THE TITLE *PARUMAKA* FOUND IN SRI LANKAN BRAHMI INSCRIPTIONS—A REAPPRAISAL

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In Sri Lanka the Brahmi inscriptions begin to appear around the middle of the third century B. C. at the dawn of the historical period of the Island. Most of these have been edited by Paranavitana. His first volume published in 1970 contains 1289 inscriptions collected from 269 sites and the present study is based on the inscriptions included in this volume. (Paranavitana S. 1970). The vast majority of these inscriptions are Pre-Christian in date and concentrated in the Dry Zone; they are spread over the northern, northwestern, eastern and southeastern parts of Sri Lanka, where there are natural caverns suited for inditing these inscriptions. It is of special significance that the title *Parumaka* not only occurs in more than a quarter of the above inscriptions but also these inscriptions are found at sites where the relics of both the Protohistoric and early historic periods have been discovered. The materials contained in them are therefore invaluable for analysing the social and cultural institutions of that period. (Fig. I)

The word *Parumaka* occurs in inscriptions as the title of persons who made donations of caves or were the kinsmen of such donors. Inscriptions which refer to this title have a wide distribution. They are generally brief and run to one or two lines only. Neverthless, the occurrence of this title in these records proves to be a valuable source of information for the study of the political, social and economic organisation in early Sri Lanka about which the Pali sources do not record detailed information. Although much has been written on the origin and the significance of this title, there is scope for a reappraisal in view of its occurrence in the Sangam literature which too is partly contemporaneous with the inscriptions as well as the recent archaeological findings which throw new light on the beginnings of civilization in the island. (Sitrampalam. S. K. 1980)

Various scholars have from time to time expressed different views on the origin of this word. Bell (1892) argued that it signified chief and was applied to kings. He also drew attention to the similarity of this word with Sanskrit *Pramukha* and Elu (Proto-Sinhalese) *Pamok* and the Tamil word *Perumakan* used to denote a prince or a noblemen. Goldschmidt however (1897) erroneously rendered this word as *Brahman*. According to Wickramasinghe (E.Z.1: 17,35) Sanskrit *Pramukha*, Pali *Pamukho*, and *Pamokkho*, Sinhalese *Pamok* are synonymous and mean "Chief" and phonetically too the Pali and the

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Sinhalese forms are derived from Sanskrit *Pramukha*. Paranavitana (1970: ixxiv), on the other hand, while endorsing the view of Wickramasinghe suggested that this word is the old Sinhalese form of Sanskrit *Pramukha* and Pali *Pamukho* or *Pamokkho* which is often used to denote the president of a guild or a corporation. He further argued that this title too was borne by the nobles who were the members of the gana confederacies at the time of the Buddha. Finally he concluded that this title may denote the same group of people as the Issara (which means lord or noble) who are often referred to in the literary sources. Many others endorse Paranavitana's view on this matter. (Nicholas.C.W. 1950; Ellawalla H. 1969) Before scrutinizing the arguments adduced in support of this view, it may however be noted that although this title occurs frequently in the Brahmi inscriptions, it is not found in Pali Chronicles such as *Dipavamsa* and the *Mahavamsa*.

Phonetically the derivation of the Sinhalese *Pamok* or Pali *Pamukho/ Pamokkho* from Sanskrit *Pramukha* is tenable. For, Sanskrit Pra becomes Pa or Para and not Paru in the Prakrit languages as in the case of Sanskrit Priya becoming piya and chandra becoming chanda. This only proves that the Sinhalese *Pamok* and the Pali *Pamukho/Pamokkho* are really derived from Sanskrit *Pramuka*. Hence it is misleading to derive *Parumaka* of the Brahmi inscriptions from Sanskrit *Pramukha*, especially when there is already a parallel derivation. Therefore it is incorrect to argue that the *Parumaka* of the Sri Lankan Brahmi inscriptions is derived from Sanskrit *Pramukha*.

