

VANNI

and

THE VANNIYAS

C. S. NAVARATNAM



# VANNI & THE VANNIYAS

with

## A MAP OF THE VANNI DISTRICTS



By

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1960

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*Dedicated to the memory  
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**S. Mahadavan Esq.**

*Founder of*

**Messrs Mahadavans Ltd.**

*and*

**Founder-Secretary of Colombo Hindu College.**

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## PREFACE

The Paper entitled "Vanni and the Vanniyas" was read by me at the Jaffna Historical Association on 5-8-59. To have a wider circulation the paper has now been printed with illustrations.

In general histories of Ceylon the part of the country with which we are concerned figures only in a small way. Scanty as our information is on the early history of the Vanni, I have endeavoured in a modest way to present a brief general survey of its history to the middle of the 19th century.

The history of the Tamils in Ceylon will be incomplete without the history of the Vanniyas and it is my hope that this small book will be a useful supplement to my earlier publication "Tamils and Ceylon."

I thank the Management of Eelanadu Limited, for their best services in bringing out this book for me.

*Navaly, Manipay.*  
25-8-1960.

C. S. Navaratnam







Image of Vishnu found  
at Kantalai

## Vanni and the Vanniyas

### CHAPTER I

### GEOGRAPHY

Vanni was the name given to the northern country between the Jaffna Peninsula and the Nuwara-kalawiya District. Before it acquired the name Vanni, it seems to have been known as "Adankapattu."\* It stretched from Trincomalee on the east to Mannar on the west and consisted of Tennamaravadi, Mulliyavalai, Karunaval Pattu, Panankamam, Perunkali Pattu and Musali Pattu which included lands as far as Kudiramalai and a portion of Cheddikulam. The extent of the Vanni may be about 3000 square miles.

The coasts that surround these districts rise gradually from the shore towards the interior. In the Mullaitivu District high rocks are found as at Kurunturmalai, Kumpakannamalai and Otiyamalai. Though the coastal areas are sandy and saline, various types of very rich soil are found inland. Tunukkai is a region of black fertile soil of about sixteen square miles. The lands in the Vavunikulam area, which are situated in the Mannar District and to the south of the Tunukkai Division, are the most fertile tracts in the Jaffna and Mannar districts. There are no mountains in the Vanni districts to ensure a perennial supply of water for the cultivation of crops, but fresh-water surface springs flow out at Mulliyavalai, Tannyuttu and at Kumarapuram.

### RIVERS OF THE VANNI

The Parangi Aru which has its source in the Mamaduwa Tank is the largest of the small seasonal rivers. It flows into the sea north of Mannar. The

\* J. P. Lewis C. C. S., "Manual of the Vanni".

other river Aruvi Aru or Malawattu Oya\*\* flows into the sea near the historic port Arippu south of Mannar. It drains the Anuradhapura District and supplies several tanks with water and among them the Kaddukarai (Giants' Tank) and the Akkattimurippu near Arippu are of importance. The Moderagama Aru or the Morkaman Aru forms the southern boundary of Musali Pattu. It feeds the Periyakattukulam by a channel from the Pilmadu Tekkam. The Kanagarayan Aru rising near Vavuniya flows through Iranaimadu Tank and empties its waters into Elephant Pass Lagoon. The Nay Aru and the Per Aru are two seasonal rivers that fall into the sea near Mullaitivu. The Ma Oya takes its name from the confluence of two rivers and after a short course empties itself into the Kokkilai Lagoon. One of these rivers flows through the Padawiya Tank and at the eleventh mile after leaving the tank the river is checked by a dam known as Vannadi Palam. It is one of the foremost structures of its kind in Ceylon. The Ma Oya forms the boundary between Mullaitivu and Trincomalee districts.

#### CLIMATE OF THE VANNI

Owing to the proximity of the equator the Northern Plain of the Island has an average temperature of about 82°F.

The South-west Monsoon gives this area very little rain, while the North-east Monsoon brings much rain. The Mannar District has a rainfall of about 25 to 50 ins. whereas the Mullaitivu and Vavuniya districts have a rainfall of about 50 to 75 ins. Occasionally these districts are subject to cyclonic storms and once in 1896 a locality recorded 31 ins. of rainfall for twenty-four hours. On the other hand they are subject to periodical

\*\* In ancient days this river was known as Kadamba Nadi due perhaps to the Kadamba trees on its banks.

droughts due to failure of monsoon rains. During this period trees get scorched and wild animals die by hundreds.

Owing to these geographical factors, the husbandman in the Vanni districts, from time immemorial had to depend on the village tanks and on other irrigation works for the cultivation of his crops.

#### IRRIGATION OF THE VANNI

In ancient times various systems were adopted in Ceylon for conserving the abundance of rain-water that fall all over the plains during the seasonal rains. The first was the use of village tanks and wells. The second system was the impounding of water in reservoirs by making use of the upper reaches of a valley. The water was then taken directly into the fields by means of channels. In the third system a part of the water flowing from rivers was turned into longer channels which conveyed them into reservoirs or a chain of reservoirs. This model is of great antiquity and was practised in South India from time immemorial. The oldest tanks in Ceylon are mainly of this type.

Some of the pre-Christian tanks of the Vanni are the Giants' Tank, Vavunikulam and Pavatkulam\*. Tanks of the early Christian era are Periyakulam, Mamadu, Olumadu, Kanagarayankulam, and Pandarakulam.\*\*

The Giants' Tank which no chronicle claims for any king of Ceylon is an old tank whose construction is lost in antiquity. Tradition ascribes the building of the tank to the Yakkas. Parker has attributed its construction to a pre-Christian era. The

\* H. Parker "Ancient Ceylon"

\*\* H. Parker "Ancient Ceylon"



tank has a very long bund of 15 miles and covers an area of six thousand four hundred acres. A stone dam 90 feet thick was built across the river Aruvi Aru in order to divert the water to the tank by means of an excavated channel (Allavakka). In 1739 Governor Van Imhoff tried to restore the tank, but it proved too difficult and he had to abandon it. In 1897 the Public Works Department repaired the breaches in the bund and restored the ancient channel. The tank is now the fourth longest artificial lake in the world.

Another pre-Christian tank is Vavunikulam. It was in existence during the time of Dutugemunu. The construction of this tank is assigned to king Elala by Parker. Its original name was Pili Vapi because it was formed by raising a long embankment across the valley of a stream now known as Pali River.

Another pre-Christian tank is Pavatkulam which is of the same age as Vavunikulam. It has five valve-pits which is an uncommon feature among the tanks of Ceylon. It is one of those tanks that has no corresponding Sinhalese name. This fact alone indicates that Tamils from remote antiquity have been the permanent inhabitants of these districts. King Elala could not have held sway over a people different from his own for a period of forty-four years, if there had not been a permanent Tamil population of sufficient strength to support him. The late Mr. H. W. Codrington wrote: "There was a steady stream of immigration from South India through the port of Mahatittha with the result that the neighbouring country became entirely Tamil. It is noteworthy that while many Sinhalese place names remain more or less disguised in the Jaffna Peninsula and in the Eastern Province, now Tamil, this is not the case in the country behind Mannar; there these names are fully Tamil."

The construction of such magnificent tanks in the second century B. C. and earlier, confirms the presence of a large population who understood earth-works and the art of rice-cultivation. We are also told that Panda Wewa on the Waryapola Chilaw road was supposed to have been built in the fifth century B. C. For it must be remembered that the Sinhalese nation was then being formed, and their numbers would have been totally inadequate to carry out such ambitious schemes in diverse parts of the Island at such an early period. It follows, therefore, that there already existed a large number of inhabitants for whom these tanks were of use. Under these circumstances there can scarcely be any doubt that Ceylon was first colonized from Southern India.

In this connection it is good to note what an eminent scholar like Rev. Father Heras, an authority on Dravidian civilization and culture, said in 1937 after examining the inscriptions on the early cast and struck copper coins of Ceylon known as puranas or kahapanas and by early European archaeologists as punch-marked coins. He says: "The fact that the system of writing was not yet developed like the Brahmi scripts of India proves that the coins are prior to the Christian era and even granting that the script of Ceylon did not develop as fast as the script of India the pictographic character of some of the signs of Mohenjo Daro and the nominal values of all the signs incline me to believe that these coins belong to the first half of the first millenium B. C.)\* He further concludes that the race that produced the marvellous civilization of the Indus Valley spread over India to Ceylon. The pre-historic tombs of Hyderabad State, the designs of the Nilgiris, the patterns on pieces of pottery found in the Tinnevely District, and the ins-

\* *Journal, Royal Asiatic Society Vol. XXXIV No. 90 Page 52*

criptions in the cave near Kegalle are indications of the long trek of the Dravidians from the Indus Valley to Ceylon.

We learn from the Mahavamsa that in the sixth century B. C., before the coming of Vijaya, Kandamadanam near Rameswaram was ruled by Culodara, a nephew of Mahodara, ruler of Nagadipa. It means that there was close intercourse between South India and North Ceylon. Considering the intimate connection that existed between the two countries, it is but likely that the Tamils, the nearest neighbours in the continental coasts who were already a prosperous seafaring people of South Asia, might have established trading centres in the Island as Matota and Kudiramalai in close proximity to the continent. When these ports grew in wealth and influence, the new settlers in order to meet the food problem of a growing population might have constructed stupendous tanks and irrigation works based on the models of their native country. To satisfy their spiritual needs they seem to have dedicated temples to Lord Siva at Tirukketiswaram. It is therefore, that we find the most ancient tanks in Ceylon situated in the north and in the north-western coasts of Ceylon that face South India.

Further the Mahavamsa says that there was a Brahman chief engineer Jotiya in Anuradhapura in the reign of Pandukabhaya. Mihintale Rock No. 2 inscription says: "According to the supply of water in the lake the same shall be distributed to the lands of the Vihara in the manner formerly regulated by the Tamils"\*\*. The Tamils who were very early acquainted with tank building should have been the first builders of tanks in Ceylon and should have been the first to introduce the use of iron,\*\*\* for these stupendous irrigation schemes would not have been possible without iron tools.

