polonnaruva and the Rise of Dambadeniya*, Colombo: Department of Cultural Affairs, 1968: 29. Liyanagamage mentions that “the important officials of the court discussed the matter and decided to appeal to the grace of god Uppalavanna.” The king’s minister Devapatir ja went to Devinuvara and performed rituals and the “god appeared at midnight in a dream, in the guise of a *br hmana* and made it known to him that the king’s ailment was incurable.” The *Alutnuvara D v laya Karav ma* is a text that most likely was written after the 16th century and simply reflects a larger popular tradition of the king’s illness.

South to Sri Lanka.¹² Unfortunately, none of our texts give us a clue on either the actual *gotra* of the Brahmin visitants or their places of origin (except in mythic terms) or how conservative they were. If there was a *tabu* or at least qualms against Brahmins crossing the ocean, this was not all that effective because they entered Sri Lanka via the Palk Straits which in Hindu mythology contains the remains of the bridge created by Rama (Tamil, *r ma s tu*), a safe route one might say! Nevertheless, this myth is an important one. It is a myth of origins where Hindu Brahmin immigrant groups who had important ritual tasks in the Dambadeniya kingdom, and perhaps among the people at large, are now Buddhized and given legitimacy and a pedigree by being associated with the birthplace of the Buddha.

It therefore seems that the *vitti pot* and other historical texts mention the following related areas although with different emphases: Madyadesa or Madda-desa (middle country), the area in which the Buddha preached, lived and died and the *b dhi ma ala*, the place of the *b dhi* tree and the sacred sites of Buddhism. In the Sinhala histories known as *R j valiyas* written after the 16th century, the *b dhi ma ala* and Madda-desa are described in great detail as part of the Buddhist cosmography, based on the Hindu, but given Buddhist significance through the birth of the original king, Mahasammata or “the great elect” from whom the Buddha’s own clan of the Sakyas and the Sinhala kings are descended.¹³ In the *vitti pot* in general, the length and breadth of the regions adjacent to the *b dhi ma ala* are not described as in the *R j valiyas* but on the contrary given a greater sense of immediacy and practicality as places to visit or where the protagonists of our stories have visited or have had their homes. Thus the Brahmins mentioned earlier originated from Kapilavastu (Sinhala, Kimbulvat), the birth-place of the Buddha while others came from the Madda-desa. The *R j valiyas* state that among the many places that do not recognize the teachings of the Buddha are familiar “Tamil” areas such as Chola, Kongu, Bengal, Karnataka, Kerala (Malayura), Telegu and many non-Tamil areas, including an interesting distinction between China and a place known as Mahacina.¹⁴ It seems that our texts ignore the actual places of origin of the Brahmins and instead are given invented pedigrees that make them truly Buddhist.

Brahmins as *Pur hitas* in the Reign of Par kramab hu I (1153-1186)

While it is certain that Brahmin *pur hitas* were known in the courts of Sinhala kings, the documentation is sparse because the authors of the great Sinhala chronicle the *Mah va sa* and its later form as

12. Mahadevan, “On the Southern Recension of the *Mah bh rata*, Brahman Migrations and Brahmi Paleography.”

13. The *R j valiya* commences with a detailed description of the traditional Hindu-based cosmos that is also found in classical Buddhist texts. Its cosmology is in complete contrast to the Christian and begins with: “In the midst of the endless and boundless Universe, there are hundreds and thousands of crores of such worlds superior to the latter, and this blessed world still more superior” The text goes to describe the ramparts that surround this world in the center of which rests Mah meru “which is one hundred sixty eight *yojanas* tall” and has a circumference of ten thousand *yojanas*.” South of this great mountain is the Jambudvīpa, the “rose-apple continent,” a mythic region within which are encompassed many known places. Later this ideal description of Jambudvīpa is replaced by a more pragmatic one that simply refers to the Indian sub-continent. Sometimes Sri Lanka is included within the Jambudvīpa and sometimes Jambudvīpa simply means the geographical entity India. This leads to some confusion in reading the *R j valiya*, something that the reader should be cognizant of. I refer the reader to the details of this cosmography in the *R j valiya* and its relation to the *b dhi mandala* (p.1-5); in this context, the regions known to the authors have their bearing from the *b dhi mandala* and then goes on to enumerate newly known regions such as Baburu (Berber), Pratikal (Portuguese) and Spa a (Spain), Roma (Rome), Alamanna (Germany) all part of 43 countries that don’t believe in the teachings of the Buddha. The *b dhi mandala* itself is described in huge proportions. The *R j valiya* interestingly says that “this Jambudvīpa is a field of virtue and is superior to the Deva worlds and the Brahma world,” presumably because Jambudvīpa is the place where all the previous Buddhas are born, these being Kakusa da, Kon gama, K syapa and our own Buddha, Gautama while in the next eon the Buddha Maitreya will arise. The *R j valiya* accepts an early Buddhist notion of four Buddhas and Maitreya who is yet to appear as against the more popular notion of 24 or 28 Buddhas that developed much later. Though not clearly stated, the Madyadesa (or *mādda-d sa* or *madda-desā*) in the middle part of the Jambudvīpa and the *b dhi mandala* is the central part of the Madyadesa. It seems that the other regions known to the author take their bearing from the *b dhi mandala* and the dimensions of these regions are mentioned. The dimensions of the *b dhi mandala* itself are not given, preserving the idea that it is a small region within the larger Madyadesa, the place of the sacred *b dhi* tree and its environs. See A.V. Suraweera, *R j valiya*, English translation, Ratmalana: Vishva Lekha, 2000, XXIV-XXVII.