Paranavitana also argued that the *Parumaka* cannot be derived from the Tamil word *Perumakan/Parumakan* (Ray: 1959). According to him this Tamil term is a later occurrence than Sanskrit *Pramukha*. But, this is incorrect for the following reasons. The antiquity of the term *Perumakan/Parumakan* is clearly vouchsafed by the earliest literary works in Tamil, namely the Sangam literature, where it occurs as a title meaning "Chief", a leader. Although it is believed that the Sangam literature was composed in the first three centuries of the Christian era, one cannot ignore the fact that they contain much older words as well. Hence it is incorrect to say that the Tamil *Parumakan/Perumakan* is a later occurrence than the Sanskrit *Pramukha*. Moreover the analysis of the words *Perumakan/Parumakan* shows that they are not derived from Sanskrit *Pramukha* because as in the case of the Sinhalese *Pamok* and Pali *Pamukho* and *Pamokkho* in Tamil too there is another parallel term *Piramukar* being derived from Sanskrit *Pramukha*. It may be asked why this term not occurring in the Brahmi records of Tamil Nadu In Tamil Nadu these records number less than hundred and were inscribed only in some important centres. The Prakritic influence too was limited only to these places and did not penetrate the rural areas about which the Sangam literature provides elaborate information. Moreover, unlike in Sri Lanka where