\* Mahavamsa (Turnour) Chap. X

\*\* Ceylon Literary Register Vol. V Page 151

\*\*\* Oruva-(Sinh) Steel-seems to have been derived from Uruku (Tamil)

## CHAPTER II

### ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE VANNI

Vanni is the land of spectacular ruins of huge tanks and of breached bunds. Ruins of Hindu temples stand side by side with dilapidated dagobas. Sometimes on an embankment Lord Ganesha, the God of Learning and Wisdom, can be seen seated on a raised platform watching over the fertile plains below. In another spot in the jungle can be seen the statue of the Great Master silently reminding his devotees of the great Middle Path. Occasionally among such surroundings would stand the ruins of the proud residences of the Vanniya chiefs narrating their thrilling story of a thousand years of independence.

The western division of the Vanni (Mannar District) seems to have been once thickly populated, for there are many abandoned tanks and neglected water channels. Of the many ancient dams Kurinchalkulam Tekkam on the Kal Aru and another Tekkam on the Per Aru are of importance.

The historic port of Matota with its celebrated temple of Tirukketiswaram is in the above district. The antiquity of this port goes back beyond the beginnings of Ceylon history. The Portuguese to satisfy their religious zeal destroyed this venerable shrine. After their defeat in the First Battle of Jaffna in 1560, they built a four-sided fort at Mannar over-looking the Strait to ward off the attacks of the Tamils. It was later rebuilt by the Dutch.

A few miles south of Matota stands the village of Arippu on the Gulf of Mannar over-looking the pearl banks. Arippu meaning a sieve in Tamil derives its



Image of Lord Ganesha  
unearthed at Tirukketiswaram

name from the sifting of pearls which was carried on there. Apart from its association with the pearl fishery it is remarkable for it is here that Robert Knox regained his freedom which he lost at Kottiyar in 1660. One mile south of this village are the ruins of a Dutch fort. A mile from this are the impressive ruins of the building which Frederick North, the first British Governor of Ceylon built to supervise the pearl fisheries.

Some stone pillars mark a shrine at Komputukki between Vidattaltivu and Iuppaikadavai. Further north near Vellankulam is an Aiyandar temple with elephant as its vehicle (nandhi). Perhaps this may be the temple mentioned in Kokila Sandesa.

There are ruins of buildings at Chinnachcheddikulam, Cheddikulam Palampiddi, and Venayankulam. Cheddikulam was the seat of Vanniya chiefs. Mr. J. P. Lewis basing his facts on some ancient Tamil manuscripts states that Viravarayan Chetty, a merchant of Madura, together with some Paravars were wrecked off the western coasts of the Mannar District about A. C. 247. He and his followers later settled in Cheddikulam and constructed a "keni"\* known as Vavvalai and erected a temple to Lord Santhirasegaram about A. C. 289. The Muslims that are in the area claim to be the descendants of the Arab traders who first came to Mannar.

In Parangi Cheddikulam the numerous descendants of the Portuguese could be distinguished by their colour, but they wear the dress of the inhabitants of the area.

Madhu is one of the most famous places of pilgrimage. There is a tradition among the Catholics that the original home of the statue at Madhu was Mantai and when the Dutch took possession of the town some Catholics carried with them the statue of Our Lady

\* A rectangular well with steps on one side.

and emigrated to Marutha-Madhu which was then on the borders of the Kandyan territory and had a custom-house for the goods that came into the king's territories. Soon other Catholic emigrants from Jaffna took shelter in the Vanni. All these settlers lived under the patronage of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary. Later on, an annual festival was established in 1870 to be celebrated on the 2nd of July.

Traces of ancient roads from Anuradhapura to Matota and to Jaffna can be noticed in Kilakkumulai South. There is an ancient bridge at Olukkulam.

Panankamam was one of the celebrated headquarters of the Vanniya chieftains. In this Pattu there is an absence of Buddhist remains. It shows that Hindu Tamils have been in occupation of the district from time immemorial.

There are some ruins in the jungle north-west of Vavunikulam. It may possibly be the remains of a town. Hindu temples dedicated to Siva and Vishnu were found among these ruins by Mr. J. P. Lewis about seventy years ago.

Nothing of note was found at Pavatkulam. Here there are no local traditions and no inscriptions. The ancient channels of the tank can be traced for about three miles.

The town of Vavuniya has nothing to show in the way of ruins though there were Tamil settlements from ancient times.

An ancient irrigation channel about two miles long connects Madukanda and Maniyarkulam. There are ruins of Buddhist establishments at Madukanda and Iratperiyakulam.

In Kilakkumulai South there are many caves with inscriptions. According to Mr. Lewis, Mah akachatkodai is one of the earliest settlements of the Vanni.



There are ruins of Hindu temples at Irasentirankulam, at Chinnapuvarasankulam and at Kurunturkulam.

Ruvanmaduva on the south-eastern limit of the Vavuniya District was probably the residence of Vanniya chiefs. Its neighbourhood must have been once thickly populated.

Omantai was once the head-quarters of the Vanni chiefs. There is a stone Saivite temple of the Vanniya times. Close to this village Mara-iluppai possesses a ruined Saivite temple.

Tannirmurippu and Putumurippu have ancient channels. Pandarakulam in the Mullaitivu District has no corresponding Sinhalese name. Until the advent of the British a Vanniya prince had his residence four miles from this "kulam"

A Tamil inscription was found at Kumpakannamalai. Ruins of temples are found in Tiraviyamalai and Savarathuveli in Karikaddumulai South. Remains of Buddhist establishments are found at Otiyamalai in Melpattu North.

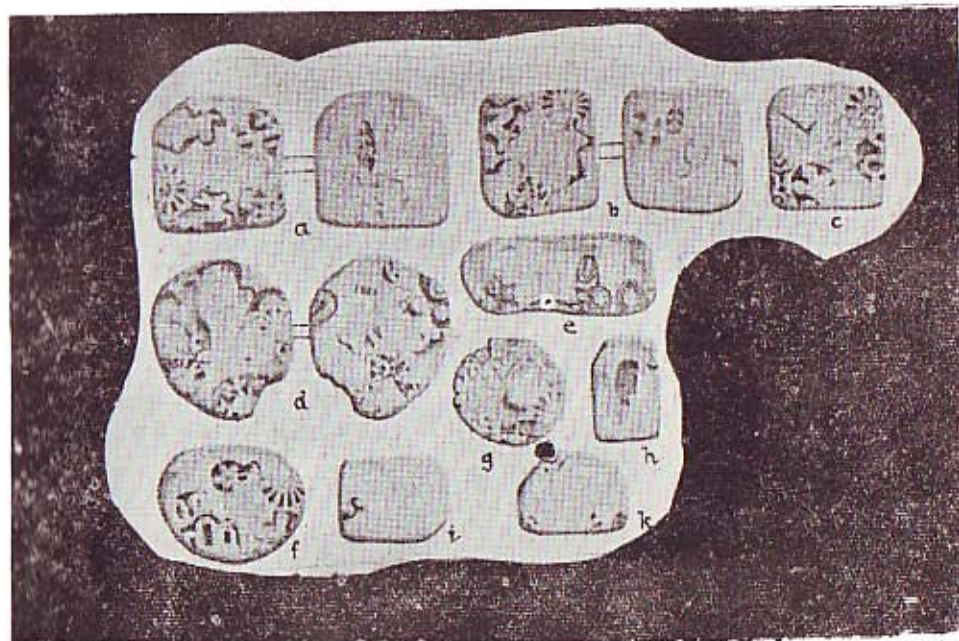
A few miles from Putukkudiyiruppu are the ruins of Kuravil Kovil.

In 1885 a very important event occurred at Mullaitivu where a labourer in a coconut estate discovered silver puranas numbering 51 and 16 plaques in a well whose sides were ringed with earthenware cylinders.\* The well was similar to the wells discovered at the Tirukketiswaram temple site. This discovery reveals the antiquity of Dravidian settlements in this area.

According to an accepted tradition in Jaffna, Magadhese Buddhists sought shelter in Ceylon during the time of Prince Vijaya\*\* As the Tamil Saivites

\* H. Parker "Ancient Ceylon" Page 460

\*\* James Gray basing his facts on the Buddhist traditions of Burma asserts that Buddhism was known to Ceylon long before Mahinda set foot on Ceylon. Early Sinhalese chroniclers in order to exalt Mahinda and his mission probably have suppressed these facts.



Some of the silver 'puranas' discovered at Mullaitivu in 1885. Common designs are rayed sun - symbol, a circle with six emblems, the dog, the bull, trees, and three-arched structure.



were living in Matota and in Kudiramalai districts, Vijaya and his Buddhists founded the city Tammana Nuwara, down south near Puttalam. It is interesting to note that the port of Puttalam in ancient days was called Kalyanaturai Mukam (port of marriage) for it seems to be the spot where Vijaya married Kuveni\*.

Buddhists were known to the Saivites then as "Samana". "We are" says Mahinda, to Devanampiya Tissa, "Samana Oh great king, disciples of Dharmaraja". The city built for Samana or Thamana settlers would become Tamana Nuwara\*\* and later as Tammana Nuwara. Their special arrival gave a special name to their town.

From the archaeology of the Northern Province we are led to infer that Ceylon was first colonized from South India and that a Dravidian culture existed in Ceylon long before the coming of Vijaya. We are on firm ground, when we say that the history of Ceylon first began in the north, and moved later to other parts of Ceylon.

#### PLACE NAMES IN THE VANNI

Names of places are more often causative, but in the process of time they undergo changes that it is difficult to find out their meanings after a lapse of centuries; but it is not so generally in the case of the Vanni districts. In these districts every village is called after its tank and in the majority of names the affix is one of the numerous words employed in Tamil to denote a tank or pond. The word may be 'kulam', 'madu', 'keni', 'odai' and 'vil'. So we have Kanagarayankulam, Mamadu, Nedunkeni, Marutodai and Kokkavil. Of all these, names ending in 'kulam' are the most numerous.

