

THE FORM 'DAMEDA' OF THE SRI LANKAN BRAHMI INSCRIPTIONS A HISTORICAL ASSESSMENT

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Sri Lanka maintained a close link with the subcontinent of India, particularly with Tamilakam, from very early times. Perhaps, the geographical proximity to Tamilakam is often reflected in the references such as 'opposite coast' 'further coast' found in the Sri Lankan Pali Chronicles¹. The marine resources of the region of Palk Straits and the other items of trade of these two regions along with the strategic position of Sri Lanka in the trans - oceanic trade made this region attractive from very early times², from Pre - history to Proto - history³ as well. It is said that Sri Lanka, because of its geographical situation, naturally established its first trade relations with the Indian sub continent. Proto - historic Sri Lanka was more closely linked with South India. In the excavations conducted at Gedige (Anuradhapura) Pomparippu, Kantarodai, and Ibbankatuwa, substantial quantities of potsherds were found which parallel the Iron Age and Early historic wares of South India, such as Megalithic Black and Redware and the Rouletted ware of the Arikamedu type.⁴

Sri Lanka's contact with Tamilakam during the early historic phase too is also clearly documented in the Sri Lankan sources, both literary and epigraphical. It is only in the above context, one has to analyse the form 'Damedā' occurring in the earliest Brahmi inscriptions of Sri

Lanka in five instances datable to 3rd / 2nd century BC. They are the two inscriptions from Periya Puliyankulam in the Vavuniya district,⁵ one in Seruvavila in the Trincomalee district⁶, one in Kuduvil in the Ampardai district⁷ and one in the ancient capital city of Anuradhapura,⁸ in the Anuradhapura district. When Paranavitana edited these inscriptions there were only four inscriptions mentioning 'Damedā', subsequently one was discovered at Seruvavila.

I

Paranavitana while referring to this form 'Damedā' made the following observations⁹.

"All these inscriptions are in the old Sinhalese language, the vast majority of the persons who had them indited must have been of the community known as Simhala'. But this name does not occur at all in them, for the good reason that as almost everyone in the land was a Sinhalese, it was not sufficiently distinctive to refer to a person by that designation. But when a donor named in an inscription belonged to an ethnic group other than Sinhalese, we find the ethnic name associated with his personal name. Thus we have four inscriptions in which the term 'Damedā' has been applied to persons named in them. It is

easy to recognise in 'Dameḍa,' the proto - type of 'Dameḷa' or 'Demaḷa', the designation in Sinhalese literature as well as in the current speech of the Tamil people who inhabit the extreme south of the Indian Peninsula. Its affinity to Pali 'Damiḷa' Skt. 'Dramiḍa' or Dravida and Tamil. 'Tamil', which are the names in the respective languages of the Tamil people, is also not difficult to recognise. As the Tamils made a bid to gain the mastery of the Island as early as the second century BC. and on many subsequent dates and have played a most important role in the Island's history, we should make some what more than a passing reference to these records in which we find the earliest reference to the Tamils in Ceylon. They are in fact the earliest documents in which the ethnic name Dameḍa (Skt) Dramiḍa, P. Damiḷa has been met with."

At this juncture as a corollary to Paranavitana's above statement it is necessary to add a few words. The advances made in the study of Sri Lankan Brahmi inscriptions recently however shows that Pali Prakrit introduced along with Buddhism and the North Indian Brahmi characters was only a language of Buddhism and not of the people as confused by Paranavitana.¹⁰ Palaeographical features of these inscriptions indicate the presence of an earlier form of Brahmi writing of Southern Brahmi, akin to Tamil Brahmi of the Tamil Nadu cave inscriptions before the introduction of Northern Brahmi.¹¹ Moreover the contents of these inscriptions do confirm the presence of

non - Aryan Dravidian languages such as Elu, Proto Sinhalese and Tamil.¹² It was through a long process of evolution and by way of bilingualism with the heavy mixture of Pali, the language of Buddhism that Sinhalese developed its characteristics around 7/8th century A.D. Furthermore, the perusal of both literary and the epigraphical records of this early period shows that neither 'Simhala' nor 'Dameḍa' at this time denoted an ethnic group. For, ethnicity was an European concept of the eighteenth century. The evidence from the Sri Lankan Pali sources namely Dipavamsa and Mahavamsa shows that Simhala (Skt) Sihala (Pali) originally denoted the land and only after many centuries did it come to be associated with a particular linguistic group.¹³

Incidentally it may be noted that while the form Damiḷa is used in the Pali Chronicles with reference to invasions from Tamilakam, Dameḍa occurs as adjective applied to traders from Tamilakam in the Brahmi Inscriptions. Sangam literature and Tolkapiyam, the earliest extant grammar of Tamil Language, refer to Tamil in the context of land, people of the land and language.¹⁴ While drawing a parallel from Simhala, it is very likely that Tamil / Draviḍa/ Damiḷa/ Dameḍa originally denoted the land, people of the land and only subsequently the Tamil language speakers. It is also argued that the form Tak - ir and Tamir gave way to Damiḷ, Damiḷa, Draviḍa as M/V alteration is a common phenomenon in Dravidian

phonology.¹⁵ Nevertheless the form Dravida / Dravidian is used today to denote a group of languages of which Tamil is one.