THE DISTRIBUTION PATTERN OF THE BRAHMI INSCRIPTIONS

WITH THE TITLE PARUMAKA

SRI LANKA

Scale
1 : 1,000,000

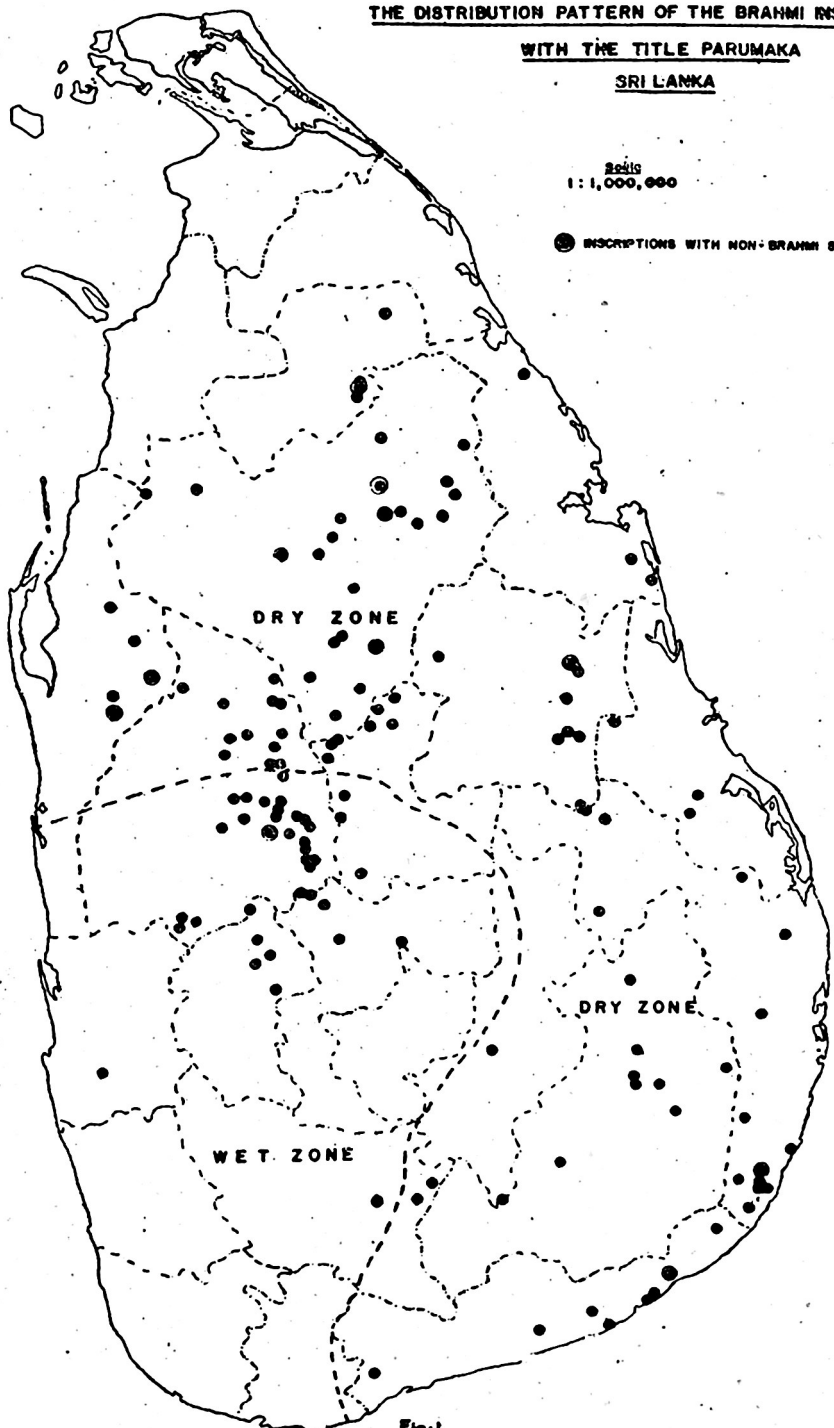⦿ INSCRIPTIONS WITH NON-BRAHMI SYMBOLS

DRY ZONE

DRY ZONE

WET ZONE

Fig:1

Parumakas played an active role in the spread of Buddhism, in Tamil Nadu they did not play such a role. Hence there was no need for these *Parumakas* to be mentioned in the Brahmi records of Tamil Nadu, where many of them are records of donations to Jaina monks.

The feminine form of *Parumaka* too occurs in eight instances in the Brahmi records of Sri Lanka. Paranavitana, however, has inadvertently read the suffix la of the Brahmi letter as Lu and read the word as *Parumakalu*. Readings of the similar form of the Brahmi records of Tamil Nadu by Mahadevan (1968) and Mahalingam (1967) convincingly show that this letter should be read as La and not as Lu as Paranavitana has interpreted. Even if we accept Paranavitana's reading, it is quite evident that there is no Lu ending for the feminine form in the Sinhalese Language. On the other hand Lu ending is quite common in the Dravidian languages. For instance Telugu, adds an ''U'' to all words ending in a consonant. Tamil colloquial does this to a certain extent. In view of the above arguments, it is not at all convincing to derive *Parumaka* of the Sri Lankan Brahmi inscriptions from Sanskrit *Pramukha*

On the other hand Mahalingam (1967) Kanagaratnam (1978) Veluppillai (1980) and the author (Sitrampalam, 1980) are of the view that the word is of Dravidian origin and the *Parumaka* of the Sri Lankan Brahmi inscriptions is derived from this form. The etymological derivation of this word clearly confirms this. It could be derived from two ways; either from Tamil prefix *Paru* or *Peru* with the addition of suffix *Maka* or *Makan*. In Tamil *Paru* means large or bulky as in *Paruppu, Paruman, Parumai* and *Pariya* and other such forms. If *Maka* is added to *Paru* then it becomes *Paru+maka=Parumaka*. (Burrow T and Emeneau S. M. 1960. 267 No. 3277) In Tamil as well as in other Dravidian languages such as Malayalam, Kannada, Telugu and Tulu, *Maka* meaning child or infant appears as the early form; *Makan* and *Makal* are its later derivations It is also significant to note that the feminine form of *Makan* is *Makal*, which again means daughter. In Malayalam *Makan* is the Masculine form and *Mon* is its variant. *Mol* again in Malayalam means daughter. In Kannada *Maga, Magaru, Magu* refer to son, while *Makal* to daughter, *Makkal* in genera denote children. (Burrow T and Emeneau.M.B. 1960. 304: No. 3768).

A second derivation of this word *Parumaka* is also possible with the addition of prefix *Peru* with suffix *Maka/Makan* .(Burrow;T and Emmaneau, M. ., 1960:291 No.3613) In Tamil *Peru, Perum, Per, Periya* are the variations of the form *Peru*, which means large, greater, elder and important. In Malayalan *Peru, Per, Periya* again means large or chief. In Kannada *Per*, and *Percu* again convey the same meanings. So is in Tulu. Telugu has *Peru* which again denotes the same. Thus for *Parumaka* two derivations are possible. One is *Paru+Maka* and the other is *Peru+Maka*.

The suffix *Man* which again is a variant of *Maka/Makan* of *Perumaka/Parumakan* reminds us of the chieftains ruling in Tamil Nadu such as *Atiyaman*. *Atiyaman* is in fact a derivation from *Atiyarmakan*. *Malaiyaman*, *Ceraman Tontaiman Velman* are other such cases. Thus, we see *Makan* shortening as *Man* as in the case of *Peruman, Netuman, Koman*. The connotation of *Makan* is son or an exalted person. As head of a resident clan group who achieved this rank designation the term *Makan* may imply descendant of the clan/lineage, ancestor, great descendant, scion and son (Seneviratne, S. 1984: 288). References in the Asokan inscriptions such as *Keralaputa, Satyaputa* show that *puta* is a prakrit equivalent of *Makan/Man*. In fact these are references to *Ceramans* and *Atiyamans* and conveys the meanings of a descendant, scion and so forth. The examination of the word *Perumakan* occurring in Sangam literature reveals that in almost all cases it refers to chief/clan chieftains.