\* J. R. A. S. Vol. XXVIII No. 73. Page 40.

\*\* Greeks called the Buddhists Thamanaioi. Hugh Neville Taprobanian, Page 47

A tank takes the first part of its name from some tree or plant that are on or near the tank bunds. The finest specimens of the different varieties of trees are chosen to form the name of the tank. Of these the tamarind is the most popular and next in order are trees like Maruthu, Nochchi, Puvarasu, Iluppai, Vilathi and Karunkali. So we have Puliyanakulam, Marutamadu, Nochchikulam, Puvarasankulam, Iranai Iluppaikulam, Vilattikulam, and Karunkalikulam.

Sometimes the tank or village takes its name from some physical feature or peculiarity in the situation or construction.

Allaikalupoddakulam—a bund which has wave stones.

Matavuvaittakulam—a tank with a sluice.

Murikandi—where the breach in the bund occurred.

Kalnaddinakulam—tank where the stone was set up.

Vattapalai—the place where the water never dries up.

Marantallininrakulam—tank where trees stood apart.

Another method of naming tanks or village is to call them after some trivial incidents.

Anaiviluntan—where the elephant fell.

Pandichuddan—where the boar was roasted.

Odduaruthakulam—the tank where the paddy or kurakkan stalks were cut.

Manintrakulam—the tank where the deer stood.

Lastly there is the method of naming places in the following manner :—

**Prefixes :** Chinna — Small — Chinnakulam.  
 Kilakku— Eastern — Kilakkumulai.  
 Ma — Big — Mamadu.  
 Mel —Above or upper— Melpattu.

**Affixes :** Irakkam — Slope — Periyairakkam.  
 Kallu — Rock — Periyakallu.  
 Murippu—Breach in the bund— Muntrumurippu.  
 Malai — Hill — Chemmalai.

In this fashion the ancient settlers of the Vanni named their tanks and villages.

## CHAPTER III

### VANNIYAS

Of the great Fire Races - Agnikulas that inhabited South India in ancient times, the Vanniya was an illustrious non-Aryan warrior tribe who claimed a regal descent to establish their superiority of birth.\* They may be acknowledged as the Rajaputs of South India.

The “manmiam” that treats about the Vellalas is known as Ar Elupathu, and the “manmiam” that treats about the Vanniyas is known as Silai Elupathu.\*\* Silai in Tamil means a bow, for it is the national emblem of their tribe.

The Nambimar (Nallawas) too have the bow as the emblem of their tribe. They seem to have taken the ensign from their masters, the Vanniyas. In ancient times, just as the Pallas helped the Vellalas in their cultivation so the Nambimar helped the Vanniyas in their wars and conquests.\*\*\* We learn from the Vipava Malai that the Kalpitiya Vanniya chief had sixty armed Nambimar under him. Originally the occupation of the Nambimar was not climbing but they often served as archers under their chiefs. Even during the Portuguese period there were thamparu-nalavar and thamparu-pallar (climbers) who were different from the non-climbing class of their tribes.

\* *M. D. Raghavan*

\*\* *Rev. Fr. S. Gnanapiragasar, Yalpana Vaipava Vimarsanam*  
 Page 40.

\*\*\* *M. D. Raghavan*

## ADVENT OF THE VANNIYAS

Various explanations could be given for the coming of the Vanniyas to Ceylon. Firstly they may be the remnants of those Tamil armies that were periodically brought to this country either by aspirants to the throne of Lanka or by invading princes and chiefs. The second is the one given by the Vaipava Malai, "In the reign of King Pandu about A. C. 436 a chief from India called Kulakodan came over and repaired certain shrines, and the king sent an army against him, but after coming to an amicable arrangement Kulakodan completed his buildings at Trincomalee, and dedicated large tracts of land with their revenues to the use of these temples. He sent for Vanniyas to the coasts of India and placed them over these tracts with strict orders to cultivate them for the benefit of the temple. There came a band of fifty nine families from Pandya country and they rapidly increased in numbers. Seven chieftains were selected from among the Vanniyas\* to exercise sovereign power, each within his own territory." The descendants of these chieftains continued to exercise like power, and the territories over which they ruled came to be called Vanni. The people who inhabited these districts were known as Vanniyas.

The Konesar Kalveddu, a memorable work endorses the statement of the Vaipava Malai. The Vaiya Padal though not a critical work gives the traditions of the peaceful colonization of the Vanni districts by the different tribes from South India.

\* Names common among Vanniya chieftains :- *Nallamapanna-vanniyar, Periya Kumarasuriyavanniyar, Kathirgamavanniyar, Kailayavanniyar, Pandaravanniyar, etc.*

Names of Vannichees :- *Pallakunachchy, Punnianachchy, Kathirainachchy, Vallinachchy, Nallanachchy, Chinnanachchy, Kunchynachchy, Ponnarvannichchy etc.*

In the Sinhalese chronicles the name Vanni had a greater application by the inclusion of the Nuwara-kalawiya District also known as Maha Vanni. In later times the name Vanniya was adopted as a title of distinction for any Sinhalese, or Veddah, or Mukkuwa chieftain. When Vellalas assumed the chieftainship of a principality, they were known as Vanniyanar. Nachchiyar was a respectful form of address for Vanni princesses. This is a corruption of Nayakiyar the feminine gender of Nayakanar.

Whatever may be the interpretation of the advent of the Vanniyas and the colonists that settled in the Vanni districts, it is a fact that the northern districts known as Uttaradesa in the Sinhalese chronicles were inhabited by the Vanniyas from a very early date.

## ANURADHAPURA KINGS AND THE VANNIYAS

We hear very little of the Vanniyas in the Ceylon chronicles. Here are a few references. According to the Vaipava Malai in the Saka year 515 (A. C. 593) on intimation that the Vanniyas were trying to assume the title of kingship the king (Agbo I) led an expedition against them and reduced them to their true position namely that of Athikaris. The Mahavamsa makes no mention of this incident nor about the revenue of the districts that went to the maintenance of the Koneswaram temple.

On the death of Agbo VII (766-772) Mahinda who was at Matota hastened to the capital. Concerning this period the Mahavamsa says, "Then in Uttaradesa the chiefs of the districts together with the dwellers in the provinces seized the land by force and refused tribute to the king."\* Mahinda crushed the rebellion, but soon after the northern chiefs occupied

\* *Mahavamsa Chap. 48. V. 83.*

the city of Anuradhapura, but again also they were driven out. Here the reference is more probably to the Vanniya chieftains and their people.

In Saka year 717, (A. C. 795) we hear of Ugra Singan, a chief from the continental coast, in possession of one half of Lanka, while another ruled South Ceylon. Then Ugra Singan travelled through the Vanni and received tributes from the seven Vanniyas.\*

When Kassapa usurped the throne of his brother Mugalan and murdered his father king Dhatusena about A. C. 479, Mugalan escaped to India and returned with a Tamil force in the eighteenth year of Kassapa's reign. A great battle was fought which ended in the defeat and suicide of his brother about A. C. 496. Even after this incident the kings of Ceylon who followed Mugalan relied upon the support of the Tamils for retaining their kingship. Even a strong monarch like Parakrama Bahu I had to depend on Tamil soldiers to maintain his sovereignty. The Tamils in these centuries were more or less the virtual rulers of the country, and as the Sinhalese kings could not find peace in Anuradhapura, Agbo IV (658-674) was the first monarch to shift his royal residence to Polonnaruwa. Later it was Sena I (831-851) who made Polonnaruwa the capital of his kingdom. From that time onwards Anuradhapura gradually sinks into oblivion, though we hear about it occasionally in the succeeding centuries.

In the sixteenth year of the reign of Parakrama Bahu I (1153-1186), the people of Matota (Western Vanni) rose in revolt and they were soon put down.

The removal of the capital to Polonnaruwa had destroyed the prosperity of Anuradhapura. Parakrama Bahu I (1153-1186) tried to restore the capital by repairing the sacred edifices. The tupas were covered with trees and he tried to restore the buildings.\*\* His renovation was only a temporary measure for after him the forests reclaimed the city. All these indicate that Anuradhapura was for long in the hands of non-Buddhists.

\* *Yalpana Vaipava Malai*

\*\* *Mahavamsa Chap. 74. V. 6-14.*

## CHAPTER IV

### NUWARAKALAWIYA OR MAHA VANNI

As the Vanniyas played a great role in the history of the Maha Vanni we shall here examine briefly its history. During the period of one king Sena an important event took place in the Nuwarakalawiya District. There came a large band of Tamil Vanniyas (known as Vanniwaru Sinhalese) and settled in the district.\* Probably these Vanniyas were a part of the Pandyan army of Sri Vallabha (815-862) who invaded Ceylon during the reign of Sena I (831-851) and sacked the capital Anuradhapura. On acknowledging Pandyan suzerainty, Sena was allowed to rule. Perhaps the descendants of these Vanniyas became the powerful chieftains of this district. They later played an important role as officers of state in the Kandyan kingdom, and in the subsequent history of the Island.

#### TAMIL COLONIZATION OF THE MAHA VANNI

Of the colonization of the Maha Vanni by the Tamils the Vaiya Padal states that the family of Suriya Singa Vanniya together with Tamil Vellalas settled in the Nuwarakalawiya District.

According to Simon Casie Chetty the Villi Durai, a tribe that is found in the Maha Vanni came as followers of the Vanniyas from the Indian coasts. Probably they are the 'Villiyar' of the Palai region of the Tamil Nadu.

\* *J. R. A. S. Vol. III No. 9. Page 149.*

Another Tamil tribe are the Wagays who are mostly found in the Anuradhapura and the Kurunegala districts. They do not very much encourage intermarriage with the Sinhalese and claim themselves as Agambadi Vellalas.