14. See Suraweera, *R j valiya*, English translation, 3-4.

C lava sa as well as literary works in Pali and Sinhala assume that kings had Buddhist monks as their teachers and consultants. Monks who compiled these texts naturally tried to downplay their competition. And this view has gone into our contemporary histories, such that little or no reference is made in them to Brahmin *pur hitas* until we reach the birth and reign of Par kramab hu I, one of Sri Lanka's greatest kings, who was as much a follower of Brahmanic ideology as he was of his Buddhist commitments. If Hindu kings tended to feed monks and give them "maintenance villages" and other emoluments, Sinhala kings performed similar meritorious actions in respect of monks. It is therefore especially significant when some kings also supported Brahmins with benefices, lands and other emoluments.

Even before Par kramab hu was born Brahmanic rites seemed to have been employed by his father M n bhara a, also known as Mah dip da Vrab hu and his wife (and cross-cousin) Ratanaval who initially had two daughters but no male heir. M n bhara a complains that even though sprung from the dynasty of the moon (*s mava sa*) and outwardly very distinguished, he and his brothers have lost the various wars with Vikkamab hu (his wife's brother and also cross-cousin). Like many a king in both Buddhist and Hindu worlds, M n bhara a temporarily gave up the administration of the kingdom and spent seven or eight months engaged in pious works in order to obtain a son.¹⁵ One night around dawn the king dreamed that a marvelously beautiful god predicted the birth of a son possessed of a "fount of excellent qualities, a furtherer of the [Buddhist] Order and of the laity." Naturally the king went back to his palace and jointly with his *mahes* Ratanaval he began to amass good deeds, such as almsgiving and the observance of the Buddhist precepts. One day near morn, in another dream he saw "entering the sleeping chamber of his Mahes holding gently by the ear a beautiful, pure white elephant calf, endowed with all auspicious marks," very much like the dreams of the Buddha's own mother Mah m y , the significance of which would be known to most persons. No wonder the Brahmin *pur hita* predicted that the son "shall bear on him the marks of (future) power."¹⁶ Now follows a neat combination of Buddhist and Brahmanic rituals to ensure a propitious delivery. Thus Buddhist monks recited *p rittas* (Buddhist benedictory verses) over and over again and M n bhara a gave alms and gifts to countless beggars and repaired many ruined *vih ras* and relic shrines and reservoirs, perhaps the very ones destroyed by him in his own wars against the legitimate king Vikkamab hu, his cousin and wife's brother, and described at great length in the *C lava sa*.¹⁷

Along with the Buddhist rites performed by M n bhara a were the Brahmanic ones, details of which were surely understated and probably not fully understood by the monk compiler of our text: "Rites like the Homa sacrifice and held to be salutary, he had performed by the house priest [*pur hita*] and other br hmanas versed in the Veda and the Vedangas [Upani ads]."¹⁸ And when the son was born with extraordinary astrological signs, the king in Buddhist spirit "set many free who lay bound in fetters in prison and gave a (sic) splendid alms to the s manas and br hmanas."¹⁹ And then once again we are presented with the other side of his belief system: "According to the rules laid down in the Veda, the Monarch had the birth rites and other ceremonies performed for the boy. He then summoned the house priest and the other Br hmanas versed in the lore of body marks ... and [he] charged them with the determination of the body marks of the boy."²⁰ Based on the projected future of the boy's "foe-crushing arms" the boy was named Par kramab hu, *par krama* meaning "valiant" or "strong" and a well-known name for some South Indian kings while *b hu* the second part was equally familiar to Sri Lankans as a

15. Wilhelm Geiger, translator, *C lavamsa*, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2003 (1929), 62:10-12, 233.

16. Ibid., 62:29.

17. Ibid., 61: 48-73.

18. Ibid., 62:33.

19. Ibid., 62:42.

20. Ibid., 62: 46-47.

suffix attached to a king's name, as for example Vijayab hu ("victorious arm") and Gajab hu ("elephant arm)," all of the above deriving from the archetypal "b hu" who was none other than Sinhab hu ("lion arm"), the father of Vijaya, the founder of the Sinhala people and of Sinhala kingship. The piercing of the ears and the ceremony of eating the first rice meal was also presumably according to Brahmanic procedures. The crucial Brahmanic ritual of the tonsure (the symbolic cutting of the hair) is followed later "with great pomp."²¹

What is striking in the career of Par kramab hu I is that he was educated in the arts of war and in the course of his education he studied "the work on politics, as in that of Ko alla [Kautilya] and others" and all of this stood him in good stead in his wars against his cross-cousin Gajab hu, the son of Vikkamab hu and the ruler of the *rajara a*, the district of the sovereign ruler, whose kingdom Par kramab hu planned to usurp. I further assume that following Indic tradition Par kramab hu was tutored in Kautilyan statecraft by Brahmin teachers, rather than Buddhist monks. As with other rulers, Par kramab hu accompanied by his father toured the territory and in a village called Badalatthal he met "the loyal, powerful Sen pati [commander] Sa kha who was entrusted with the defense of the frontier." The commander treated the son and father (actually Par kramab hu's deceased father's brother who in kinship terminology is also a "father") with great honor and both sojourned there for some time. The ruler informed Sa kha that "my son is grown to manhood and is ripe for admission," that is for the performance of the Vedic ritual of the "twice born" or *upanayana* where the youth is ritually inducted to adulthood and which entailed the wearing of the sacred thread over his right shoulder. In order to combine this with Buddhist custom the Vedic rituals were prefaced with many rich offerings for the "three jewels" or the Buddhist *tri ratna* after which the ritual of *upanayana* was performed "by Brahmans versed in the ritual of the Veda." To commemorate this occasion, a great spring festival was held in the town of Sankatthali near the residence of Sa kha.