It is also quite interesting to note that in the Sangam literature it is the form *Perumakan* that was used. The following are some of the references.

Valvil ilaiyar Perumakan	(Akam 152-15);
Vatukar Perumakan	(Akam 253-15);
Vayavar Perumakan	(Akam 69-17);
Kallallaiyar Perumakan	(Akam 83-9);
Akavunar Perumakan	(Akam 113 3);
Aviyar Perumakan Perunkalnatan Pekan	(Circu; 86);
Oviyar Perumakan	(Ciru 122);
Canror Perumakan	(Patir.58);
Malavar Perumakan Atiyaman Netuman Anci	(Narri 52-9);
Villor Perumakan Korran	(Narri 265-3);
Vicciyar Perumakan	(Kuru 328-5)
Panar Perumakan	(Aink 458-3);
Maravar Perumakan	(Puram 88-3);
Kuravar Perumakan	(Puram 157-7;13);
Puliyar Perumakan	(Puram 387-28)

The expression *Perumakan* also denoted king as is evident from the references in the post Sangam works such as *Cilappatikaram* (1-31; 10-47; 162; 13-63; 27-173; 215) and *Manimekalai* (14-71; 25-40; 62; 132). Probably taking the above meanings into account Tamil Lexican (1930 2881) gives three meanings for the term *Perumakan/Parumakan*. They are great men, chief and the king. *Peruman, Pemman*, a variant of this also meant a nobleman, great man, elder, king and God Siva. Again *Perumakkal* too meant great men. *Perumal* a title

used by the Cēra kings had the original meaning elder, great man, nobleman, king or God (Tamil lexicon. 1930. 2882); *koman* again denoted both king and God.

In the light of the evidences from the Sangam literature another strong possibility is that the title *Parumaka* is a Proto-Dravidian form having the same connotation as the Tamil form *Perumakan*. Such a view presupposes that an older form was retained for a longer period without any modification in the Island of Sri Lanka, while in Tamil Nadu it had undergone a process of phonetic change and development during the early historic period.

Interestingly the title *Parumaka* went out of use in Sri Lankan Brahmi inscriptions in the early part of the first century A. D. and was replaced by another title *Ma Parumaka* and this persisted up to the 10th century A. D. It is also interesting to note that the prefix 'ma' in Tamil means 'great' (Burrow, T and Emeneau. 1960 No. 3923). This form could even be a Proto-Dravidian form. Hence, it is no longer possible to say that ma' is a derivation from Sanskrit 'Maha' which again denotes the same. Thus the addition of prefix '*Ma*' to *Parumaka* again shows that the king himself was originally the *primus interpares* among *Parumakas*. The survival of this form '*Maparumaka*' in the Sinhalese language itself shows that it has preserved more likely Proto-Dravidian forms such as '*Ma*' and *Parumaka* in it. This again shows that in Ancient Sri Lanka as well as Tamil Nadu the political hierarchy developed along similar lines. The rare occurrence of "*Parumakal*" in both the Sangam literature and the Brahmi inscriptions of Sri Lanka again shows that the ladies in both countries did not take an active role in the then prevailing political and social system as did the *Parumakas / Parumakans / Perumakans.*

Paranavitana (1970 : ixxiv) on the contrary asserts that it is most likely that these *Parumakas* were the descendants of the Indo-Aryan pioneers who established village settlements in various parts of the Island during the early days of its colonization by immigrants from North India who played a vital role in introducing a settled agricultural life and the elements of Indo-Aryan culture, including the Sinhalese language into the Island. Finally he ended up by saying that 'the foundations of the economic, political, religious and cultural institutions which they laid stood firm for centuries and still remains so for those of the present and the future generations to build upon'. However, his arguments for North Indian origin of the *Parumakas* are not at all convincing for the following reasons. Firstly the etymological origin of this title shows that it has no semblance what so ever to Sanskrit *Pramukha* and hence indicates no North Indian origin. Secondly the close resemblance in the role of the *Parumakas* of Sri Lanka and the *Perumakans / Parumakans* of Tamil Nadu repudiates its North Indian origin. Finally there is neither literary (Mendis G. C. 1965 : 263—279) nor Archaeological (Sitrampalam S. K. 1980) nor Anthro-