The Oddes (Ottar)\* another Tamil tribe are found in the North-Central and North-Western provinces. They are chiefly employed in the quarrying of stones, in the sinking of wells and in the construction of tank bunds.

In the reign of King Bhuvaneka Bahu of Kotte a number of princes from Malabar District who were defeated by their neighbours the Maravars came with valuable presents to the king of Ceylon and sought refuge here. They were given the country near Pom-parippoo and the Vanni where they settled down.\*\*

In the latter part of the eighteenth century a large number of Tamils from the Jaffna Peninsula especially from the villages of Alaveddy, Udupidy, and Navaly went out as peaceful colonists and settled in the Mullaitivu and in the Kilakkumulai North districts. Many emigrants from Kachchai went to the Nuwarakalawiya District.\*\*\*

In 1676 as a consequence of the new land toambo to relieve the poor people of the burdens and rapacity of the headmen, there was such an uproar that most of the headmen from Tenmarachchi and Vadamarachchi went over to Kayila Vanni of the Nuwarakalawiya District and made settlements there.\*\*\*\*

\* *Census Report 1911.*

\*\* *J. R. A. S. Vol. XXX No. 80. Page 321.*

\*\*\* *Yalpana Vaipava Kammuthy Page 184.*

\*\*\*\* *J. R. A. S. Vol. XXVII No. 72. Page 76.*

The Demala Hatta Pattu which was entirely inhabited by Tamils was a part of the North-Central Province until 1845, when it was included in the newly created North-Western Province.

In the Tamankaduwa Pattuwa each Pattuwa is almost entirely inhabited by one race. In the Sinhalese Pattuwa there are Sinhalese, in the Megoda Pattuwa Muslims and in the Egoda Pattuwa Tamils.

In this connection it should be mentioned that there were marriages between the members of the Vanniya chieftain families of the Nuwarakalawiya District and those of the Vanniya chieftains of the Northern Province. Whenever a bride was taken from the North, apart from her movables and immovables as dowry, a retinue of forty or fifty families went as her servants to her new district. These Tamil families took employment under their new chieftains, and their descendants later became Sinhalese.\*

Besides these, individual Tamil settlers from time to time have made settlements in Maha Vanni for the cultivation of crops. Many Tamils of the above mentioned categories have to-day lost their identity.

Robert Knox, who was a prisoner of Rajasingha II for eighteen years, while describing his escape from the Kandyan kingdom in 1679 states that from Kala Wewa he came to Anuradhapura where he found the inhabitants were Tamil-speaking. When he spoke to them in Sinhalese, his speech was not understood by them. Later he was taken to the Governor of the district who too did not understand his language and spoke to him through an interpreter. This was the Anuradhapura of the seventeenth century. He further says that Anuradhapura was the northern limit of the Kandyan kingdom.

\* *Yalpana Vaipava Kammuthy P. 187.*



As regards the population of the North-Central Province we shall see what the R. A. S. Journal 1959 says: "Throughout the Sinhalese districts of the north-western and north-central regions the great majority of the ancient Sinhalese place names has been lost, and it has been suggested that the present population is not descended from the original Sinhalese inhabitants. These were regions subject to invasion and conquest and with the downfall of the Sinhalese kingdom and the ruin of the irrigation system followed soon afterwards very probably, by the advent of the malaria heavy migrations of population into the hills and the wet zone would have taken place." From all the above facts we see that a large percentage of the population of the North-Central Province was originally Tamil.

The first reference to the Vanni found in the Mahavamsa is in its reference to Vijaya Bahu III (1232-1236) as "belonging to the line of Sri Sangha Bodhi, a man of splendid courage who after he had through fear of the foe (Kalinga Magha) withdrawn to diverse inaccessible forests and had long dwelt there, attained the dignity of a king of the Vanni."\* This king ruled from Dambadeniya.

Then later we hear of the Maha Vanni during the period of Parakrama Bahu II (1236-1271). One day the monarch summoned his son Vijaya Bahu IV and ordered him thus: "The Ratnavali Cetiya destroyed by alien foes thou shalt restore and adorn it with a golden point."\*\* This order seems to have been made after the Tamil war (1236-1244), when Kalinga Magha had retreated from Polonnaruwa to Uttaradesa. It appears that Parakrama Bahu II in the above war was not able to drive the Tamils beyond Anuradhapura. For we are told that Karikattumulai South of the

\* Mahavamsa Chap. 81. V. 10, 11.

\*\* Mahavamsa Chap. 87 V. 66.

Vavuniya District was under Tamil domination in the reign of Parakrama Bahu II.\* Vijaya Bahu went to Anuradhapura and cleared the holy places by cutting down huge forests that had grown on them. He recalled the scattered population and re-peopled the city and gave it in charge of the Vanniya princes. The descendants of these chieftains perhaps became later the custodians of the bo-tree. During the early period of British rule there were continuous disputes with regard to this custodianship among the Vanniya chieftains of Anuradhapura.

After the victory of Arya Chakravarti of Jaffna at Yapahu in 1278 to the year 1581 except for a short period of eighteen years between 1450-1468 the Nuwarakalawiya District was under the Tamil rulers of the North.\*\* When Rajasinha I (1581-1593) defeated the Kandyan king his territories together with some Vanni districts were annexed to the kingdom of Sitawaka. After Vijaya Bahu IV (1271-1273) visited Anuradhapura no king of Ceylon ever seems to have visited it, until king Kirti Sri (1747-82) who went there to pay his respects and veneration to the sacred edifices.

In 1803 when there was constant friction between the Kandyan kingdom and the British, the Kandyans attacked all the British maritime territory from Hambantota to Mullaitivu. The Dissawa of Nuwarakalawiya together with Pandara Vanniyan and the people of Vanni attacked the fort at Mullaitivu. Lieutenant Driberg who was in command abandoned it and went by sea to Jaffna. Soon a British force from Trincomalee hastened to Mullaitivu and recaptured the fortress.\*\*\*

\* J. R. A. S. 1959. Page 87.

\*\* Manual of the N. C. P Page 37.

\*\*\* Manual of the N. C. P. Page 48.

Later in 1810 the Vanni Unneche the hereditary Governor under the Kandyan king tried to oppress the Nuwarakalawiya people by enforcing the Rajakariya system. Many of the Sinhalese inhabitants fled to the Tamil Vanni abandoning their native villages.\* The descendants of these people are the present Sinhalese inhabitants of the Vavuniya District.

When in 1817 the Kandyan disaffected chiefs rose in revolt against the British, the Vanniya chiefs of Nuwarakalawiya also joined the revolt. The Nuwarawewa Vanni Unneche is said to have sent messengers to a Tamil dewale at Arippu and to have brought a 'pandaram' whom he presented as one of the members of the royal family. Once when Madugala one of the disaffected chiefs arrived, the new king hastily descended from the elevated seat—an involuntary show of respect. The 'pandaram' was accordingly dismissed as unworthy of a kingship.\*\*

Towards the end of 1818 the rebellion had collapsed and the leaders got dispersed and sought concealment. Pilime Taluwe, Madugala and Keppitipola took refuge in Nuwarakalawiya. Madugala and Keppitipola were captured and beheaded. Ehelepola remained in Colombo for some time, and was later sent to Mauritius.

Two ancient divisions of Nuwarakalawiya frequently referred in Sannas and in old deeds were Kayila Pattuwa and Kilakku Mulai (Eastern District).\*\*\* Constant changes and overlordship of Maha Vanni between Tamils and Sinhalese account for the names of places in the North-Central Province being of Sinhalese and Tamil origin in the most haphazard fashion.

\* *Manual of the N. C. P. Page 49.*

\*\* *Manual of the N. C. P. Page 50.*

\*\*\* *Manual of the N. C. P. Page 62.*

The two classes from which headmen were selected in Nuwarakalawiya in early British period were Vannihuru and the other called Badderalas (Vellalas). The officers who served under the assistant superintendent of lands in the Anuradhapura District, and who enjoyed the status of Vel Vidhanes were styled Kathi Kanganies.

In this connection it is interesting to note the report of the Historical Manuscripts Commission of 1951. It reveals that the Tamils of the Kurunegala District in the 17th and 18th centuries wrote their notarial deeds in Tamil. It only indicates what fundamental civic rights a minority community enjoyed under native princes.

Here is an extract from a deed of transfer after an auction sale. The wording of the deed of sale is in metric Tamil phrases. After mentioning of the crying out of the vendor and the response of the purchaser the document signifies the consent of the parties thus :-

எதிர்மொழி மொழிந்து மறுமொழி பகர்ந்து விட்போம்  
என்று விற்பதற்கு யிசைந்து கொள்வோம் என்று கொள்  
வதற்கு வதற்கு விசையற விற்று பொருளற பற்றி எம்மி  
விசைந்து எதிர் மொழி மொழிந்து தம்மில் இருவரும்  
தான் சம்மதித்து விற்பதற்கு இசைந்து கொள்வ  
தற்கு வந்து.

Then after mentioning the name of the land its limit and its price, all that belongs to the land is indicated as : Jungles with their honey and the pools with their fish including water-holes and depressions (தேன் படு காடு மீன் படு பள்ளம் குண்டு குழி உட்பட) and again including fruit-trees and flower-trees (காய் மரம் பூமரம் பலா மரம் உட்பட).

Finally the continued possession of the land by the buyer is expressed as follows : To possess and enjoy as long as the hills and the Kavery, grass and earth and the Moon last. (கல்லும் காவேரியும் புல்லும் பூமி சந்திரன் உள்ளளவும் ஆண்டு அனுபவிக்க). The witnesses sign I also know, I also know.

With regard to the Vanniyas of the Nuwarakalawiya District, it should be stated that from the time of the fall of Anuradhapura to the present day they have played an important role as officers of state not only in their own districts, but also in the general administration of the Kandyan kingdom, and have influenced the history of the Island in no small measure\*.