Kautilyan techniques and many more seem to have been perfected by Par kramab hu. Thus it happened that on a visit to his father's general, he flouted canons of hospitality by killing him, because Sa kha was too loyal to his father rather than to him. Par kramab hu's spies were sent to the outlying districts of Gajab hu's kingdom to find out those who were for or against him. He sought out those who "understood all kinds of tricks and knew the dialect of the various regions" and he employed those skilled in mixing poisons and those taking various guises, such as that of a snake charmer.²² Others sent as spies were palmists, soothsayers, wandering musicians and also two opposed categories both given to wandering, namely, *can las* who were wandering beggars and Brahmins, who also could move from place to place without incurring suspicion. He selected Tamil professional singers and dancers and made them wandering sellers of leather dolls and such items; others sold rings and glass bangles. "Others again he sent forth with the command that they should go in the garb of ascetics, with the equipment of such, the umbrella, the beggar's staff and the like wandering like unto pious pilgrims from village to village and thereby performing their devotions in front of the cetiyas."²³ Other kinds of healers were employed to go into market towns and practice their arts, and presumably also act as spies. He had a thing or two that might impress some of our modern day spies: he had them infiltrate the court to find out the weaknesses of the king and his officials. And he had spies learned in Sanskrit literature to visit the various houses in the guise of Buddhist monks. "As soon then as confidence in them had been established, and when they had found trust and reverence, they came forward as (spiritual) advisers, estranged the people and brought them under their influence."²⁴ It is almost certain that these

21. Ibid., 63:5-6.

22. Ibid., 66:131.

23. Ibid., 66: 136-37.

24. Ibid., 145-46.

techniques of surveillance were directly influenced by the *Artha stra* or creatively adapted by Par kramab hu to suit local conditions.²⁵

It therefore seems fair to say that Brahmins had an important role in the Sinhala kingdoms as *pur hitas* who were, along with Buddhist monks, gurus of the palace. It is they who organized calendrical rituals and recommended astrologically propitious times for royal events. For example, it was a Brahmin priest who performed the funeral rites of another great king of Kotte, Par kramab hu VI (1411-1460) and not a Buddhist monk as is the custom among us ordinary citizens; this is not surprising because Brahmin *purohitas* had a central role during his reign.²⁶ Even Par kramab hu II (1236-1270) idealized as a very Buddhist king had, according to Amaradasa Liyanagamage, "Br hma as and Brahmanical practices at the court" such that "a compromise with Buddhist ways have been made."²⁷ Unfortunately, the word "compromise" implied that Brahmanic practices were unusual and un-Buddhist. One must assume that there were Brahmins a-plenty in his kingdom and after him but the existence of Brahmin functionaries and the practice of Br hmanic rituals did not mean that either Par kramab hu I or Par kramab hu II were not Buddhist kings, no more than ordinary people who nowadays propitiate Hindu gods and still remain good Buddhists. Nevertheless, one must be aware that Brahmin *claims* were not necessarily Brahmin *realities* because non-Brahmin castes could over time claim high Brahmin status.

Coming close to more recent times, there is clear evidence that some rulers gave extensive properties to Brahmins, the best reference comes from the Gampola kingdom during the reign of Bh venekab hu V. The standard chronology that has to be questioned attributes to this king a reign of 15 years (1344-1359) but this seems to be contradicted by the account in *Nik ya Sa grahaya*, a brief Sinhala text on the history of Buddhism, that I employ here. It says that the king's *suhurubadu* (cross-cousin, brother-in-law) known as Mehenevara V rab hu, who was *p na* or heir apparent, became king (*raja tampat va*). There is considerable controversy whether V rab hu was a reigning monarch or not but this is not altogether germane to my argument.²⁸ What is clear is that V rab hu was a powerful figure and he not only supported the Buddhist order but also gave extensive support to Brahmins, just as their Hindu counterparts did although the term *brahmadeya* is not used. "To some Br hmanas he gifted villages, lands, fields and wealth; to others clothes, ornaments, and corn [grains of various kinds]; to some Br hmanas and bards he gifted slaves, oxen, buffaloes, horses, elephants, cows, gems, maidens"²⁹

25. Most of these are discussed in great detail in I.N. Rangarajan *Artha stra* New Delhi: Penguin, 1987 on 475-498 and 690. Here are some examples. "Spies in the guise of ascetics shall find out who among the population is discontented" (475). Similarly spies will be posted in villages to keep track of those who leave and those who arrive as well as dubious characters. Secret agents or spies could be disguised as thieves; others shall patrol roads and paths and temples, sanctuaries and so on. Thieves could be employed by the state; and thieves should be used to plunder caravans in order to amass wealth for the ruler; agents can take the guise of demons and terrorize the local population. "An agent in the guise of a holy man shall take refuge in the popular temple of the city and by his performance of magical tricks gradually win over the principals and use them to outmaneuver the enemy" (690).

26. This is clearly seen in the Oruva a *sannasa* or grant with extensive land rights in the region of Oruvala, near the present town of Aturugiriya given by Par kramab hu VI to two Brahmin *pur hitas*, Pot Ojjhalun and his nephew Avuha a Ojjhalun. See H.W. Codrington, "The Oruva a Sannasa" in *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, vol. III, London: Archeological Survey of Ceylon, 1933, 51-71.