pological evidences (Kirk R. L. 1976 : 91—99) to substantiate the story of the North Indian colonization of the Island. On the other hand the evidence for the early settlements in the Island in the form of Megalithic monuments shows that the early Civilization of both Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu not only originated from Megalithic culture but also developed along the same lines before the introduction of Buddhism to the Island around the 3rd century B. C. The proximity of the Megalithic sites to the caves bearing the Brahmi inscriptions as well as the donations of caves to the Buddhist clergy by the *Porumakas* again show that it was these *Parumakans/ Perumakans* who became prakritised with the introduction of Buddhism and its canonical language Pali. Subsequently this paved the way for their assimilation of North Indian cultural traditions. Scholars like Paranavitana failed to recognize this process and confused the later cultural infiltration with the original settlements. A thorough assimilation of the Buddhist cultural tradition by the progenitors of the present day Sinhala speakers need not imply and did not require a full scale Indo-Aryan migration from North India. (Goonetilleke. S. 1980, Sitrampalam, S. K. 1980).

Although one could dismiss the arguments of Paranavitana regarding the North Indian origin of *Parumakas*, yet his views on the role of *Parumakas* in the political, and the economic life of the island is quite convincing. Thus Nicholas (1950) is right as Paranavitana in saying that this title denoted a group of aristo-cracy immediately below royalty but high in social scale. According to him most of the high officials belonged to this group which formed a ruling class or a considerable portion of it. Similarly Perera (1951 : 78 − 96) expressed the view that they were the backbone of a stable local government at a time when the power of the kings was not sufficiently centralised in order to provide the protection and leadership the people needed. Although one could not get many more details of *Parumakas / Perumakans / Parumakans* in the Sangam literature and their role in the administrative, economic and the social set up of ancient Tamil Nadu as in the case of Sri Lanka, however, it may be argued that there too they would have played a similar role and the Sangam literary sources failed to take cognizance of this aspect in detail as in the case of the Sri Lankan Pali sources like *Dipavamsa* and the *Mahavamsa*.

Further more it may be asked as to whether this title was a hereditary one. It is true that in the majority of the Brahmi inscriptions that the *Parumakas* are introduced as the sons / daughters of a *Parumaka*, yet instances are not wanting to show that the father of a *Parumaka*, did not have this title prefix to his name. This again shows that even people who were not the sons of *Parumakas* were elevated to this position. Ironically enough we do not know the modus operandi of this process. However, Nicholas (1950) succintly concludes that "the title was not hereditory although it was borne by an upper class or nobility from whom were drawn the higher officials of the

kingdom. Men who were not the sons of *Parumakas* could be elevated to that rank". Therefore it is plausible to argue that the title *Parumaka* which appears to have been used on a hereditary basis seems to have lost its original character and subsequently was applied as a title of high rank.

The perusal of the body of the Brahmi inscriptions, in fact gives very many details of the role played by the persons bearing this title. They were ministers (*Amataha; mataha*) (Paranavitana, S. 1970. 161; 1202, 1205); Army commanders (*Senapati*) (Paranavitana, S. 1970. 620, 665, 724, 725) Keeper of the Treasury — *Badakarika* (Paranavitana, S. 1970. 3, 22, 59, 63, 64, 65, 66, 621, 1035, 1109) keepers of horses *Asa-Adeka* (Paranavitana, S. 1970. 355), Record keepers— *kanapedika* (Paranavitana, S. 1970. 1202), keepers of palanquins *Sivika - Adaka* (Paranavitana, S. 1970. 894, 895, 896a), city councillors — *Nagaragutiya* (Paranavitana,S.1970. 230), Officers in charge of city affairs—*Purakamata* (Paranavitana S. 1970. 1002) Revenue collectors of the king — *Ayaka* (Paranavitana. S. 1970. 471, 647, 648, 703, 761), Accountants - *Ganaka* (Paranavitana, S. 1970. 212, 213), Officers in charge of store houses of goods in seaports — *Panitabadakarika*, (Paranavitana, S. 1970. 1035) Superintendents of Royal kitchen-*Batakaraka* (Parana- vitana, S. 1970. 507), Cavalry officers — *Asaruya* (Paranavitana, S. 1970. 606), Superintendents of roads - *Pakara-Adeka* (Paranavitana, S. 1970. 69). Some of them even owned villages — *Gamabujhike* (Paranavitana, S. 1970. 837) and tanks — *Vapihamita* (Paranavitana, S 1970. 1132, 1151, 1153). Besides these, there are even references for the various types of avocations followed by these *Parumakas*, such as Traders — *Vanijha* (Paranavitana, S. 1970. 515), navigator—*Kaniyata* (Paranavitana S. 1970. 977a) ship captains — *Duta navika* (Paranavitana, S. 1970. 1054), teacher— *Achariya* (Paranavitana, S. 1970. 749) city architect — *Nagara Vadika* (Paranavitana, S. 1970. 1092), astrologer — *Nakatika* (Paranavitana, S. 1970. 941) copper smith — *Tabara* (Paranavitana, S. 1970. 319) and dancer — *Nata* (Paranavitana, S. 1970. 910).