\* *Manual of the N. C. P. Page 92.*

## CHAPTER V

## VANNIYAS—(Contd.)

## VANNIYAS AND THE JAFFNA KINGS

When Varothenya Singai Aryan (1302-1325) was away in India, the Vanniya chieftains planned a revolt. They also appealed to the Sinhalese king for help, but when there was no response the agitation proved abortive. Then when Singai Aryan returned to the Island he held an inquiry and pardoned those rebels.

Again in the time of Virothaya Singai Aryan (1371 - 1380) the Sinhalese subjects in his kingdom were frequently urged by the Vanniya chieftains to revolt. Knowing these the king subdued the Vanniyas and punished the rebels. Then he raised the Vanniya chieftain of Omantai, in consideration of his loyalty, to the position of the first chieftain of the Vanni districts.

About 1450 Sapumal Kumaraya of Kotte took a large force and subdued the Vanniyas. After reducing them to the position of vassals, he then turned his attention to Arya Chakravarti of Jaffna. Advancing along the west coast road, he conquered the northern kingdom and assumed its kingship as Bhuvaneka Bahu.

The Vanniya chieftains of Trincomalee were for some time under the kingdom of Jaffna, and some time under the overlordship of the kings of Kandy. In 1551 the chieftain of Trincomalee died leaving behind a minor son of eight years. Sangily Segarajasekaran put forward his claim and annexed his principality. The prince left his territories and escaped with his mother and relatives to India. There with the help of the Christians they sought the aid of the Portuguese. A mixed force of Portuguese and Indians

landed at Trincomalee, but Segarajasekaran compelled them to retire. The prince later became a Christian and took the name of Alfonso. It was once the plan of the Portuguese to overthrow Sangily Segarajasekaran from the throne of Jaffna, and to make this prince king of Jaffna.

## VANNIYAS AND FOREIGN RULERS

When the Portuguese took Jaffna in 1621, they nominally became the masters of the Vanni. The policy of the Portuguese with the Vanniya chiefs was one of non-intervention. They left them unmolested in their secluded jungles provided they paid their annual tribute of elephants. To prevent raids of the peninsula by the Vanniyas the Portuguese built two forts near Elephant Pass.

Later when the Dutch became masters of the Island they too decided to continue the policy of the Portuguese in their relationship with the chieftains, till a suitable opportunity should present itself for their complete subjugation. It was also the policy of the Dutch to desist from taking strong measures against the Vanniya chiefs, lest they should seek alliance with the king of Kandy. Hence the Dutch were very cautious in their dealings with the Vanniyas.

It was Thomas Van Rhee (1692 - 1697), the Dutch Governor, who wrote: "The Vanni rulers were standing with one foot on the company's land and the other on the king's territory." They were a constant source of irritation to the Dutch as they had been to the Portuguese. The chiefs would not often pay their annual tribute of elephants and their land rents, and some even would not appear at the annual durbar when they were summoned by governors. This was especially the case with Kayla Vanniya of Pannankamam who failed to appear before the Dutch Governor for twelve consecutive years.

The Dutch authorities ignored his insubordination for they knew full well his power and influence. They feared that he might seize the port of Arippu which was of importance for the protection of the pearl fishery. When this fearless wealthy chief died in 1678, the Vanniyas appointed a successor without reference to the Dutch authorities. The Dag register of that time notes: "Affairs in Jaffna as regards the Vanniyas had improved, for the obstinate Kayla Vanniya was dead and his grand nephew Kaysianar had succeeded him and sworn allegiance to the company."

The Dutch authorities in order to have a control over the Vanni chiefs made a rule in 1690 that one of the Vanniyas should always remain at the fort at Jaffna as hostage, each taking his turn for three months. The term of detention was afterwards changed to one month. The company gave a native retinue consisting of one Arachchy and a few Lascoreens who served more as spies than as a guard of honour. Later the Government had to discontinue this system as the native princes could not be disciplined.

In 1714 two Vanniya chiefs carried on smuggling through the eastern coasts with some Indian merchants. This information was passed to the Dutch authorities by Don Antony Kulasegara. Fearing the consequences of their action, the two Vanniyas appealed to Narendra Sinha, King of Kandy, for protection and assistance against the company. As the king at that time was in cordial relations with the Dutch, he arrested the two Vanniyas and forwarded them with their letters to the authorities in Colombo. A display of force was shown in their territories and the properties of the two Vanniyas were confiscated.

Moyart in his memoir says that another haughty chief of Panankamam named Nichchinga Senadirayan died in 1765, and was succeeded by his minor daughter

Maria Kadiri Nachchi or Katirai Nachchan I. She was the sole ruler in Panankamam and was on friendly relations with the Dutch. The Dutch always spoke of her in commendatory terms.

During the time of Don Philip Nallamappanan the most formidable of all the chiefs, his son Don Gaspar Nitchinga Senadirayan was Master of the Hunt at Punakari. The Dutch did not get all the elephants and subsequently they appointed their own officer (Adigar) to urge the Vanniyas to get the work done for them.

When the Dutch Government in the later part of the eighteenth century found the Vanni chiefs getting more and more independent and defiant in their attitude towards the company, they decided to enforce their authority by putting the Vanni districts under their direct rule. With this end in view, the Dutch authorities removed Don Gaspar Nallamappanan from the district of Panankamam, and his nieces Nalla Nachchi and Chinna Nachchi were directed to surrender their divisions to lieutenant Nagel.

All these affairs infuriated the people and they rose in revolt. They killed some petty officers, and drove away the company's wood-cutters. Then they barricaded the roads. In the meantime the two ladies escaped to Cheddikulam. The villagers hotly attacked Nagel and his company, but they held their own till reinforcements reached them. At last when both sides got exhausted an amnesty was proclaimed. Chinna Nachchi went to Mullaitivu and took her residence there. Nalla Nachchi and her husband were pardoned, and they later lived at Vannarponnai until their death.

Of this revolt Tennet says: "In 1782 these continued conflicts were brought to an apparent issue by a combined and vigorous effort of the Dutch who



routed the forces of the Vanniyas at all points and reduced the country to at least the outward semblance of submission. It is characteristic of the spirit of the people that the Dutch met nowhere a more determined resistance than from one of the native princesses the Vannichee Marie Sembatte, whom they were obliged to carry away prisoner, and to detain in captivity in the fort of Colombo.\*\*

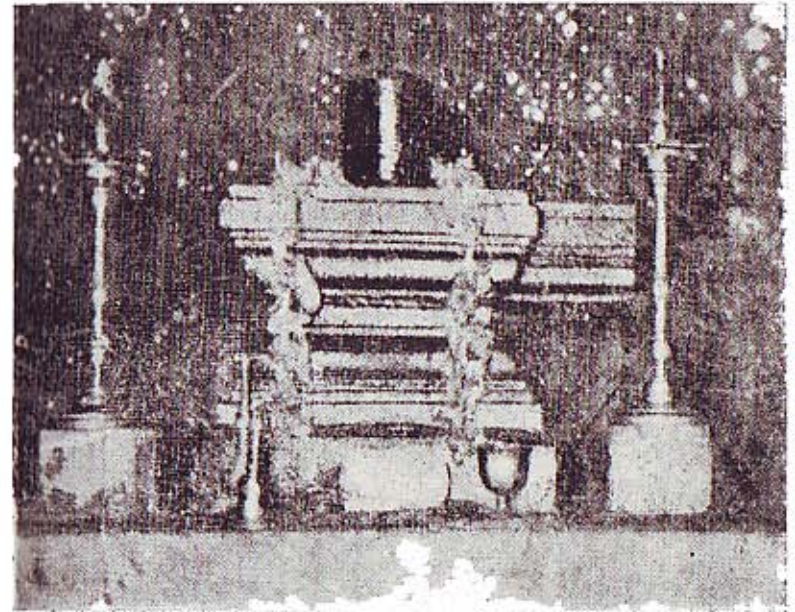
When Lieutenant Nagel took up the administration of the Vanni, he was allowed to have a small company of soldiers for police purposes. Annually he paid a tribute of rice to the company. On the whole his administration was very successful. He established a Landraad to decide land cases and disputes, and also introduced the Jaffna Tesawalamai to the Vanni districts.

About 1790 Nallamappana Vanniyan of Panankamam\*\* was arrested for treason on the allegations made indirectly by a Sinhalese Vanniya. He was taken to Colombo and imposed a fine of 12000 Rix dollars. There he was retained in prison till the payment of the fine. All his lands were seized and leased to Periya Thamotherampillai of Vannarponnai\*\*\*. During the three years of his lease he amassed a good deal of wealth. Nalla Nachchan, the wife of this celebrated Vanniya came to Jaffna and took her residence at Vannarponnai, after taking a solemn vow that she would neither bathe

\* *Poodan Arachchy was instrumental in entrapping this Vannichee. He employed all the arts of persuasion to remove her in a palanquin. There are many traditions in Jaffna connected with this arrest.*

\*\* *One of the descendants of this chief was Banda Vairamuttu, who was a leading gentleman of Vali West in the later part of the 19th century. He lived at Araly and died in 1901. — Yalpana Charithiram A. M.*

\*\*\* *This wealthy aristocrat lived in a palacial residence in front of the Pandikoddai Pillaiyar temple at Vannarponnai.*



The excavated Sivalingam from Uruthirapuram, seven miles west to Kilinochchi. Unlike other Sivalingams it is rectangular probably of the early Chola period.



nor take more than one meal a day, until her husband was released from prison. Vaithilinga Chettiyar a friend of the family, and one who commanded great influence with the Government soon proceeded to Colombo, and secured his release after paying the fine.