27. Liyanagamage, *Rise of Dambadeniya*, 28.

28. The account in the *Nik ya Sangrahaya* has been the subject of considerable scholarly debate. First, the *Nik ya Sangrahaya* says that *p na* V rab hu became king in the 20th year of Bh venekab hu V, which is impossible according to the standard chronology. I would place greater trust on the *Nik ya Sangrahaya* that was written during this period or soon after. Second, it is believed that this *p na* V rab hu remained an *p na* and was never a king but in fact the *Nik ya Sangrahaya* does not explicitly say so either. The Sinhala of the text says: "Emarajun suhuruba u Mehenevara V rab hu nam *p n* raja tampat (alternate, *tampat*) va" *Tampat va* can be rendered as "realized" or "occupied" or "took over the high [position]". Thus one could translate the above phrase to mean: "That king's cross-cousin [massina or brother in law] the heir apparent named Mehenevara V rab hu came unto the position of king" or the latter clause could be read as "became like unto the king." My translation is based on the Sinhala *Nik ya Sangrahaya*, edited D.P. Samaranayaka, Colombo: Gunasena and Co, 1966, 86.

29. C.M. Fernando, trans., *The Nik ya Sangrahaya*, Colombo: Government Printer, 1908, 28. I have checked this translation with the original Sinhala and it gives a reasonable gist of the latter.

The text goes on to say that he supported other sects such as the *pan arams* (non Brahmin Saivite mendicants) and adds: "He gifted in increasing proportions money, corn, clothes, ornaments, beds, and conveyances to Brahmanas and bards, and delighting their hearts was himself delighted by the clamor of their gratitude."³⁰

It seems to me that there are two kinds of Brahmins mentioned in the aforementioned literature. There are the Brahmins who come from South India as *pur hitas* and as popular ritual specialists and there are those Brahmins who have been "Sinhalaized" and incorporated into the operative caste system as *goyigama* (the dominant farmer caste). But, as we noted earlier, this was also the fate of the *he is* as well as some *k atriya*s, like the Malala princes of our *vitti pot*. Just as there are place names prefaced with the term "bamunu" there are also place names with *he is* and many surnames among *goyigama*s prefaced with the same merchant designation. As far as Brahmins were concerned, they were a continuing presence as ritual specialists as the following Dutch account probably composed during the reign of the Kandyan king Vimaladharmasuriya (1591-1604) indicates: "Among these *Singales* there live many *Moors*, *Turks* and other heathens, who all have special laws. *Brahmos* are there in large numbers, who are very superstitious and respected by the other nations. These *Brahmos* never eat anything that has life." Ferguson whose translation I employ here thinks this is a reference to Buddhist monks but Paranavitana is surely right that these are Brahmins who officiated in the palace and in the many *dev / s* in the capital.³¹ It is likely that these were Indian Brahmins but alongside of them were the Brahmins who have been Sinhalaized, witness the references to them in M1. In M2 the Brahmins are fully Sinhalaized, that is, converted into Sinhala farmers and some into the aristocratic sub-caste of the *goyigama*. Thus one of the persons who met the Dutch embassy of 1781-82 in the reign of Kirti Sri Rajasinha was Ba uvatt Brahmana R la.³²

30. Ibid., 29 .

31. Donald Ferguson, "Short account or history of what has happened in the island of Ceylon since the death of the King Ragu, and how the kingdom of Candy situated in the island of Ceylon freed itself from the Portuguese rule," in *The Earliest Dutch Visits to Ceylon*, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1998 (1927-1930), 41 (33-53). The newer translation by Paranavitana says that these were Brahmins, not monks, see K.D. Paranavitana, trans., *Journal of Spilbergen: The First Dutch Envoy to Ceylon, 1602*, Dehiwala: Sridevi, 1997, 62, n. 121. As far as I know, the only surviving Brahmin ritual specialists are those who officiate in the shrine for the popular god Skanda aka Murugan aka Kataragama in Kandy.

32. A beautiful example of mythic legitimizing of Brahmin immigrants is found in a *vitti pot* with the attributed title *Vijaya du Ha ana* that incorporates Brahmins into the classical Vijaya myth. According to this myth, a noble Brahmin performed an important ritual (*y gaya*) for a rich king. The king in gratitude gave the Brahmin a priceless gem which if placed against the forehead will grant any thought he might have had. The Brahmin's wife was a young and beautiful wench and wished to possess the gem so that she could amass wealth. She pleaded with the Brahmin to show him where he had sequestered the thought-fulfilling gem and she did manage to find out the location of the gem. When the Brahmin was away she planned to place the gem against her forehead and wish for wealth. However, the god Sakra reading the woman's mind and knowing that a woman using the gem would result in its loss of efficacy, made the gem vanish. Because the Brahmin thought that the woman stole the gem, both decided to swear to the truth of their positions. He accused the woman of stealing the gem and she denied it which means that both were guilty of lying and both died owing to the effect of *divi dosa*, that is, the sin of false oaths. The woman was reborn as the daughter of king Bamba by queen Candr vat . She had three breasts. Because the Brahmin indicated that this was an inauspicious sign, she was placed under a *dimbul* (woodapple) tree in a pond in Tammanna. It was prophesied by the Brahmins that when she meets her legitimate husband, the middle breast would fall off. The *yakku* who lived in that area fed her and looked after her and she became one of their following. The aforesaid Brahmin was born as Vijaya, the son of king Sinhab hu and his mother was Sinhavalli. Because of his violent ways Vijaya was banished from the country and he set sail with seven hundred of his followers, and landed in the port of Tammanna. There Vijaya's followers were hidden by Kuveni, the former daughter of Bamba and Chandravati, who had taken the guise of a bitch. When the prince went in search of them and met Kuveni, the latter's middle breast vanished. Kuveni yielded to him, and she restored Vijaya's seven hundred followers. Thereafter she created a splendid city named Upatissa for the benefit of her spouse and followers.