Finally the inscriptional evidences do show that this title was borne by various castes and clans such as *Brahmins* (Paranavitna, S. 1970. 296, 838, 1045), *Nagas* (Paranavitana, S. 1970, 11, 54, 120, 196, 261, 263, 265, 343, 360, 507, 639, 660a, 677, 725, 736, 869, 934, 958, 979, 992, 1007, 1008, 1042, 1048, 1055) *Vels* (Parana- vitana, S. 1970. 121, 169, 271, 319, 383, 355, 403, 477, 529, 612, 647, 647a, 979), *Ays* (Paranavitana, S. 1070, 684, 703, Bata / Barata (Paranavitana, S. 1970, 321, 776, 896, 931). The fact that the *Parumakas* form the single largest group in making such cave donations itself shows the amount of power and influence wielded by them during this period. Although the majority of these *Parumakas* could have married amongst themselves, instances are not wanting to show that they even had matrimonial alliances with the ruling monarchs. While one of the *Parumakas* married the daughter of a king, in another instance, son of a king married the daughter of a *Parumaka* (Paranavitana, S. 1970. 984, 655).

Before we conclude, it becomes necessary to say something about the symbols occurring in the inscriptions bearing this title *Parumaka* (Fig. 2) Paranavitana, however, has named these as non-Brahmi symbols. (Paranavitana, S. 1970, xxvi). These symbols mostly occur either at the beginning or at the end of these inscriptions. But there are also instances where they occur in the middle of the inscriptions. The number of symbols found in these inscriptions too vary from one to five. Sometimes the same symbols are repeated twice in the same inscriptions and in some other cases with varying symbols. With regard to the details, symbol 1 actually consists of two symbols and in appearance looks like a Brahmi letter *ma* in an inverted position. This occurs in an inscription at Anaikutti kande (Paranavitana, S. 1970. 72) The symbol 10 and 21 are in fact similar to this symbol I. The only difference is that unlike the symbol 1 these appear single in the normal position of a Brahmi letter *ma* in the inscriptions at Ritigala and Tonigala (Paranavitana, S. 1970 269, 1051 - 55).