The occurrence of the form *Damiḷa* in the early Pali literature, the earliest morphological derivation from Tamir indicates the early use of this form in Sri Lanka, co-eval with that of *Tamilakam*. However a perusal of the literary and the epigraphical sources shows that *Damiḷa/Draviḍa* has been used as the name of the country and the people of the land in and around the Christian era. This is confirmed by the following references. In the Buddhist sources the Tamil country is referred to as *Damiḷa*, its language as *Damiḷa bhasa* and its script *Draviḍi lipi*.¹⁶ While the Tamil country is referred to as *Damila* in Jaina sources, its script is mentioned as *Damiḷi*.¹⁷ Ptolemy, the Greek writer refers to this region as *Damirike*, with its variation *Iymirike*.¹⁸ The *Haṭhigumpha* inscription of *Kharavela*, datable to second century B.C has a reference to the confederacy of the Tamil states as *Tamiradesasanghatam*.¹⁹ The epigraph found at the stupa in Andhrapradesh has a reference to *Damiḷa Kaṇha*, which means *Kaṇṇan* from *Thamilakam*.²⁰ The *Nagarjuna Konda* inscription of 3rd century A.D. refers to the Tamil country as *Damiḷa* along with the other countries such as *Kashmir*, *Gandhara*, *China*, *Tosali*, *Aparanta*, *Vanga*, *Vanavasi* and *Yona*. Interestingly in this very same epigraph *Srilanka* is referred to as *Sihala*, and *Tambapanni*.²¹

The form '*Dameḍa*' occurs in the Brahmi inscriptions datable to 3rd/ 2nd century as a reference to traders from

Tamilakam. As *Paranavitana* had correctly perceived, the non availability of the letter *la* in the North Indian Prakrit has necessitated the use of *ḍa* in place of *la* in these inscriptions. Also in place of *la*, *la* was used in them. Hence the form *Demela* and *Dameḍa* are synonymous. Moreover when *Paranavitana* edited these inscriptions, there were only four which had been discovered. Since then, with the addition of one to this list, it becomes five. These are found scattered in the Dry Zone region of Sri Lanka, the area of early civilization where natural caverns were available for inditing them. It is also worthy of note that except the last one, the other four inscriptions are in the present day Tamil – speaking region of Sri Lanka. The names as well as the contents of the inscriptions indicate that they were Buddhists. This is not unusual, because at this time too it was the mercantile class which patronised non – orthodox religions such as Buddhism and Jainism.²² They figure as patrons of these religions in India as well. Unlike Sri Lanka, in *Tamilakam* most of the donations were given to Jains most likely by the traders who professed Jainism.²³

II

Of the five inscriptions, the first two are from *Periyapuliyankulam*,²⁴ which is in the *Vavuniya* district. The first reads as follows '*Dameḍa Vanijha ga (pa) ti Visakaha line*'. This has been translated by *Paranavitana* as the 'cave of the householder *Visakha*, the Tamil merchant. The second one mentions *Gahapati Visakha* as having made the flight of steps to the cave. The actual wording of the inscription is '*Dameḍa –*

Vañijha gapati – Visakaha seṇi kame' and this has been rendered into English by Paranavitana as the work of the flight of steps of the house holder Visakha, the Tamil merchant. However, the context in which the form Gahapati occurs both in Indian and Sri Lankan Brahmi inscriptions shows that it didn't mean simply a house holder as Paranavitana concluded. Instead, in a larger perspective it meant a land owning wealthy aristocratic mercantile class.²⁵

Hence one cannot construe the word 'Visakha' simply as a trader from Tamilakam but a person of means and part of the great mercantile community which was powerful during this period.

