

Pauttamum Tamiḷum

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We learn from four Brāhmī inscriptions in Prakrit that Tamiḷar from Īlam embraced Pauttam already in the early Anurātapuram period, when Pauttam was not yet identified with cultural and "racial" characteristics of the Ciṅkala(va)r. The religious situation in the island was then completely different from the situation in Tamiḷakam in the precolonial period-and from the situation in Īlam today. There was no ethnonationalism based on the concept of race. The dominant religion in the island was not Caivam. It was Pauttam, Caivam, not Pauttam, was a minor religion. The dominant insular language was not Tamiḷ. Prakrit had developed into Eḷu, an early form of Ciṅkala, in about the 8-9th centuryAD.¹

Tamiḷ was a minor language. For Tamiḷar to be integrated, it was necessary to use Prakrit-Eḷu-Ciṅkala. They actually did use Prakrit in the early Anurātapuram period. There was no opinion that Tamiḷ speaking people in their capacity of speaking Tamiḷ as mother tongue, were disqualified to become Pauttar. Their integration was possible due to their becoming Pauttar, to their use of Prakrit, and to their recognition of territory dominated by the Prakrit speaking group. It would be anachronistic to project the concept of race into the pre-colonial period. Only during the later colonial period, the idea was generated that Tamiḷar per se are disqualified. Then Pauttam had been reserved as identity marker for the Ciṅkalavar as economic, linguistic and racial group.

¹ I use Eḷu here as a language stage in the development from Prakrit to Sinhala. I do not use it in the Purist sense, as Sinhala purified from Sanskrit and other foreign elements.

² G.Obeyesekere, *A Meditation on Conscience*, Occasional Papers I (Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 1988).

The precolonial evaluation of Tamiḷar by representatives of the dominant Prakrit speaking group can be highlighted by a famous passage, 25: 101-111, in the *Mahāvaiḷṣa*. The *Mahāvaiḷṣa* defined a true human as a person expressing the values of the *buddhasāsana*. It would of course be unhistorical to search in the *Mahāvaiḷṣa* for a concept of humanity that was defined in terms of universal values; it was defined in terms of specific and specified religious values.

When Gananath Obeyeskere in 1988² and I in 1986³ wrote about this passage in the *Mahāvaiḷṣa*, we tried to understand and relativise it "contextually". Today, I see this passage in a different light. I compare it not any more with similar religious

anthropologies in the Sanskrit *Śāstra* literature where we find the idea that *dharma* constitutes true humanity. Furthermore, I have no intention here to again confront this passage from the *Mahāvaiḷṣa* with the message of the Puttan, and with modern views about the universality of human rights. I think the adequate point of comparison is the excluding doctrine of modern Ciṅkala-Pautta ethnonationalism. Then, this passage in the *Mahāvaiḷṣa* comes into another light.

The passage 25:101-111 in the *Mahāvaiḷṣa* from the 5th century AD, conveyed two ideas. 1. Tamiḷar who were not belonging to the *buddhasāsana* were regarded as *micchādiḷḷi*, "wrong believers" and *dussilā*, "evil-doers," and *pasumā*, "like beasts". This is the rejecting side of this passage, but there

³ P Schalk, "Landets söner. Om nutida buddhistisk historietolkning och konflikten mellan singaleser och tamiler i Sri Lanka", *Häftet för Kritiska Studier*, 1, 19 (1986), pp.24-41. Also published in *Chaos* 4 (1985), 39-55.

⁴ This fourfold refuge is mentioned by the Anagārika Dharmapāla but was later taken up by Maḍiḷe Pañña sīha, by the Mahanāyika of the Amarapura Nikāya. Vide *Vīra Carita. Anāgarika Dharmapāla tumā*, Vol.1 (Nugegoda:Kurunāgala Taruṇa Bauddha Saṅgamaya, 1985), p.22. For a comment on this vide P Schalk, "Lejonet och tigern. Kampen med symboler i Sri Lanka", *Svensk Religionshistorisk Tidskrift* 2 (1986), pp.45-76, especially p.50.

⁵ P Schalk, "Kette ohne Anfang und Ende. Die Welt der Fundamentalisten in Sri Lanka ist hermetisch gegen Kritik versiegelt". *Der Überblick. Zeitschrift für ökumenische Begegnung und internationale Zusammenarbeit*. 33. Jahrgang. März 1997, pp.83-88 Id., "Twisted Cross: The Religious Nationalism of the German Christians". *Studia Theologica, Scandinavian Journal of Theology* 52, 1, (1998), pp.69-79.

was another, inviting side also. The passage implies 2. that Tamiḷar could become humans, even gradually, if they turned systematically towards the *buddhasāsana*. If they accepted the refuge formula, they could become half-humans, and if they accepted the precepts, they could become full humans.