Nallamappana Vanniyan never forgot the benign services of his friend. When Vaithilinga Chettiyar built the present Sivan temple at Vannarponnai, he supplied almost all the palmyra timber required for the construction of this great temple. In addition to these gifts he bequeathed Tharangkandal, a village in the Punakari District, and the profits thereof for the daily services of the temple.\*

Lastly a few words should be said of Pandara Vanniyan of Mullaitivu. He was a courageous and independent prince. On one occasion the Dutch authorities forced him to supply them with dye-roots, which request he flatly refused to carry out.\*\* On another occasion Pandara Vanniyan joined the Sinhalese forces in their attack on Mullaitivu. As a result of these encounters he had to lose his principality soon after. In 1785, a sister of this defiant prince was married to Kumarasinga Vanniya, the eldest son of Nuwara Vanniya of the Nuwarakalawiya District.\*\*\*

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\* *Mr. A. Moothoothamby Pillai—Yalpana Sarithiram. P. 110.*

\*\* *do do do P. 102.*

\*\*\* *do Yalpana Kammuthy. P. 187.*

## CHAPTER VI

### POPULATION OF THE VANNI

The present inhabitants of the Vanni do not all belong to the same stock as that of the ancient Vanniyas. For in the past few centuries many migrations of people to Vanni have taken place, and much new blood has been added. All the tribes that are found in the Jaffna Peninsula are found in the Vanni. In 1661 the population of these districts was 18,000.

The Vanniyas are an industrious, agricultural race. They are hospitable and obliging, but are extremely conservative. To the Vanni villager, his plot of arable land is his kingdom and he cannot be got to work for hire. He considers it beneath his dignity. If there are quarrels among them they do not take a serious turn. Earring is worn by both the sexes. They do not wear gold jewellery for fear of being stolen.

They live in straw-thatched houses and whenever one dies they abandon the house and build a new one. Their chief occupation is farming and in spare time they go out hunting. It is the practice among them to buy things on credit and pay by paddy.

Milk and milk products form one of their chief articles of diet. They have honey in abundance and relish venison and pork. They consume toddy.

In ancient times a bride's dower might be a buffalo and sometimes a small piece of land. Their marriages were celebrated in the presence of the barber and the washerman, and the bridegroom presented a 'thali' and a piece of cloth called 'kurai' to the bride.

### Population of the Vanni

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Their customs are similar to those of the people of Jaffna. Thesawamalai which was then in vogue in Jaffna was introduced into the Vanni during Dutch times.

Though Christianity has made inroads in the coastal areas, Saivism continues to be the dominant religion of these districts.

### VANNI CHIEFTAINS

The Vanni chiefs always conducted themselves with royal dignity. John Christopher Wolf, Principal Secretary of State, Jaffna makes reference to the Vanniyas as "Princes under the Dutch." In 1697 during Henrick Zwaarde Croon's tenure of office some of the Vanniyas were received in Colombo with great show of ceremony and respect. When summoning them to their presence, the Governors had always to send their tom-tom beaters to meet and accompany them with music. On one occasion they refused to attend the durbar held in Jaffna by Gerrit de Heere, Governor of Ceylon, because his tom-tom beaters had not gone to meet and accompany them as usual. The last representative and descendant of the Vanni chiefs was an old lady who resided at Vannarponnai, and there is a tradition that the then British Governor of Ceylon when he visited Jaffna in 1848 paid her a courtsey call.

During the early part of the Dutch period there were seven Vanniyas, though in later times their numbers were reduced by the Dutch.

The Vanniya of Panankamam was the chief among Vanniyas. The Vanniya of Tambalagamam was the managing director of Koneswaram temple, before the capture of Trincomalee by the Portuguese. The Yalpana Vaipava Malai says that the Vanniya chieftains of the north gave a portion of their revenue to the Koneswaram temple.

During the Dutch period some Vanni rulers pretended to be Christians in order to please their Dutch Masters, but in reality they were not so. The members of the Vanniya ruling families had intermarriages with the staunch Vellala Saivite families of Araly, Moolai, Tholpuram, Chulipuram, Navaly, Chankanai, Kopay, Irupalai, Tellipallai, Maravanpulo, Udupidy and Koilakandy. Many of the descendants of such unions became great officers of state during the Dutch and early British period.\*

#### ADMINISTRATION OF THE VANNI

The Vanniyas had few laws. There was an establishment of Adigars, Kanganis, Udaiyar, Ayutanti, Panikamar, Talaiyar, Pattangutties and Podia Kammakarar.

Kangany was a military officer who used to collect soldiers in case of war.

Ayuaniti was assistant to the Kangany. They were also keeping the register in Dutch times.

Mottakar — master of the hunt.

Panikamar — elephant-catchers.

Talaiyar — tax-collectors and headmen among potters and Shanars.

Patangutties — tax-collectors and headmen among the Mukkuwas, Kareyar and Thimilar.

Adappanar — a similar officer like the Patangutties among the Paravars of Mannar.

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*Saravanamuttu Mudaliyar was a Chief Magistrate of Valigamam and was the founder of the Tholpuram Amman temple. He was a great philanthropist and made an endowment of lands to the celebrated temple at Chitamparam.*

*His illustrious brother Shanmuganayaga Mudaliyar was the head of the land registry at the Jaffna Kachcheri.*

*Punyanachchy a distinguished lady of the same family was the founder of the Trust known as the Chitamparam Punyanachchy Madam Trust. She bequeathed all her rich estates to this "madam".*

The chiefs seemed to have exercised the rights of capital punishment. Fees were paid for the use of the white cloth ceiling and for securing divorce.

#### ECONOMY OF THE VANNI DURING THE DUTCH PERIOD.

Dutch Governors made repeated attempts to improve the economy of the Vanni. It was their general policy to make the territories under them self-sufficient in food. With this end in view, they made repeated attempts to repair tanks and channels but the coolies often deserted them on account of the Malaria scourge.

Western Vanni was the most unhealthy spot in Ceylon. Here very often infectious diseases took a large toll of the population. Parangi was another scourge of the Vanni. Bad water was another cause of diseases in these districts. All these factors hampered the economic development of the Vanni and caused the depopulation of these districts.

Cotton was introduced into the Mannar District and later the people took to weaving as a cottage industry.

The rich plains of Karachi had been the centre of many abortive plans. Very often the Government blamed the owners for their tardiness and neglect.

During the North-East Monsoon the people cultivated rice, and during the dry summer they raised kurakkan and gingili. They made the best use of the cattle and the buffalo.

About 10,000 people annually migrated from Jaffna to the Vanni districts during harvest time. In this manner the Jaffna labourers helped the economy of the Vanni.

Government helped the people in Punakari to sink wells and encouraged colonization of the Vanni. Between the years 1750—1800 a large number of families went out from Jaffna as settlers to the Vanni districts.

The sale of elephants and the export of ivory was one of the important sources of revenue to the Government. Deer-skins, timber, ropes and gingili were other things that were exported. Excess paddy was mostly sold in the Jaffna Peninsula.

## CHAPTER VII

### *DEITIES OF THE VANNI*

Throughout the interior of Ceylon Aiyandar (Tamil) or Aiyana (Sinh.) is considered a forest god who guards travellers in the forests. He presides over tanks which are supposed to be under his special protection. He is worshipped by the villagers on all occasions in drought, in sickness and in all agricultural operations. When a tank fills and is about to spill the elders in Sinhalese villages sometimes assemble and perform "Mutti Mangalaya" or the Pot Ceremony to God Aiyana.

The worship of this god seems to have been introduced from South India at a very early period. His proper name is "Kai-yanar" so called because he sprung from the hand of Vishnu. He is known as Ayyappan in Travancore.\* His emblem is the shepherd's crook. His seat is in the Western Ghats.

Temples dedicated to this deity are in many parts of the Vanni. One famous Aiyandar temple as mentioned earlier was between Mannar and Jaffna. The horse and the elephant are his vehicles. At Madampe where there is an ancient Aiyandar temple his steed is very prominent.

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*Dr. J. T. Cornelius : "Are Dravidians Dynastic Egyptians."*





At Isurumuniya. No warrior but god Aiyandar, the forest god of the North-Central Province and Vanni. Reveals early Pallava influence in architecture.

One of the first Buddhist shrines founded in Anuradhapura is the Isurumuniya rock temple. Before it was converted to a vihara it was a devale.\* Carved in the rock is the relief of a dignified personage seated in a royal pose. Some call this figure a warrior, but in all details the figure resembles the god Aiyandar. For in all images of this deity the figure is seated with the elbow resting on a raised knee.\*\* Another peculiarity in the images of Aiyandar is the absence of the "kiridam" the conical headwear that usually adorns the images of the higher gods of the Hindu pantheon. In this representation of the god, the deity has a horse, the shepherd's crook, in his hand and below are the figures of elephants who probably are his vehicles. In a panel below is represented presumably his wife who carries a flower in her left hand. All these pointers clearly show that the figure is not a representation of a warrior but the image of Aiyandar.

The serpent-cult which was prevalent among the people of Malabar later became popular in Ceylon. The early Nagas built temples for its worship. Ruins of temples to the five-headed cobra are found at Matavuvaittakulam and at Kurunturkulam. The annual festival to Nagathambiran at Putur attracts many thousands of people from all parts of the Vanni.

The cult of Pattini or Kannakai the guardian goddess of Ceylon, is more popular in the Island than in the country of its origin, India. She is the protector of the people from epidemics like small-pox, chicken-pox, etc. Though Pattini is a Hindu goddess from its inception, she is to-day venerated by the Sinhalese Buddhists with great pomp and ceremony.

\* *J. R. A. S. Vol. XXVIII Page 24.*

\*\* "*Virra-asanam*" – the sitting posture of a warrior.

To the ancient shrine of Vattappalai dedicated to this goddess many thousands of pilgrims congregate for the annual festival from all parts of the Tamil-speaking provinces. Another shrine to Kannakai is at Kunchu Parantan which is also a popular one.

Tradition ascribes that a temple for Kannakai was at Madhu before the coming of the Portuguese. The popularity of the "Lady of the Holy Rosary" among Hindus may possibly be attributed to the age long veneration of Kannakai in that locality, for one mother cult has given place to another. This tradition is endorsed by Mr. Ievers in his "Manual of the North-Central Province," as follows, "St. Mary's Church at Madhu is considered by the Buddhists and a great many of the Tamil pilgrims who resort there as the Temple of Pattini-Amma (Amman Kovil)"

Allied to the worship of Kannakai the veneration of the seven virgins (Nachchimar) was also prevalent in the Vanni districts. The cult first originated in South India,\* and later found its way to the Tamil areas of Ceylon. The ruins of temples to these deities are found at Mannakandal between Odduchuddan and Putukudiruppu.