Unfortunately, my manuscript copy ends there and we have no idea of the sequel, if there was any. What is reasonably clear however is that the myth has a radical reformulation of most versions of the Vijaya myth. It gives a Brahmin pedigree to the myth and in effect says that Brahmins are not late migrants but were here in the very beginnings of Sri Lankan history. As with the Malala myths, this too is an attempt to legitimize the Brahmin presence. However, even though held by some Brahmins domiciled in Sri Lanka, it is neither a well-known nor a popularly accepted one. In the myths that developed in the same period, that is, the post-Dambadeniya period, it is Vijaya who made the original false vow when he promised Kuveni to be her lawful husband and then

The Brahmins in the Soraguna *D v le*

It seems that many Brahmin migrants have important ritual roles in some of the shrines for the Hindu gods known as *d v les*; but here also after some time these roles were taken over by Sinhala priests known as *kapur las*. There is a lot of anecdotal evidence on these trends but one can see this process in operation in the history of the famous Soraguna or Horaguna *d v le* in the Badulla district where the presiding deity is Skanda (identified in this text as Kandasv mi and occasionally as Kataragama). The *d v le* ancestry is recorded in two texts, one entitled *horagu u ku apata* (the palm leaf grant to the *d v le* of Horaguna) and the other *Mädagama sannasa* (the Mädagama copper plate grant), both edited by P.B. Sannasgala.³³ I will focus primarily on the latter because it deals with the role of Brahmins in the ritual services of Sinhala *d v les*. The *Mädagama sannasa* says that in the Saka era 1304 (CE 1382, the early Gampola period), a Brahmin named Rangan tha, resident in Mädagama but originally from Maddadesa in India that we are now familiar with, had a dream-vision of Kandasv mi in his resplendent form who shot a "Rama arrow" (*r ma sär*) that landed in the wilderness. Rangan tha searched for it and saw it visible in the lake but failed to recover it on three occasions until he realized that the arrow had lodged in the *andara* tree overhanging the lake and was mirrored on the water.³⁴ Subsequently Rangan tha's brother Mangalan tha had a vision of the god on a white elephant and he was urged to find a suitable place for worshipping this deity in Sri Lanka. The *r ma sär* was temporarily placed in a cave in the middle of a field named *vannivela* ("the *vanni* rice field"). A king named Sriya heard about this, and when he came down to Mädagama he saw the arrow shimmering with the sacred heat (*tejas*) it generated. He felt a sudden anxiety. He now wanted the god Kandasv mi to protect him, his people and Sri Lanka and he made a vow to build a *d v le* there. That very night a nearby rock splintered into smithereens, a sign pointing the place where the *d v le* had to be constructed. The king entrusted the Venerable D vamitra, a monk in Kandy, to find an auspicious hour and he in turn got Kadirasinha Tantriya ("the Tantric named Kadirasinha") to plant the *magul kapa* ("festival bough");³⁵ and the construction was given to the architect Devundara Va umistri ("the carpenter maestro from Devundara"). The text has an extensive description of the three-tiered *d v le* and the adjacent structures, including the four *v di geval* (buildings lining the streets) and a *d v le* for the goddess Pattini. The king, Suriya Maha Raja, then placed the *d v le* in charge of the two Brahmin brothers (Rangan tha and Mangalan tha) and their descendants and to two others known as N garad v and Valli D v. Valli D v is probably a female attendant or temple dancer of Kandasv mi whose mistress is known as Valli but the identity of N garad v is not clear. It might mean "the lady or deity knowledgeable in Sanskrit" because *n gara*

abandoned her for a princess from South Madura. Vijaya himself did not suffer from *divi dosa* owing to the timely intervention of Sakra but its deadly effects fell on his descendant, Pa duvas.

33. Punchi Bandara Sannasgala, *Soraguna a D v la Puvata* ("The story of the Soraguna *d v le*"), privately printed, 1973 has a detailed introduction by Sannasgala who also includes many grants or *sannasas*, two of them especially significant, these being *Soraguna a D v la Ku apata* and *Mädagama Sannasa*. Sannasgala tries to fit in the reigns of Sri Lankan kings in relation to the chronology of the two texts; but this seems to me to be a hazardous enterprise because it takes for granted the accuracy of the dates mentioned therein. Otherwise, Sannasgala's introduction is a very fine scholarly account of the Soraguna *d v le*. For present purposes I have used the *Mädagama Sannasa* reproduced in this volume on p. 28-32. Both texts, but especially the *Soraguna D v la Ku apata* has a rare step by step description by an unnamed local architect on the construction of the *devale*.

34. This piece of information on the reflected object seems to have been culled from a well-known Jataka story, *Mah-Ummaga Jataka*, in E.B. Cowell, editor, *The Jataka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, vol. VI, London: Pali Text Society, 1981, 156-246.

35. The *magul kapa* ("festival bough") is planted at the beginning of any auspicious public ceremony such as a temple procession or any collective ritual for the well being of a community, such as the *gammaduva* or the *kohomb kank riya*. It is generally a bough of a milk oozing tree (*kiri gaha*) such as a *jak* tree, and is ornamented with flowers, fruits and areca or coconut streamers. It represents wish-fulfilling (*kalpa vrk a*) tree of Hindu mythology. For a detailed discussion of the *magul kapa* in the *gammaduva*, see Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Cult of the Goddess Pattini*, University of Chicago Press, 1984, 76, 93-95.