This inviting opening for Tamiḷar to enter the path towards humanity has been closed by modern ethnonationalists. A window to their mental *gehäuse* (Karl Jaspers) of modern ethnonationalists or their "locked minds" (TN Madan), housing "the four jewels," country (*raṭa*), race (*jātiya*), religion (*āgama*), language (*bhāṣāva*), cannot be locked up.⁴ No dialogue is possible.⁵ The idea of Tamiḷ Pauttam appears in the light of ethnonationalism as an anomaly. I conclude that modern ethnonationalism has broken with the *vaṃsa* tradition according to which Tamiḷar also could become humans by taking over values of

the *buddhasāsana*. What today is commonly called a "*Mahāvāṃsa*-mind-set" by Western commentators without professional training in history and philology is not a *Mahāvāṃsa*-mind-set; it is a modern ethnonationalist mind-set that claims to be and anachronistically historicises itself to be the authentic *Mahāvāṃsa*-mind-set. These commentators make themselves-unconsciously-representatives of an ethnonationalist view of history according to which Ciṅkala ethnonationalism is the essence of the *vaṃsa* tradition.

We move at a time not only when the *Mahāvāṃsa* was compiled in the 5th century AD., but also at a time when this passage was transmitted from generation to generation, and also in other sources, for example in the *Saddharmālaṅkāraya* in Ciṅkala from the 13th century.⁶ There, no doubt is left, that Tamiḷar who did not belong to the *buddhasāsana* were regarded as cattle, dogs and mice,⁷ but also that

⁶ *Saddharmālaṅkāraya*, Makuḷuvē śrī Piyaṛātnabhidhāna (Kolam??ba:Ām Di Guṇasēna, 1971), p.550.

⁷ *Saddharmālaṅkāraya*, p.550

Tamiḷar can become humans, even gradually, if they enter the *buddhasāsana* step by step. We shall meet several examples of Tamiḷar whom have chosen for themselves that approach to humanity defined by the dominant group.

We have to consider also the canonical norm in the *Vinaya* about the languages in which the *dhamma* should be learned [and taught] by the monks. The *dhamma* should be learned by each in his own language in accordance with the famous saying ascribed to the Buddha in the *Vinaya-Piṭaka*, Cullavagga V.33..

anujjanāmi bhikkhave sakāya niruttīyā buddhavacanam pariyāpuṇituntī.

"I allow you, o monks, to learn the words of the Buddhas each in his own language".

True, Buddhaghosa from the 5th century had a special interpretation according to which this *buddhavacana* should be construed to refer to the language of the Buddha, which he

classified as Magadhī, which again he wrongly identified with the language of the canonical texts, with Pāli. This interpretation is, however, a re-interpretation of the buddhaword quoted above. The context makes it clear that each monk should learn the buddhaword in his own language. I imply that each monk also should teach in his own language.

Even, if we had to commit ourselves to Buddhaghosa's interpretation, Magadhī is not Cīṛkālā. Buddhaghosa chose Magadhī not because he wanted to "nationalise" or parachiolise Pauttam, but, on the contrary, because he wanted to internationalise Pauttam. He thought wrongly that Pāli was known in his world. He wanted to replace the insular parochiolised Parakrit in the commentaries with an "international" language Pāli. His action can be seen as taking the consequence of the missionary order of the Buddha in the *Vinaya*, MahāvaggaI.II, according to which the liberated monks should have in mind the welfare of the many, the happiness of the many. They should show

compassion with the [whole] world and have both humans' and gods' happiness in mind. So, there is no support in the work of Buddhaghosa for constructing a parochialised insular Pauttam. The concept of Ciṅkala Pauttam questions the spirit of his work and the work of the Puttan.

The history of the island shows that the island was a permanent target for migrations from many parts of India, not only from Tamiḷakam. Warriors from northern India, indicated by the projection of Vijaya, the alleged first king, were spillovers from internecine dynastic struggles, like also Tamiḷ chiefs having come from the Southern parts of India. These were either assimilated with the Prakrit-Eḷu-Ciṅkala speaking population, or with the Tamil speaking population. The pre-Pallava period is a profiled example of the former and the imperial Cōḷa period a profiled example of the latter.