Lord Ganesha is the popular deity of the agricultural Vellalas, for he is the guardian of their crops. Ruins of temples dedicated to this God are found in almost all parts of the Vanni districts. He is venerated by the Sinhalese Buddhists who worship him more for success in the material world than for spiritual light. Until very recently there was an image of Lord Ganesha in front of the Bo-tree at Anuradhapura to which it has been the practice of Sinhalese Buddhists to pay their homage with the offerings of

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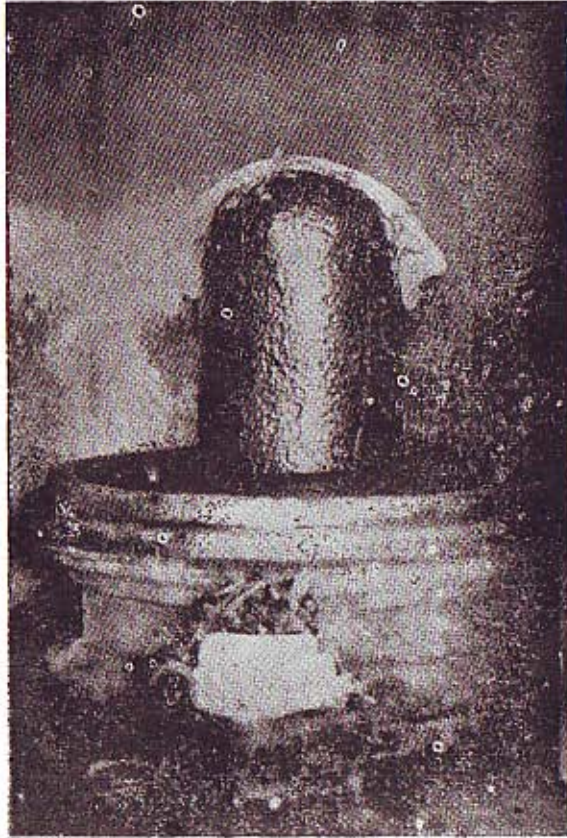
\* *Vide, Tamil Culture Vol. VII. No. 4, 1958. Page 380.*



milk rice as the Tamil Hindus still do. He is supposed to be the heavenly guardian of the Bo-tree and of Anuradhapura.

Ancient shrines dedicated to the worship of Siva are Tirukketiswaram near Mannar, Thanthonryeswaram at Odduchuddan and Asuvagiri\* near Kudiramalai. According to a South Indian inscription another temple to Siva seems to have been at Matota by the name of Thiruvirameswara Udaiya Mahadevan Kovil.\*\* Other important shrines to Lord Siva though not very ancient are Uruthirapuram, Koil Kadu near Vavunikulam and Kachchilamadu. As mentioned earlier there was one temple at Cheddikulam founded in the third century A.C.

Even in ancient Anuradhapura Siva worship was prevalent. When Devanampiya Tissa marked the boundaries of Anuradhapura he had to pass a shrine belonging to a Brahman. In 1893 the archaeological survey of Anuradhapura revealed the presence of temples to Lord Siva in that ancient city.\*\*\* A coterie of Hindu shrines and appurtenant buildings were discovered between Jetawanarama and Wijayarama monastery. In two Siva Devales the granite lingams were unearthed "in situ." Major Forbes after visiting Anuradhapura in 1828 wrote: "The only place clear of jungle was in front of the Maha Vihara (great temple) where a shady tree occupied the centre of a square and a stone pillar, fourteen feet high, stood beside the figure of a bull cut in



The excavated Sivalingam  
from Tirukketiswaram Temple site.

\* This seems to be the temple referred to by J. Haffner, a Dutchman, in his book of Travels. Reference is made to Asuvagiri in Dakshana Kallaya Manmiam. Hugh Neville (Taprobanian 7) refers to pilgrims from India visiting this shrine until recent times.

\*\* South Indian Inscriptions Vol. IV No. 1414.

\*\*\* Journal, Royal Asiatic Society Vol. XIII No. 45 Page 121

granite revolving on a point."\* All these seem to be the remains of a shrine dedicated to Siva. The stone pillar and the bull seems to be the flag-staff that is usually present in Saivite temples beside the "nandhi" (vehicle).

Besides these deities, the Vanniyas have been worshipping Vairavar, Vishnu and Kali. A great shrine to Kali was in Anuradhapura.\*\*

Thus it will be seen how from very early times the culture of South India influenced Ceylon and her people. The history of the Ceylon Tamils would be incomplete without the thrilling history of the Vanniyas who for more than a thousand years were the rulers of the Vanni districts and the custodians of all that are great in the Tamils and in their national culture.

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*The Dakshna Kailaya Manniam though not a critical work mentions that a temple to Siva was constructed when the city of Anuradhapura was founded, and that the name of the deity was Anurasapurasar and of the goddess Vijayambikai. It was the custom in ancient days for Hindu kings to construct a temple to Lord Siva while founding a new city, and in Anuradhapura Pandukabhaya who was himself a Hindu probably would have followed the custom of his day.*

*Archaeological Survey Vol. I 1924. P. 5.*

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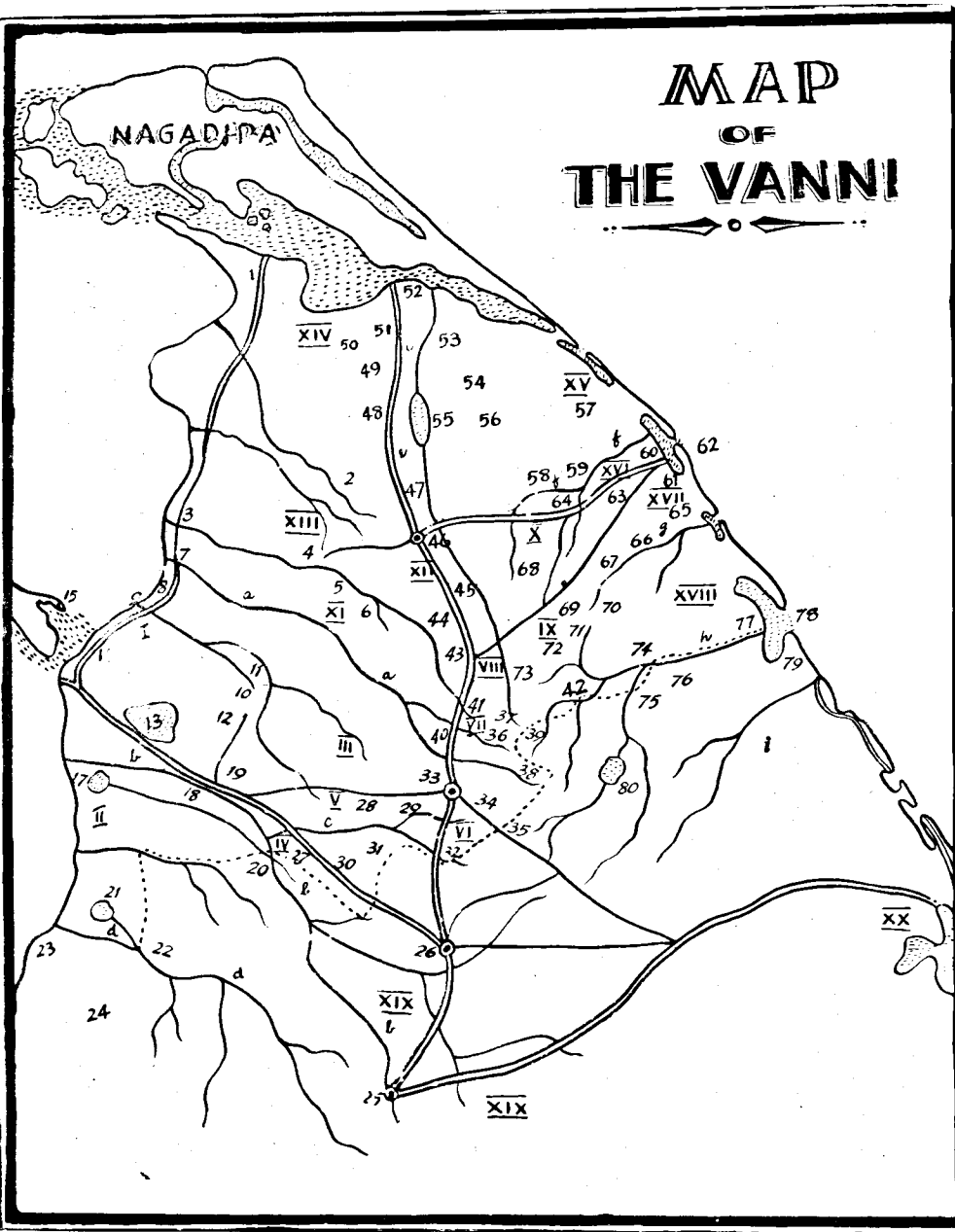
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# MAP OF THE VANNI



## Place Names of the Vanni

### Districts

- I Perunkali Pattu
- II Musali Pattu
- III Metkumulai
- IV Chinnachcheddikulam
- V Naducheddikulam
- VI Kilakkumulai South
- VII do North
- VIII Melpattu South
- IX do East
- X do North
- XI Panankamam
- XII Udaiyur
- XIII Tunukkai
- XIV Karachi
- XV Putukkudiyiruppu
- XVI Mulliyavalai
- XVII Karikkaddumulai
- XVIII do [North South
- XIX Maha Vanni or Nu-  
[warakalawiya Dist.
- XX Trincomalee District

### Rivers

- a. Parangi Aru
- b. Aruvi Aru or Malawattu  
[Oya
- c. Kal Aru
- d. Moderagama Aru or  
[Morkaman Aru
- e. Kanagarayan Aru
- f. Per Aru