The role of merchants in Ancient Sri Lanka is also confirmed by the occurrence of the form Vanijha / Vanica in the other Brahmi inscriptions as well.²⁶ Some of these references are as follows. Digavapi P(o) rana vanijana, Kudevul (In.No. 480), Amparai district, Parumaka Vanijha Tissa, Bambaragastalava (In.No. 515), Amparai district, Vanijha sumana, Mandagala (In.Nos. 585, 591), Hambantota district, Vanica Siva, Situlpavuwa: Dekundara – Vava (In.No.660) Hambantota district, and Vanica Tissa, Vilba Vihara (In.No.897) Kurunagala district. It seems that along with their normal commercial activities, they have also played the role of envoys, perhaps due to their wealthy position and thereby the recognition they gained at this time.

This is substantiated by the inscription found at Tonigala (In.No. 1054) in the Puttalam district.²⁷ This inscription reads as follows 'Parumaka – Abaya – Puta Parumuka Tisaduta Navikaha lene. Paranavitana has

translated this as 'the cave of the chief Tissa, the envoy mariner, son of the chief Abhaya (is given) to the sangha'. He further adds that this Parumaka functioned both as a royal envoy and ship captain and possibly he was himself the owner of the ship and undertook trading missions to countries outside Sri Lanka in the course of which he was commissioned by the king to establish friendly relations with the rulers of the lands he visited.²⁸

While commenting on the epithet *duta* 'Kanayata' in the inscription No 1055 at the same site (Tonigala) Paranavitana opines that this can be rendered into English as 'the daring mariner'. According to him this meant the controller of the rudder, which indicates that he himself navigated his ship.²⁹ It is also interesting to note that the term 'setthi' (guild lord) does figure as a member of the delegation sent by Devanampiya Tissa to Asoka.³⁰ Setthi who is also frequently referred to in the Chronicles and the literature seems to have been a person who had acquired wealth and social position by means of trade. Tamil literature has references to the title *etti* conferred on the merchants who have distinguished themselves.³¹ There is a strong similarity that the term 'etti' has with the term *Cetti/ Setthi*. Tantalisingly enough the Mankulam inscription of Tamil Nadu has a reference to 'Kaviti' a title borne by the head of the trading guild.³²

At the juncture it is relevant to take cognisance of the reference in the Mahavamsa. Accordingly the first Tamils to capture power at Anuradhapura were Sena and Guttaka who were the sons of a mariner trading

in horses (Assanavika)³³ Perhaps the presence of horse teeth and bones during the excavation at Anurdhapura from the early Proto – historic period (3A) onward confirms an early trade in to horses.³⁴ In fact some of the Parumakas also seemed to have owned horses. The chief Vel who had the title Parumaka is referred to in the Periyapuliyankulam inscription (No. 355) (where the Dameda Vanijha's are mentioned) as the superintendent of horses (Parumaka Asa – Adeha – Velu)³⁵

Interestingly, the Sangam literature mentions that the Vels who besides being agriculturists, delighted themselves in their horses.³⁶ In another instance Mahavamsa associates Velusumana (Vel + sumana) with horses from Sind,³⁷ Even Paratavar of Tamilakam seemed to have imported horses into South India.³⁸

Similarly Parumaka Tissa is mentioned as a cavalry officer in the Situlpavuva inscription (606) in South east Sri Lanka (Parumaka asaruya Tisa)³⁹ Moreover, a place name Kutiraimalai (horse hill in Tamil) in the Puttalam district may indicate that the Tamils at Kutiraimalai imported horses from Arabia and Persia here and sold them to the king and nobles of Sri Lanka.⁴⁰ It is also significant to note that the famous urn burial site of Pomparippu is also closer to this place and the stirrups of a horse have been depicted as a graffiti mark on the pottery of this settlement.⁴¹ Similar stirrups in bronze have been unearthed at Adichchanallur (a large burial site at the Tamraparni river) which is genetically related to Pomparippu.

With reference to Tamraparni B.J Perera⁴² opines that "one of the ancient

names for Ceylon appears to have been the result of this close commercial connection..... At the mouth of Tamraparni was the port of Korkai, famous for its export trade in gems. These gems were taken from Ceylon to this port. Thus Ceylon would have been known in North India chiefly as the source for the mart at the mouth of the Tamraparni river. This could have led to the transfer of the name of the river to the Island with which it was so closely connected". The form Tamraparni reminds us of its Pali equivalent Tambapanni, which gave way for its Greek adoption. Taprobane. It has been argued on the basis of Tamil literary and epigraphical evidences that the original form of Sanskrit Tamraparni is Tarṇ Porunai which became Sanskritised as Tamraparni and Prakritised as Tambapanni.⁴³ According to the Mahavamsa,⁴⁴ Vijaya, the mythical founder of the Sinhalese race is said to have landed here and reigned here for thirty eight years. It further says that this name which originally denoted a place later denoted the whole Island. However, this place has been identified on the coast of Mannar near Kadamba nadi / Malwattu Oya on the opposite coast of the Pandya country.⁴⁵ It is also interesting to note that the pearl banks lie along the coast of Arippu, bordering the Gulf of Mannar. The coastal area between Mannar and Puttalam was known as Muttukari, which means pearl coast in Tamil.⁴⁶