The name Kadirasinha, could in this context be translated as "the lion of Kataragama" or "the lion of Skanda," and it perhaps indicates the presence of Tantrics in Kataragama because a personal name has been conjoined with Tantriya or "Tantric."

refers to the script in which Sanskrit is written. Thereafter the Br hmana people (*br hmana gollo*) were officiants at the Mādagama *d v le*. Another myth that I will not quote here refers to a later king who had an illness of the throat (*sora* or *hora*) which was cured by the intercession of Kandasv mi and consequently the Mādagama *d v le* was renamed Soraguna or Horaguna *d v le*, to commemorate the cure (*gu a*) of the disease of the throat (*vijal ka uvak*). The *d v le* was entrusted to a descendant of the original Brahmins Rangan tha and Mangalan tha who was known as N r yana Appuh mi. The dates in the two *sannasas* also don't fully match: the Mādagama *sannasa* says that the *d v le* was inaugurated in CE 1581 although it must surely have been fully completed much later. The Soraguna *d v le* was destroyed by the British during the rebellion of 1817-1818 and the present *d v le* is a recent renovation.³⁶ The dates of the grants cannot be fully relied upon and one can only agree with Sannasgala that all we can say for certain is that the Soraguna *d v le* was constructed in the late 15th or early 16th century.³⁷

Whether the actual dates and names of kings are accurate or not, we have to take seriously the tradition that the Mādagama *d v le* was in charge of two Brahmin priests and their descendants. Note however the terminology employed: the Brahmins have not yet become assimilated into the *goyigama* caste because when this happens a term like *r la*, a very Sinhala designation for "gentleman," follows the name of the Br hmana, as in M1 where we meet Ratvatte Br hmana R la and others with similar names. We also cannot infer the original Indian home of the two Brahmins with their highly Sanskritized names and their symbolic home in Madda-desa. However, two hundred years later the officiant in the *d v le* N r yana Appuhami has a very Hindu first name, *N r yana*, but he is also an *appuh mi* which like *r la* is a very Sinhala designation for a gentleman of the *goyigama* caste. We also cannot ignore the fact that some of the crucial inaugural rites were performed by a priest with a Tantric connection, Kadirasinha Tantriya, *kadira* being another name of the god Kandasv mi.

God Vi u and Brahmin Priests

The previous discussion clearly indicates that Brahmins were a continuing presence in Sri Lanka even though they have been converted into Sinhala speaking priests of the *goyigama* caste. But while Skanda/Kandasv mi is a popular god among Sinhala Buddhists, the god Vi u is far more significant historically. All these originally Hindu deities, when adapted by Buddhists, are propitiated for material and not ideal or salvific ends. Vi u under his other name of Upulvan or Uppalavanna ("color of the blue lotus") was assigned the task of protecting Sri Lanka by the Buddha himself, when according to mythic history, Vijaya, the founder of the nation arrived in Sri Lanka, according to the *Mah va sa*.³⁸ Thereafter this god has been propitiated in two ways: in small shrines, often in a small room adjacent a Buddhist temple and secondly in major independent shrines where the officiants were at one time Brahmin priests. These large complexes for Vi u were quite rare but kings did support and patronize them. The *Parevi Sande aya* ("pigeon's message"), the first of the "message poems" composed in the Kotte period asks the pigeon to take a message to the popular god Vi u at Devinuvara (aka Devundara, "the city of the God") in the southern tip of Sri Lanka in order that King Par kramab hu VI's eldest daughter would be provided with a good husband of equal caste (*sama kulen*) and through that union she might produce

36. Sannasgala, *Soragu u Devala Puvata*, 14.

37. *Ibid.*, 2

38. Upulvan is in my view an alternative name for Vi u. This view has been criticized by S. Paranavitana in his well-known work *The Shrine of Upulvan at Devundara* (Colombo: Archeological Department, 1953) where he claims that Upulvan is the Vedic god Varuna and is not to be confused with Vi u, in spite of the popular view that he is in fact Vi u! Paranavitana's etymological and historical investigations are utterly dated from the viewpoint of modern historiography. He believes that because some texts mention Upulvan and Vi u as if they were separate, they must necessarily be different gods. Here too he is mistaken. For example, any one could worship Vi u as Krishna or as R ma separately without any cognitive dissonance. For a further critique and reanalysis of these issues see, John Clifford Holt, *The Buddhist Vi u: Religious Transformation, Politics and Culture*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. Unfortunately, it is not possible to fully resolve this issue on the basis of available historical evidence. The indigenization of Vi u is an ongoing process and its earliest manifestation is as Upulvan.

heirs to the king.³⁹ Bare breasted female dancers were found in all of these temple complexes according to the *Sande aya* poetry that describes their performances in great detail. For our purposes note that the priestly officiants were all Brahmins, as this brief report from Ibn Battuta (1325-1354) informs us. This well-known Moroccan wanderer after visiting the sacred footprint of the Buddha ("Father Adam" to him) travelled to "Dinawar" or Devinuvara, the great temple of Viṣṇu, known to our histories from at least the 11th century. "In this town there is an idol, known as Dinawar, in a vast temple in which there are about a thousand Brahmins and Yogis, and about five hundred women, daughters of the infidels, who sing and dance every night in front of the idol. The city and all its revenues form an endowment belonging to the idol, from which all who live in the temple and who visit it are supplied with food. The idol itself is made of gold, about a man's height, and in the place of its eyes it has two great rubies, which, as I was told, shine at night like lamps."⁴⁰ During this period the god was known to the generality of Sinhalas as Upulvan; but it is unlikely that Brahmin officiants saw the deity except in his classic Hindu form as Viṣṇu. This temple was destroyed by the Portuguese in 1587/1588, but while it was replaced by later kings the Viṣṇu shrine today is controlled by Sinhala officiants (*kapur las*). But they might once have been Brahmins because a village in the vicinity is to this day known as *bamunugama*, "Brahmin village."