- g. Nay Aru
- h. Ma Oya
- i. Yan Oya
- 1. Punakari
- 2. Akkarainkulam
- 3. Vellankulam
- 4. Tunukkai
- 5. Vavunikulam
- 6. Panankamam
- 7. Iluppaikkadavai
- 8. Komputukki
- 9. Vidattaltivu
- 10. Venaiyankulam
- 11. Palampiddi
- 12. Madhu
- 13. Kaddukarai (Giant's  
Tank)
- 14. Matota (Mahatittha)
- 15. Mannar
- 16. Arippu
- 17. Akkatimurippu
- 18. Tekkam
- 19. Puliyadi Irakam
- 20. do Tekkam
- 21. Periyakattukulam
- 22. Pilmadu Tekkam
- 23. Kudiramalai
- 24. Pomparippu (The  
Golden Plain)
- 25. Anuradhapura
- 26. Madawachchiya
- 27. Cheddikulam
- 28. Puvarasankulam
- 29. Kurinchakulam Tek-  
[kam

- |                       |                      |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 30. Olukkulam         | 56. Kokkavil         |
| 31. Pavatkulam        | 57. Putukkudiyiruppu |
| 32. Iratperiyakulam   | 58. Kachchilamadu    |
| 33. Vavuniya          | 59. Mannakandal      |
| 34. Madukanda         | 60. Tanniyuttu       |
| 35. Maniyarkulam      | 61. Vattappalai      |
| 36. Mamadu            | 62. Mullaitivu       |
| 37. Karunkalikulam    | 63. Mulliyavalai     |
| 38. Mahakachchatkodai | 64. Odduchuddan      |
| 39. Mara Iluppai      | 65. Kurunturmalai    |
| 40. Omantai           | 66. Tannirmurippu    |
| 41. Irapaikkulam      | 67. Otiyamalai       |
| 42. Ruwanmaduwa       | 68. Pandarakulam     |
| 43. Puliyankulam      | 69. Nedunkeni        |
| 44. Putur             | 70. Periyakulam      |
| 45. Kanagarayankulam  | 71. Chinnapuvarasan  |
| 46. Mankulam          | 72. Ariyamadu        |
| 47. Murikandi         | 73. Nochchikkulam    |
| 48. Iranaimadu        | 47. Kumpakannamalai  |
| 49. Kilinochchi       | 75. Vannadi Palam    |
| 50. Kunchuparantan    | 76. Olumadukulam     |
| 51. Parantan          | 77. Tennamaravadi    |
| 52. Elephant Pass     | 78. Kokkilai         |
| 53. Murasumoddai      | 79. Pulmoddai        |
| 54. Vaddakkachchi     | 80. Padawiya Tank    |
| 55. Iranaimadu Tank   | 81. Trincomalee      |

## THE WRITER ON HIS WRITINGS

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I take this opportunity of answering some of the criticisms that have been made while reviewing my book "Tamils and Ceylon" in one section of the local press.

I do not claim perfectness for the book. Those who attempt to criticize a publication of this nature should bear in mind that the sources of material for such a production are extensive and complex. Another important point to remember is that the book deals with the history of the Tamils up to the end of the Jaffna Dynasty (1621). Hence, the history of those Tamils who came to Ceylon after this period would be left out— Colombo Chetties.

If there was less presentation of any Tamil region, it is because the sources of its history before 1621 were not available. Further a critic of the book should keep in mind that it was written on the conclusions arrived at by earlier historians as the late Sir Paul E. Pieris, Mudaliyar C. Rasanayagam, Sir P. Arunachalam, Rev. Father S. Gnanapiragasar, Dr. S. C. Paul, Mr. Simon Casie Chetty, Mr. C. Britto, and Mr. H. W. Codrington. In this connection the old Jaffna Historical Association that functioned from 1919 for about twenty years had made many valuable contributions to the history of the Tamils in Ceylon. I, therefore, did not care to prove the veracity of historical facts on which conclusions were already arrived at, but proceeded on their findings and developed those grounds uncovered by them. Whenever I differed from the conclusions of my predecessors I have readily pointed them out.

It was my aim to present a readable volume which an average English educated Ceylonese might easily understand. It is not always possible for a writer to surmise the various questions that would arise in the minds of his readers and write accordingly. The mistakes of our ancestors for not having left behind good records of their doings should not be put on my shoulders. The reviewer cannot expect me to solve all the knotty problems in Ceylon history in an outline history of the Tamils.

The writer of the review blames me for taking Buddha's visits to Ceylon as historical facts. They may be legends, but the Dipavamsa of the fourth century A. C. mentions them. Buddhaghosa's commentary on the Vinaya-Pitaka of the fifth century records them in its historical section. The Mahavamsa of the early sixth century gives a detailed account of those visits. Dutugemunu erected a monument on the spot where Buddha is said to have arrived in his first visit. Manimekalai a Sangam work says about them. Furthermore Buddha's visit to the Island is the oldest historical tradition of the Sinhalese. Considering these facts one cannot blame me for mentioning it for what it is worth.

The reviewer criticizes me for not giving sufficient reasons when I differed from Rev. Father Gnanapiragasar's conclusion that the word "Yalpanam" was derived from Sinhalese "Yapane." As Mudaliyar C. Rasanayagam had already disproved these findings in his book "Yalpana Sarithiram" on pages 253, 254, and 255 I did not care to give many reasons but gave one or two.

Another criticism is that the book was mainly written for the Jaffna Tamils. It is far from it. The book was written for all those who cared to read it. Out of the 14 chapters in the book only six chapters

deal with the history of Jaffna, all the others speak of Tamils in general. The reviewer unfortunately sees motives where none existed.

He also blames me for taking Vaipava Malai as an authoritative source book. There are some defects in the book, but at the same time it contains many facts which seem to have some historical data in the same way as there are legends and history mixed up in the Mahavamsa.

We shall take one instance from the Vaipava Malai. "In the Saka era 515 (A. C. 593) king Agbo subdued the Vanniyas." This is not mentioned in the Mahavamsa. Surely the author of the Vaipava Malai, Mailvagana Pulavar in the 18th century would not have known the Mahavamsa and the regnal years of the Sinhalese kings. The Chronicle was in Pali and was secretly preserved by some Buddhist monks in their monasteries. The Sinhalese laymen too did not know about the Chronicle. It was only in the middle of the last century that it became known to the general public. We learn from the Mahavamsa that Agbo I ruled from A. C. 568-601. The agreement of the two chronicles with regard to the time of Agbo only shows that the Jaffna chronicle based its narration on some independent source which is not available to us now.

Similarly the Vaipava Malai says that during the reign of king Pandu in the Saka era 358 (A. C. 436) Kulakodan, a Chola prince repaired to Trincomalee and restored the Koneswaram temple and built the Kantalai tank. According to the Mahavamsa the Pandu kings of Anuradhapura ruled from A. C. 433-460.

Besides, the Jaffna chronicle records that Prince Vijaya gave shelter in his territories to many persecuted Magadhese Buddhists who were wandering from country



to country without a homeland. This fact is not mentioned in any of the Sinhalese chronicles, but according to Burmese tradition, Buddhism was known to Ceylon long before the time of Mahinda.

In like manner many statements of the Vaipava Malai can be cited to show that the author had some independent sources to rely on for his narrative. They may be the lost books like the *Rasa Murai* and the *Pararajasekaran Ula*.

With regard to the taking of the capital Yapahu by one Arya Chakravarti I am criticized for stating that there was no South Indian invasion of Ceylon during the time of Kulasekhara I (1268-1308), although the reviewer points out that there was a South Indian epigraphic record No. 110 of 1903 stating otherwise.

The epigraphy runs as follows viz :— “ On the second gopura of Jeganatha Swamy Temple of Tirupullam to the left of the entrance a Pandyan inscription of the 37th year of Maravarman alias Tiribhuvana Chakravarti Kulasekhara deva who conquered every country in Tamil alphabet, which is mutilated and which records an order of a certain Ariya Chakravarti.”

In this epigraphy there is no mention of an invasion of Ceylon. Unfortunately it is a mutilated record, otherwise it would throw some light. The 37th year of Kulasekhara corresponds to  $(1268+37)=A. C. 1305$ . But the court astrologer of Parakrama Bahu III states in his *Sarajoti Malai* that Parakrama Bahu III of Dambadeniya came to the throne in 1303. But according to the *Mahavamsa* the king, after obtaining the Tooth Relic from the Pandyan king and placing it at Pulathinagara in the former Relic Temple, began his rule.

When a ruling monarch becomes sickly, the heir sometimes assumes the kingship to carry out state affairs. This may be the case with Kulasekhara and his 37th year may probably be 1303 and not 1305, and this tallies with Parakrama Bahu's accession.

The inscription probably refers to an undertaking by Kulasekhara that the Sinhalese king Parakrama Bahu would pay the annual tribute to Ariya Chakravarti, king of Jaffna.

Those who assert that Arya Chakravarti, was the Prime Minister of Kulasekhara Pandya and he sacked Yapahu should explain the statement of Ibn Batuta in 1344 that Ariya Chakravarti (Jaffna) was the Sultan of Ceylon and the Sinhalese king was the Sultan of Conacar. Furthermore they must explain the statement of the Rajavaliya that Alagakkonara fortified Kotte and hanged the tax-collectors of Arya Chakravarti as it was not fitting to pay tribute to the Jaffna kings.

## ERRATA

- |        |                 |                |                    |
|--------|-----------------|----------------|--------------------|
| P. 9.  | L. 5.           | for unde       | read under         |
| P. 19. | L. 26.          | for 679        | read 1679          |
| P. 27. | L. 12.          | for later      | read latter        |
| P. 28. | Footnote L. 6.  | for later      | read latter        |
| P. 33. | last Para L. 4. | for Vann       | read Vanni         |
| P. 40. | L. 4.           | for Hollandess | read<br>Hollanders |