III

The other important inscription is from Seruvavila in the Trincomalee

district, which mentions a donation of a cave to the Buddhist Sangha jointly by *Bata Mahasiva and Gahapati Dameda*.⁴⁷ As we have already discussed the meaning of the form Gahapti, it is now necessary to explain the form 'Bata'. This form occurs as Bata and Barata in more than hundred instances in the early Brahmi Inscriptions.⁴⁸ Though Paranavitana,⁴⁹ explained this form as giving the meaning of 'lord', the study of Sangam literature however shows that it denoted a social group which originally had its habitat in the south eastern Pandyan coast.⁵⁰ The presence of Baratas in Sri Lanka indicates their early migration here. Sangam literature depicts a section of the affluent Paratavas community living in mansions in the coastal towns and engaging themselves in trading activities. They had their own ships and warehouses. Conch shells, salt, gems, spices and horses were the items of trade.⁵¹ Moreover the trading ventures of the Paratavar community are praised in Cilappatikaram as well.⁵² It also refers to the affluent Parata Kumarar.⁵³ Interestingly enough there is a reference in a Sri Lankan early Brahmi inscription from Kuttikulam which records a joint donation made by Parumaka and Bata-Kumara.⁵⁴ The form Bata Kumara of this inscription is no other than Parata Kumarar mentioned in Cilappatikaram. Nevertheless, the mention of Paratavar most probably from Sri Lanka along with the Tamil merchant itself is an indication of the joint trading venture of this people. Probably the Paratavar preferred to be called by their clan name.

At this juncture it is appropriate to quote Sudharshan Seneviratne,⁵⁵ who has

drawn our attention to a Brahmi inscription of the Paratavar found at Polonnaruwa. Thus he says,

"The Early Brahmi inscriptions in fact shed a great deal of light on the commercial connection of the Baratas. An inscription (of a Barata) from Duvegala (Polonnaruwa District) carries an interesting symbol of a ship (Bell 1917-18: pl.xx; Paranavitana 1970 No.270, Pl.XXXV). This symbol may be described as a single mast vessel carrying a nandipada (Taurine) symbol at its helm. It is extremely significant that the identical symbol is found on the Satavahana coins, unearthed along the coastline of Andhra and Tamil Nadu (Elliot 1886; 1970; Rapson 1908; pl.V.No.96). These symbols correspond very closely to the nagapatnam seven leg-type vessel used for east Indian coast travelling and until recent times these vessels also operated between nagapatnam(Kaveridelta) and Sri Lanka"

Interestingly enough, the ship type coin of the Satavahana ruler Yajna Satakaruni mentioned above is a bilingual coin which carries its legend both in Prakrit and Tamil.⁵⁶ This reinforces the role played by the Trade of Tamil Nadu in the sea borne during this time. Significantly the discovery of a fragment of pottery the German archaeologist unearthed from the Akurugoda (Ancient Mahabath excavations,⁵⁷ depicting a vessel with mast, is very important in this context. The representation of the mast indicates that it is a sea going vessel. More

two other fragments of Black and Red ware depicting the same type of vessel with a mast were found during the explorations at Ridiyagama in the Walawe Ganga area in the South eastern Sri Lanka.⁵⁸

Sangam classics not only depict Korkai, as a primary sea port of the Pandyas but also as a chief town of the leading Paratavar. The people of the town consisted mostly of Pearl divers and chank cutters.⁵⁹ Hence it is very likely that the references regarding the coming of the princes and others as brides of Prince Vijaya, the progenitor of the Sinhalese and his followers and Vijaya's sending annually a shell pearl with twice a hundred thousand (pieces of money)⁶⁰ may indicate the Pandyan monopoly of this trade as confirmed by both Sangam and Greek sources and the involvement of Paratavar in Pearl fishing.