While many kings supported this shrine, we know of at least one king Parakramabahu IV (1302-1326), a near contemporary of Ibn Battuta, who it is said, constructed in Devapura (Devinuvara) in the premises of Upulvan/Viṣṇu "a long temple consisting of two storeys, provided with four pairs of gates for the image of the recumbent lion [Buddha]," which clearly shows the co-presence of the Buddha with Viṣṇu. More to our purpose, he "founded in the charming district of Malydhanu a new town with fine walls and gate-towers. There he had a fair temple erected to the gods with lofty spires and two storeys, provided with walls and gate-towers [*gopurams*], placed there a glorious statue of the lotus-hued King of the gods (Upulvan) and celebrated a great sacrificial festival."⁴¹ To me, it is clear that the divine city created by Parakramabahu IV on the Hindu architectural model with its *gopurams* housed the gods, but prominent among them was the lotus-hued king of the gods. It seems that the lotus hued king of the gods must surely mean that Upulvan, whatever his origin, is at this time simply another form or manifestation of Viṣṇu. We must also expect female dancers here also, especially since the king had such dances performed in the very "palace of the Tooth Relic," the Relic that symbolized the sovereignty of Buddhist kings.

Brahmins in the Sinhala Adaptation of the *Varna* Scheme

Many of the *vitti pot* refer to princes, merchants (*heṭṭi*) and Brahmins. I have shown that in several texts the Brahmin villages, mostly in the Vanni area, are mentioned, but unlike M1 and M2 we are rarely given any information on these Brahmins eventually becoming aristocratic *goyigamaṣ*. But they surely did when they became priests (*kapur las*) of the *goyigama* caste but this is complicated by the fact that other ritual specialists such as *pant rams* and also popular ritual specialists from South India might also become *kapur las*. Many *vitti pot*, particularly those reference texts we have assigned to the Dambadeniya and Kurunagala kingdoms, simply account for the presence of Brahmin families in their midst and gives traditional histories of their origins. It should be noted that most migrants, not just Brahmins, are males and one must presume that they married into the local population or, less likely, obtained their women from India. Given their notions of ritual purity, a few Brahmins did bring their women with them and this is clearly stated in the *Vanni Vittiya* when it mentions the arrival of noble Brahmin women and men (*bāmini brahmana r il*). Other texts mention two kinds of Brahmin villages:

39. *Parevi Sande aya*, edited by K. Jayatilaka, Colombo: Pradapa Prakāśayā, 195, stanza 203; for the explication or *sanna* of the relevant stanza, see 196-97.

40. H.A.R. Gibb, translator and editor, *Ibn Battuta: Travels in Asia and Africa, 1325-1354*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953, 260.

41. *C lavamsa* 90:100-102, 211

bāmini gam and *bamunu gam* or villages of Brahmin women and those of men. In my interpretation *bāmini gam* are those villages of high caste, probably a high sub-caste of *goyigama* or those related to the royal families, whom Brahmins could legitimately marry into.

Now let us examine the larger context of the Brahmin visitants in relation to the Sinhala classification of *kulas*. The Malala narrative has as its main focus the seven princes paying homage to the king and then being incorporated into the political and social structure of the "nation." But there is a further discourse on *kula* embedded in the main narrative. Nowadays *kula* simply means caste as it is in Hindu India where there is a wide distribution of castes or *j ti* that can be reclassified into the four-fold *varna* system of classes. Our *vitti pot* has another meaning of *kula* and that is the Sri Lankan re-adaptation of the *varnas* into four *kula* which in other contexts can have the meaning of *j ti* (the many service castes), dynasty and even family. In the Malala narrative, the princes leave Malakk va and journey to Sri Lanka and they are joined by two other ships with the *bamunu kula*, the *he i kula* and groups of their attendants and specialists who would later belong to separate service castes. In the *vitti pot* I have examined only the first three groups of migrants that are mentioned because the *goyigama* had already become the dominant caste in Sri Lanka and there is no need to mention them. They have already arrived! But the texts also bring the latter into the picture in a four-fold classification of *raja*, *bamunu* (brahmin), *vela da* (traders or *he i*) and *govi* (farmers or *goyigama*). The texts mention the formal classification of the multiple castes or *j ti* into four *kula*. Although it is difficult to pin a date for this development, it seems to me that by the mid-thirteenth century (the Dambadeniya period) the Sri Lankan caste system had been formalized into these four broad classes or *kula*. Although the ideal scheme puts the *goyigama* at the bottom of the local caste hierarchy, they soon became the dominant caste which was also the case in South India with the rise of the *vell la* except that in Sri Lanka there were no castes that could compete with the *goyigama*. In Sri Lanka several kings came from this caste but later claimed *k atriya* descent or more frequently emergence from the sun, the dynasty of the Buddha and also that of Manu, both dynastic origins mentioned in the chronicles. Nowadays the *goyigama* constitutes well over 50% of the population, but prior to the arrival of new castes on the west coast during Portuguese and Dutch times the percentages were overwhelmingly in favor of the *goyigama*. Given the omnipresence of the *goyigama* and their control of land, we have already seen that even those who claimed *k atriya*, *br hmana* and *hetti* descent eventually became *goyigama*. While the four-*kula* classification is the one found in our texts, other classifications also exist as M.B. Ariyapala documents in his study of society in the thirteenth century.⁴² He points out that the thirteenth century Sinhala text, the *P javaliya*, "enumerates four castes, viz. *raja*, *situ* [noble merchants], *bamunu* and *vele da* [traders]." However Ariyapala says that in the same text in another place "the *situ* (*se hi*) is dropped and *govi* ["farmer"] substituted" indicating again the changing fortunes of the *goyigama*. Yet another text *Saddharmaratn valiya* has a variation of the *kula* classification: *raja*, *br hmana*, *vy p ray* (traders) and *govi* (*goyigama*) but it adds *h naj tiyo*, the latter meaning "low *j ti*." It would seem that from this popular *kula* classification, the *goyigama*, dominant though they are, cannot get rid of their *udra* base. This is explicitly recognized in the mid-fourteenth century Gadaladeniya rock inscription that mentions *k atriya*, *br hmana*, *vai ya*, *udra*, the latter obviously a reference to the *goyigama*. But one must remember that this as well as the *kulas* is a formal classification, and it is very likely that the first three *kulas* were already being assimilated as sub-castes of the *goyigama*.⁴³ Ideal schemes everywhere have to meet the demands of practical reality.