I cannot see a deviation between Buddhaghosa's interpretation of the languages and the views of the position of Pauttam in the world of the compiler

of the *Mahāvāṅsa*. True, the latter had a special view about the island being selected for making the lamp of the *dhamma* shine to the world, but there is no view the Pauttam is the religion of one ethnic only, of the Ciṅkalavar.

True again, there are several documented physical persecutions and verbal outbursts against the Tamiḷar even in the pre-colonial insular history of the island. An examination of the *vāṅsa* tradition shows, however, that these negative attitudes and actions were directed against a special group of Tamiḷar. These were either on realistic grounds or by prejudice associated to anti-Pautta open or subversive activities against Pauttam. We saw above that they were characterised as *micchādiātṭhī*, "wrong believers" and *dussilā*, "evil-doers," who destroyed Pautta institutions. They were characterised as *pasumā*, "like beasts," but all these characteristics indicate anti-Pautta activities. We have to realise, however, that to be a Pautta means much more than to have a religious conviction. There was no such concept as "religion only." The *buddasāsana* was the

religion of the state. It was a royal state ideology. To be anti-Pautta implies therefore to become an enemy of the state. If I destroy a *stūpa*, rob the alms bowl, and smash the tooth relic, I also become an enemy of the state. Religious man and political man could not be separated in the *vaṃsa* tradition, which affected his evaluation of anti-Pautta activities. What I want to say is that it was easy to be classified as anti-Pautta. Every action against the state was potentially an anti-Pautta act. This idea is still living today among traditional and traditionalist militant, and even martial, Pautta groups.

Pre-colonial insular Pautta state formations co-operated regularly with Tamiḷar, but not with anti-Pautta Tamiḷar. It co-operated with the Pāntiyar, Portuguese, Dutch and British, but not with anti-Pautta, Pantiyar, Portuguese, Dutch and British. Numerous are the conflicts with the colonial powers due to an alleged anti-Pautta performance by them. The Pauttar, including Tamiḷ speaking Pauttar, felt selected for a privileged destiny to transmit the *dharma* as lamp

on the island from generation to generation. They had good reasons to feel the infiltration of Christianity as a threat to its mandate.

The other side of this coin was that Pautta state ideology as depicted in the *Mahāvāṃsa* became selective, exclusive and excluding inter-and intra-religiously during the precolonial period, but it was not anti-Tamiḷ. It was at times anti-Caiṇa, anti-Caiva, and even anti-Mahāyāna, even to the extent of physical persecution and elimination, when for example Mahāyāna was experienced as a threat to Pauttam in the island. This was, however, not always and everywhere the case. This "vaṃsic" sectarian ideology was not all pervading, especially not at royal courts. There we find regularly a suspension of sectarian Pautta considerations. We find pragmatic endurance of Pautta rulers, who were dependent of large groups of Tamiḷ Caiva mercenaries, settlers, and travelling merchants. They even bestowed royal patronage to Caiva sanctuaries. Caivar and Pauttar could co-exist under periods due to this pragmatic endurance that was practised

on "the other shore" also by the Cōḷar towards Pautta institutions. Ideological excluding sectarian commitment and pragmatic endurance are the two extremes between which rulers on both shores tried to position themselves. It goes without saying that this pragmatic endurance has nothing to do with recognition of human rights or with tolerance. It is nothing but pragmatism that could be replaced by sectarianism at any time.

The polarisation between Tamiḷar and non-Tamiḷar was conveyed still more colourfully in the continuing chronicle known as the *Cūḷavaṃsa*. In the *Cūḷavaṃsa*, which covers the "medieval" period, the idea of Damiḷa as being *in general* anti-Pautta, is also one of the essential themes. This idea is the precursor of the idea that Tamiḷar *in general* are alien to Pauttam. This idea can be re-enacted even by the present reader of history knowing details about the ruthless invasions by mainland Tamiḷar. This idea built on a concrete and repeated experience of war and conflict, was, however in the *Cūḷavaṃsa* abstracted from this experience and

made into a general view about the Tamiḷar being anti-Pautta. The inversion of this idea is that Pauttam in the island is transmitted by and for the Prakrit-Eḷu-Ciṅkala speaking people only, and indeed, scholars raised this inverted normative message to the level of acceptance in the twentieth century. It was projected anachronistically by them to the beginning of historical times. A work by Seneraṭ Paranavitana from as late as 1970 states that "Pauttam in Ceylon had, from the earliest times, become a Cinkala Pauttam, adapted to the conditions of life of the people in this Island" ⁸. Seneraṭ Paranavitāna was consistent on this question throughout his long career. Seneraṭ Paranavitāna's sinhalisation, parochialisation, and even communalisation of Pauttam were expressed in his denial of a Tamiḷ substratum in insular Brāhmi Prakrit inscriptions.