IV

The above view is substantiated by our reinterpretation of the Brahmi inscription found at Anuradhapura.⁶¹ This refers to a Terrace used by the trading guild of Tamilakam (*'Demeça - gahapatikana Pasade'*) There were many seats cut in the rock boulder in the form of a terrace with the names of the individuals indited. The names are Saga, Nasata, Tissa and Kubira Sujata. The topmost seat was occupied by *Navika-Karava* (Karava, the mariner). Here again the reference to Karava, refers to a social group known as Karaiyar, a section of the Paratavar community and a person of this community functioning as ship captain shows the leading role played by

Paratavar and Karaiyar in the early trading ventures between Tamilakam and Sri Lanka. Kannaki Valakkurai of a late date mentions the chief of Paratavar who had the title atiyarasan by the name Mikaman. In fact the word Mikaman itself means the captain of the ship.⁶²

The other important aspect of the inscription is with regard to the people who made this terrace for the use of the traders from Tamilakam. Paranavitana by reading the initial portion of the inscription as *'Ilubaratahi Demeça Samane Karite'* concluded that the terrace was caused to be made by the Tamil Samana at Ilubarata. According to him with the locative case ending 'hi' Ilubarata meant a place in Anuradhapura district. Mahadevan⁶³ would concur with Paranavitana and treat this as a place name 'Ila barata' perhaps derived from Ilavarta, the Ila country (of Aryavarta). However Mahadevan is right in rejecting Paranavitana's reading of the second letter of this form as lu, instead of la. The presence of this form in Tamil Nadu Brahmi inscriptions as well as on potsherds found at Punakary⁶⁴ in Northern Sri Lanka shows the fallacy of Paranavitana's reading. But a perusal of the estampage of the inscription⁶⁵ shows that what Paranavitana has explained as 'hi' the last letter of this form is not actually so. It is really 'ha', genitive case ending. Probably a fissure in the rock on the top portion of the letters ra, ta and ha was unnoticed by Paranavitana. By ignoring this aspect he tried to read this as 'hi'. Our perusal of this form, however, shows that this form has two segments namely Ila and barata. Ila is a reference to our country and instead of la, la has been used in the form Ila/ Ilam. This

confirmed by the two potsherd inscriptions found at Mannitalai in Punakary area which mention Ila and Ila.⁶⁶

The Sangam work Pattinappalai⁶⁷ and the Brahmi inscription at Tirupparam Kunram⁶⁸ in Madurai district do confirm this. The other segment refers to the community known as Paratavar, about whom we have discussed already. Probably the prefix (Ila) before Paratava was used to differentiate the Paratavar of Ilam from Tamilakam which is referred to as 'Dameda' in our inscriptions. In fact this is the earliest inscriptional evidence for the use of Ilam and Dameda which originally meant the land and only subsequently the people who inhabited the land. This occurrence of the suffix 'ha' a genitive case ending, in this form Ilabarataha' is used in the agentive sense as Paranavitana himself indicated, as in the case of Samana which has an instrumental case ending.⁶⁹ Hence it could mean that Paratavan of Ilam and Samana(n) of Tamilakam caused this terrace to be made. This interpretation further substantiates the link between the Paratavar merchants and the merchants of Tamilakam as we have seen in the inscription at Seruvavila. Though Paratavar do not figure in the inscriptions mentioning 'Dameda' merchants from Vavuniya district, the presence of this form Bata/Barata in the inscriptions of this district further highlights the connection between the two.

The other important aspect of this inscription is the reference to 'Gahapati Kana' which means the guild/corporation of Tamil Traders. There are references in

both Sri Lankan and Tamil Nadu Brahmi inscriptions to trading guilds. Puga' of Sri Lankan Brahmi inscriptions⁷⁰ and Nikama' of the Tamilakam Brahmi inscriptions⁷¹ mean the same. There are also references to the trading guilds known as 'cattu' in Tamil literature. In fact the very names Macattuvan and Manaikan figuring in Cilappatikaram as fathers of Kovalan and Kannaki respectively bespeak the fact that they were the leaders of trading guilds engaged in trade via land and sea.⁷² The prefix 'ma' occurring in the form 'naikan' meant a leader of the caravan moving via sea, reminds us of the form 'navika' who functioned as the leader of the trading guild at Anuradhapura.

It is in this context only we have to analyse the inscription at Kuduivil.⁷³ Though this inscription is fragmentary yet it mentions the cave of a lady Tissa from Tamilakam (Dameda Tisaya le(ne), who is said to be the wife of Tamil traders. However, the most important information of this inscription is that it mentions Digavapi - p(o) rana vani jhana which has been translated as 'the cave of the merchants who are the citizens of Dighavapi by Paranavitana. But actually it should mean the ancient traders of Dighavapi. It is very likely that the form 'vani-jhana' is the same as 'gahapati Kana' of the Anuradhapura inscription mentioned above. This guild of traders seem to have been operating at Dighavapi from very ancient times as evident from the phrase 'P (o) rana' qualifying this guild. This again records the presence of Traders of Tamilakam in Dighavapi which was as important place as that of Magama in

the south East Sri Lanka as we see in the account of Dutthagamani in the second century B.C. Referring to Dighavapi Paranavitana⁷⁴ observed that 'Dighavapi. given as the place of residence of these brothers, was a seat of royalty in Rohana, second in importance to Mahagama only and the place might well have attracted merchants from foreign countries who practised their own customs. The reference in the Mahavamsa⁷⁵ about the arrival of several ships loaded with gems and one ship loaded with vessels of gold and other valuable cargo in the territory of the king of Magama of this time bear witness to the role of the south east in commercial enterprise at this time.