Fig: 2

NON - BRAHMI SYMBOLS
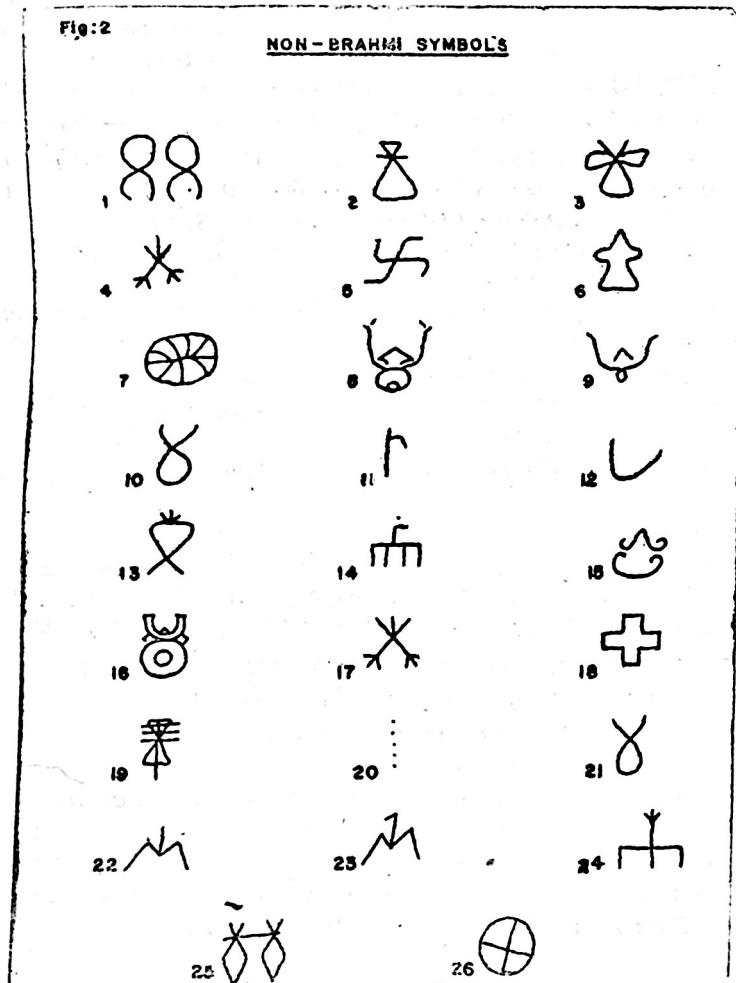
Although we are not quite certain about the meaning of this symbol it is sometimes taken to represent a fish in a stylised form. Neverthless this appears as a graffiti mark on the Megalithic pottery of both South India and Sri Lanka. Although several examples can be had from South India, in Sri Lanka it appears at Pomparippu, Kollankanatte, Anuradhapura, Kantarodai and Makewite (Sitrampalam, S. K. 1980. fig. 46—48). Symbol 2 occurs in the inscription at Vessagiri (Paranavitana, S. 1970 81). Some feel that it represents the king's seal (Abeyasinghe, A. 1965: 245 -266). Although it has no parallels in the Megalithic graffiti marks of Sri Lanka, however, it appears as a graffiti mark at T. Narasipur, and Salihundam (Seneviratne, S. 1984 298). Similar symbol without the middle stroke is also found at Alagarai (Seneviratne, S 1984. 298) Presently it is difficult to correlate symbol 3 which appears at Handagala (Paranavitana, S. 1970 - 120) with any known parallels. This again looks like a Brahmi letter *ma* with triangular like decorations outside at the crossing of the bars.

Symbols 4 and 17 are in fact one and the same and appear in the inscriptions at Nattukanda and Situlpavuva Paranavitana, S. 1970 166, 120). This too has many parallels in the South Indian Megalithic pottery but in Sri Lanka it appears as a graffiti symbol in the pottery at Anuradhapura. The only difference is that here it appears in an inverted position only (Deraniyagala, S. 1972. 124). Symbols 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 appear at Ritigila (Paranavitana, S. 1970 268) Symbol 5 is the usual popular svastika symbol which is taken to represent the sun. This not only appears as a graffiti symbol in the Megalithic pottery of both South India and Sri Lanka, but also it appears as one of the symbols in the early coins of both the countries.

Symbol 6 in appearance looks like a Mother Goddess It is no wonder that Proto-historic people who were agriculturists worshipped her. Symbol 7 is again a cakra with eight spokes. In fact Lord Vishu has the cakra as one of his symbols. It is sometimes taken to represent the sun or a Dharma cakra. This too occurs as a symbol in the early coins of South India and Sri Lanka.

Symbols 8 and 9 are in fact one and the same with slight variations. Could this be taken as a representation of a sulam (lance). Historically sulams have been represented with single, double and triple prongs Here also two prongs are quite clear and the mark in the middle of this symbol credits it with Trisula. Sulams appear as symbols in the early coins. Trisulam also appears as a symbol on the bronze seal discovered at Anaikkoddai, Sri Lanka (Sitrampalam, S. K. 1984). However, one could find a double sulam being represented as a graffiti mark on the pottery at Pomparippu in Sri Lanka, (Sitrampalam, S K. 1980) but in form it is different from the one that we are discussing Symbols 10, 11 and 12 again appear in the inscription at Ritigala (Paranavitana, S. 1970 269). We have already discussed the symbol 10. Symbol 11 looks like Ankusa and has parallel in the graffiti marks of the Sri Lankan Megalithic pottery from Pomparippu and

presenting nature / religion / clan or all combined? Finally the above discussion of the symbols however, shows that the authors of the Megalithic culture of Sri Lanka and the personages bearing the title *Parumaka* are one and the same. This in turn confirms the close relationship between South India and Sri Lanka in those early days. In the light of the above analysis one could convincingly say that the title ' *Parumaka* ' is a Dravidian form or more likely a Proto-Dravidian form.

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