In addition to all that, Ciṅkalavar were not only regarded as a language group of people, but also as a race in the 20th century. Pauttam became the religion of a race, and invertedly and symmetrically, Caivam

was related to the Tamil race. Religion became a racial factor like the colour of the skin, that cannot be changed.

The 2000-year-old insular Prakrit inscriptions refer to Pauttar and to language groups, but not to representatives of races. They show also that there was no ideological connection between language and religion. Members from both language groups based on a lingua franca that was Prakrit shared Pauttam. To talk about a special Tamil Pauttam would therefore be an anachronism from the perspective of the inscriptions-as it would be to talk about Ciṅkala Pauttam. Pauttam was not yet communalised.

In the island, there is one indication that Tamil Pauttar were organised as a separated community of monks during the reign of King Udaya I (792-797,797-801). We learn from the *Cūḷavaṛṇsa* 49:24 that King Udaya's *mahesī* handed over the Jayasenapabbata (vihāra) to a *damiḷabhikkhusaṅgha*:

*kāretvā Jayasenam ca pabbatam
Dāmiḷass' adā
bhikkhusaṅghassa⁹*

"...and having caused the Jayasenapabbata (vihāra) to be built, she handed (it) over to the Tamil *bhikkhusaṅgha*..."

This text contradicts the present dominating norm embraced by both sides that Tamils cannot be Pauttar. It implies that at least some Tamil Pautta monks lived separately based on their speaking Tamil, probably because a specialisation was required to create a Tamil Pautta caṅkam that could do missionary work among Tamils.

During the late Aunrātapuram Period, which coincides with the period of the imperial Cōḷar and Pāṅṅiyar, there was a connection established between the two "m" and the administration of the Pautta state. The two "m" are Tamil merchants and mercenaries. They were involved into the building of institutions of the state, among them Pautta institutions. Tamil inscriptions bear witness to their involvement. They also

show that Tamiḷar were integrated into the ideology of the state that was Pauttam.

In the tenth century documents in Tamiḷ referred to a type of Pauttam that was closely connected with the imperial Cōḷar. This can rightly be called a special Tamiḷ Pauttam. It was transmitted in Tamiḷ and not in Prakrit-Eḷu Ciṅkala or Pāli. The Cōḷar ideologically and ritually forged it. Caiva terms and concepts were used to expound on Pauttam. Let us call it, "iḷaccōḷappauttam, from Īlam". This was a new start for Pauttam among Tamiḷar. There is no connection to earlier Prakrit Pauttam among Tamiḷar from this iḷaccōḷappauttam. Some insular Pautta institutions that had been conquered in the wars were made centres for the establishment of this iḷaccōḷappauttam, like the *rājarājaperumpaḷi* in the East. The question of whether there was a special Īla (ttu) Pautta ideom, proposed

originally in 1978 by Ālvāppiḷai Vēluppiḷai,¹⁰ is justified and can be answered in the affirmative.

Īlaccōḷappauttam was self-contained. It was specific in the sense that Tamiḷar in a former Ciṅkala-Pautta transmitted it in Tamiḷ surrounding that had been conquered by war. It was specific also in the sense that its terminology was akin to Caivam. With the disappearance of Īlaccōḷappauttam through annihilation or assimilation in the 14th-15th centuries, there is nothing more to say about Pauttam among Tamiḷar in Īlam in the pre-colonial period.

Today, it is not easy for Tamiḷar to be Pauttar. To revive Īlaccōḷappauttam would be an atavism. To make it into a special Īlappauttam would just be the inversion of Ciṅkala Pauttam. The door to Ciṅkala Pauttam is closed because Tamiḷar do not bring the necessary qualification, which is to

⁸ S Paranavitana, "Introduction", *IC* 1, pp.cii.

⁹ For a critical comment on the source see CvT., p.129, note 4 and R A L H Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough. Monasticism and Economic Interests in Early Medieval Sri Lanka* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1979), p.47. The best reading of the Pāli is Geiger's given above.

be of the Cinkala race. The door to traditional Pauttam in the vamsa tradition, Tamilar do not wish to pass through: they think that humanity is universal, not Pautta. So, the last possible door to pass through is to go

back to the teaching of the Puttan whose words in all languages were addressed not to animals and beasts, but to humans of all kinds independent of sex, age, race, class or caste.

¹⁰ Ā Vēluppi|ai, "Language variations in Sri Lanka Tamil Inscriptions", *Journal of Tamil Studies* (1978), p.80 [65-83].