Besides the Tamil trading guilds there is also evidence for the presence of other trading guilds in this region. For, the Brahmi inscription from Bovattegala⁷⁶ at the southern border of the Amparai district refers to Kobojhiya - Maha pugiyana'. The actual wording of this inscription (553) is as follows. Kabojhiya Mahapugiyana Manapadasane agata - anagata catu disa sagasa'. This has been rendered into English as 'the cave Manapadassana of the members of the great corporation of Kambojiyas (is given) to the Sangha of the four quarters present and absent. Incidentally the corporation of Kambojiyas figure in the Brahmi inscription (no. 990) found at Kaduruvava in the Kurunagala district.⁷⁷ These Kambojiyas are from Afghanistan. The presence of beads of Lapislazuli in the excavated site at Ridiyagama in South East Sri Lanka as well as in other

sites shows that these were probably brought by them. Moreover, the above evidence indicates that the trading guild was also known as Pugi. This form occurs in the inscriptions at Anuradhapura⁷⁸, Anuradhapura district Gonagala, Hambantota district⁷⁹ and Valaellu goda Kanda in the Monaragalla district.⁸⁰

Lastly it is opportune at this juncture to make reference to numismatic evidence for the presence of Tamil traders at Akurugoda (Ancient Magama). Of these coins two are important.⁸¹ The first one (coin no. 21) has a floral design on the obverse and on its reverse 'utiran' was written along with a Swastika. On this coin Osmund Boparachchi has the following observation. This personal name with Tamil nominative form with an aksara na representing the Alveolar nasal which is not found in the Ceylonese rock Brahmi inscriptions but well known in South Indian Tamil Brahmi inscriptions. The other coin has on its obverse a wheel design composed of four spokes and on its reverse (ta) Sapijan is written in the Brahmi script. As in the earlier coin here as well Tamil origin of the word is indicated by the aksara na. It is also significant to note the presence of Tamil traders at Dighavapi as evident from the inscription at Kuduvil mentioned above. Equally interesting is another coin which has swastika and fish on its obverse and the legend Barata Tisaha written on the reverse.⁸² Even the seal discovered along with the human skeleton at Anaikkodai in Northern Sri Lanka might have been that of an important trader who was buried with honour by his companions. This is

datable to 3rd century B.C. It has two forms of writings in two lines. They are pictorial and early Brahmi. The legend of this seal has been deciphered by Indrapala⁸³ as Koventa and Koventan. However Ragupathy⁸⁴ gave a different reading as Koveta and Kovetam, which meant a king in Tamil. This might have been a personal name of the buried person.

VI

Nevertheless, the activities of the Tamil traders were not confined to Sri Lanka only. They also played a very significant role in the trade with the west, especially with the Greeks and the Romans.⁸⁵ The evidence for this has come from the Red sea port - town of Quseir - al - Qadim in Egypt. This port served as a Roman window opening to the East and a major terminus for the sea routes from India in the 1st and 2nd centuries of the Christian Era. The inscribed potsherds in Tamil Brahmi containing personal names like Kannan and cattan belonging to 1st century A.D were collected here. Significantly, the term 'Cattan' is also found in one of the inscribed potsherds from the excavations at Arikamedu. In Tamil Cattan and Cattu denote a merchant or a group of merchants respectively. Roman amphorae found in the various excavated sites in Tamil Nadu, show that they were imported from the Roman world. To corroborate these facts, an amphorae unearthed in the excavations at Berenike, situated in Egyptian Red Sea coast in the year 1995 containing an inscription written in Tamil Brahmi script datable to 60-70 A.D may be cited

here. This inscription was deciphered by Iravatham Mahadevan as Korrapuman. According to the Tamil lexicon Puman means king and Korra means brave or victor. The term Korrapuman might be a title of a Tamil King like Korkaikoman, a title of the Pandyan king referred to in the Tamil literature.

The Roman arretine ware of Roman origin had also been found at Kodumanal in Tamilakam and this proves that it was also frequented by the Mediterranean traders as this village was famous for its bead making industry. Besides these, interesting and valuable findings of horse bones and stirrups from the excavations clearly indicate the use of horses in Tamil country. This also confirms that the horses of good variety were imported to Thamalakam through the sea from Mediterranean region as mentioned in the Sangam literature.