This four-fold scheme implied recognition of the kind of migrations mentioned earlier; but with the gradual assimilation of the first three *kula* into the large and sprawling *goyigama* with its many sub-castes, the four-fold classification simply became moribund and was employed only in ritual contexts; but even then, this was so only in a purely formal manner. For example, in the *gamma uva* ritual complex for the Goddess Pattini (Kannagi) that we witnessed in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the *kapur la* or priest recites the several songs on the *tora a* ("festival arch") including the following:

42. M.B. Ariyapala, *Society in Mediaeval Ceylon*, Colombo: Department of Cultural Affairs, 1956.

43. *Ibid.*, 290.

A golden *tora a* for the royal *kula* (*raja kulaya*)
A gem *tora a* for the Brahman *kula*
A cloth *tora a* for the merchant *kula*
A *ramba tora a* for the farmer *kula*

The first three *tora as* are never constructed, in reality or symbolically, in any Sinhala ritual; only the *tora a* made of banana bark (*ramba tora a*) is recognized. But even this is not exclusively a right of the *goyigama* because any caste in any ritual can construct a *ramba tora a*. Finally, one must emphasize the lesson one learns from the clear evidence of M1 and M2, namely, that erstwhile Brahmin families have already been incorporated into the Kandyan social structure as farmers belonging to a high segment or sub-caste of the *goyigama*.

We must now surely be aware that not only the myths and narratives that I have presented but also rituals provide a form of legitimization for incoming immigrants. Here is the general scenario found in many exorcism rituals (*tovil*) and in communal rituals for the goddess Pattini (Kannagi). In the ritual arena, there are two performers who play the role of the guardian gods or *devas* of the pantheon such as Vi u and the Goddess Pattini. They hold a tape or a stick that represents a barrier. On the other side of the barrier are actors dressed as aliens, sometimes as Brahmins, or as alien deities or demons or merchants. The barrier is viewed as a *ka avata* or gates at the entrance to a city, but in this case the entrance to Sri Lanka. The alien being tries to cross the barrier but is prevented by the guardian gods. The outsider speaks something like Tamil, actually a kind of gibberish. In other instances the alien speaks unintelligible Sinhala with a pronounced Tamil accent. He does not know Sinhala-Buddhist customs and insults the deities at the barrier by some horrendous action such as saluting them with his arse. The prim deities at the barrier remain firm. Gradually the outsider begins to speak proper Sinhala and proper ways of addressing the *devas*. In one common enactment, the guardian deities at the barrier asks the outsider to bring a *sannasa* or letter of authority from the Buddha. But to begin with even this is not done properly. The outsider might place the *sannasa* on his foot and thrust it at the *devas* or perform similar outrageous actions. After much enjoyable horseplay of this sort, the outsider recognizes the superiority of the guardian gods and the Buddha. He worships the guardian deities in the proper manner and with decorum and hands over to them the letter of authority. The gods open the barrier and the outsider, be it Brahmin or merchant, enters Sri Lanka, symbolically "naturalized," as it were, as a Sinhala-Buddhist.⁴⁴

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion I would say that the *udra* fate of the Brahmins do not seem to be all that bad, given the fact that many of them have moved into the aristocratic segment of the *goyigama*. I mentioned a few of these distinguished families and I know of others. As for *kapur las*, they have lost status recently. But even in the fifties, they were highly respected members of village society. Further, it is indeed possible that a few Brahmin ritual specialists might have *descended* the caste ladder. Many years ago I knew a fine performer of *bali* (planetary rituals) belonging to the drummer caste in a remote village near Sigiriya, part of the old Vanni, who was generally addressed and known as Bha a-gurunn ns . The latter part of the term -- *gurunn ns* -- simply meant "lordly *guru*" and was often used as an honorific for any male member of the drummer caste, a caste that plays the drum in festivals and also performs a variety of healing rituals, especially *bali*. *Bha a* however is a very unusual term for drummers and it struck me, as I write this essay, that Bha a-gurunn ns might have had a Brahmin ancestor simply because *Bha a* is often prefixed to Brahmin names all over India. Bha a-gurunn ns was the last member of a distinguished line of *bali* performers and, alas, he died many years ago and I am not sure I will ever be

44. For details of such ritual dramas and the analyses of the processes of exclusion and inclusion, see Gananath Obeyesekere, "The ritual drama of the Sanni demons: Collective representations of disease in Ceylon," in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 11, no.2, 1969, 174-216; and *The Cult of the Goddess Pattini*, 306-312.

able to verify my hypothesis of the Brahmin origin of his family name. And yet, who knows whether there might be other Bha a-gurunn ns s in that same region whom I failed to interview. It therefore seems that I have no choice but to plead ignorance once again and reaffirm Nietzsche's maxim: "One must be very humane to say, 'I don't know that,' to afford ignorance."