Alagankulam is also one of the early trading ports of Thamalakam. The excavations conducted here revealed its role in the trade with the west, especially Romans. This is further confirmed by a rouletted sherd bearing the figure of the ship in the shoulder portion found here. The careful analysis of this graffiti showed that this is nothing but one among the largest ships with the three masted type of Graeco - Roman merchant vessels used on the long and busy trade route between the Graeco - Roman, Egypt and India during the first three centuries A.D and the graffiti may well be a portrayal of one such ship that the artist saw in an Indian port.

Traders of Thamalakam had commercial relations with South East Asia as well.⁸⁶ As evidence for this recently an inscription in a stone with a

brief Tamil Brahmi script has been found at Thailand and this has been deciphered as 'perum patan kal', that is the touch stone of 'Perumpattan' As pattan means a gold smith in Tamil the stone may be identified as the touch stone (Tamil - Uraikal) for gold. On palaeographical grounds the inscription may be dated to the second or the third century A.D. making it the oldest known Indian inscription in South East Asia. Similarly a square Chola copper coin bearing the tiger emblem and the figure of a chariot datable to the turn of the Christian Era was also found in Thailand. It is also important to remember that these antiquities were housed in the local museum in the ancient port city of Khuan Luk Pat on the Klong Thom river in the west coast of Southern Thailand. Thus, the above archaeological evidences indicate that besides Sri Lanka which was commercially very close to Tamilakam, the activities of the Tamil traders of Tamilakam extended to the Mediterranean region and South East Asia as well.

VII

The references to traders of Tamilakam in the Brahmi inscriptions of Sri Lanka do indicate that in the commerce between Sri Lanka and Tamilakam, the traders of Tamilakam virtually had a monopoly. This is evident from the Greek sources as well. These sources make it clear that during the Pre Christian times the Roman traders came to Tamilakam, instead of coming directly to Sri Lanka to purchase Sri Lankan goods.⁸⁷ They mention gold, larger pearls, elephants of Sri Lanka.⁸⁸ Strabo

says that in olden days Sri Lanka sent ivory, tortoise shells and other wares in quantities to the Indian markets.⁸⁹ Gems conch shells and pearls figure also as the chief items of the country's export in the Mahavamsa.⁹⁰ For it relates how the envoys sent by Devanampiya Tissa took with them three varieties of valuable gems, a couch shell which spiralled to the right and eight different kinds of pearls.

This is corroborated by the sangam classic Pattinappalai which refers to boats laden with merchandise coming from Sri Lanka to the port at Kaveripattinam.⁹¹ The scarcity of Roman coins datable to the Pre - Christian era in Sri Lanka in comparison with the hoards of coins unearthed in Tamilakam of the same period substantiate the evidence of the Greek writers. Moreover R.A.L.H Gunawardana⁹² feels that the closest trade contacts were with South India and it is very likely that even some of the goods of North Indian origin came to Sri Lanka through South India. It is even argued that most of the Sri Lankan commodities taken to Indian ports were trans - shipped by Indian as well as Greek and Roman merchants to the Graeco - Roman world at least from the 4th century B.C. Consequently the Sri Lankan products too reached the Roman markets through ports in South India. In return Roman coins were brought to Sri Lanka through intermediaries.

It is very likely that of the Sri Lankan ports Mantai figured prominently besides Jampukolapattinam in the North. Recently the archaeological investigation carried at the sea ports situated at the estuaries of the rivers of western and south eastern Sri Lanka have yielded

positive results regarding the early trade of Sri Lanka especially with South India⁹³. Some of the ports are Uruvelapattanam at the mouth of the Kala Oya, Salavattota (Chilaw) at the Deduru Oya, Wattala at the Kelani Ganga, Kalatittha (Kalutara) at the Kaluganga, Bhimatittha (Bentota) at the Bentota Ganga, Gimhatittha (Gintota) at the Gin- Ganga, Mahaval Kagama (Weligama) at the Polwatta ganga, Niwalatittha (Matara) at the Nilwala Ganga, Gothapabbata (Goda vaya) at Walawe Ganga, and Kirinda (Kirindagama) at the kirindi Oya. Similarly the ancient ports of Tamilakam were also situated either on the banks or at the mouth of the rivers. This situation facilitated both maritime and Inland trade of Sri Lanka and Tamilakam - Precious stones, pearls, ivory, tortoise shell, elephants, valuable wood, textiles especially spices (cloves, pepper and cinnamon) figure as exported items from Sri Lanka.

VIII

Although in the commerce between Tamilakam and Ancient Sri Lanka, the traders of the former had a virtual monopoly, there is evidence for the presence of traders from Ilam in Tamilakam most probably as carriers of goods from Sri Lanka. This is shown by the Brahmi inscriptions from Tamilakam. The inscription from Tirupparankunram⁹⁴ refers to one Polalaiyan who had his residence at Erakotor and called himself as Ila-Kutumbikan. He is said to have made a bed intended for sleep and meditation by the monks. This donation of a cave with

a bed made for meditation reminds us of similar donation by the traders of Tamilakam in Sri Lanka. However, the most important aspect of this inscription is the appearance of the form Ila/ Ilam and Kutumbikam. Ila like the similar form appearing in the Tamil house holders' terrace inscription at Anuradhapura refers to Sri Lanka. The evidence from this and that of the Anuradhapura inscription further reinforce our view that Ila and Dameda originally denoted Sri Lanka and Tamilakam respectively. The form Kutumbika too appears in a solitary inscription from Sri Lanka.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, it appears in the Brahmi inscriptions of the Deccan and North India as well as in early literature where it denoted a wealthy aristocratic mercantile class and hence this could be treated as synonymous with the form 'gahapati'. Like the Tamil traders from Tamilakam who had their residence in Sri Lanka but preferred to be called by the name of their land (Dameda Vanijha) this trader too preferred the appellation 'Ila Kutumbikam'.

At this juncture it is pertinent to mention a few more references in the other Brahmi inscriptions of Tamilakam to Ila/ Ilam. The Kilivalavu inscription mentions a monastery given by Ilavan, a lay devotee from Tonti.⁹⁶ The presence of the form Ilavan indicates that he was from Ilam (Sri Lanka) like the Ila Kutumbikan. As Tonti was one of the important ports of Ancient Tamilakam it is very likely that a trader from Sri Lanka had stayed here for the purposes of trade and made this donation. The reference in the inscription at Cittannavacal,⁹⁷ to one Ilavar who made

a similar donation as that of Ilavan of Tonti but had his residence at Cirupavil could also mean a person from Ilam. Recently inscribed potsherds written in the Sri Lankan Brahmi script have also been found in the ports and trading centres of Tamilakam.⁹⁸ These probably indicate the visit of Sri Lankan traders for purposes of trade to the trading centres in Tamilakam. They are seven in number. Two potsherds have been recovered from Arikamedu. The first inscription of the potsherd has been read as 'butasa' which means the vessel of Buta (Bhuta) Palaeographically this inscription has been dated to 1st century B.C. The Tamil form of this name occurs as Putan from Kodumanal, another early historic trading centre in Tamilakam. Interestingly one of the Tamil Sangam poets hailing from Sri Lanka had this name Ilattupputantevanar. As he was settled in Maturai, he was also known as Maturai Ilattupputantevanar

The other inscription has been read as 'Kubi ra ha' which could be translated as vessel of Kubira (Kubera). This inscription has been dated to 1st century A.D. This name also seems to have been popular in the Tamil country during this period. The Tamil form of this name (Kuviran) occurs in the cave inscriptions at Vikkiramangalam and also on inscribed sherds recently discovered at Alagankulam and Kodumanal.

Alagankulam lies on the northern bank of the river Vaigai near its confluence with the Bay of Bengal. This is also on the opposite coast of the Sri Lankan port of Mantai. The recent excavations at the site by the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology have revealed that this was an important

sea port of the Pandyan Kingdom from about the second century B.C to about the second century A.D. All in all four sherds have been discovered with Sri Lankan Brahmi script. The extant portion of the first one reads as 'Sa mu' (Skt. Samudra, Pkt Samudda). This is a personal name and this inscription has been dated palaeographically to about the first century B.C. The other inscription has been deciphered as ca mu ta ha, which can be translated as 'vessel of camuta'. Thus the text is Samudaha (vessel of Samuda). Iravatham Mahadevan opines that the Tamilisation of the orthography indicates that a local Tamil scribe familiar with the name but not the language incised the inscription on the pottery. According to him this 'old Sinhalese - Tamil' hybrid inscription in Brahmi characters of about the first century B.C. is an interesting and valuable epigraphical discovery. The text of the Third inscription has been read as 'sa ga' meaning the Buddhist Sangha and the inscription is assignable to the 1st century A. D. The last inscription reads as ra jha ga... This fragmentary inscription mentions the title rajha (Skt. Rajan) of some one whose personal name (now lost) apparently began with the letter ga. Palaeography of the inscription indicates an early date of ca. 2-1 cent B.C. Finally Iravatham Mahadevan concluded by saying that

'Rajha was a royal title in old Sinhalese occurring frequently with the names of kings, princes or local rulers in the early cave inscriptions of Sri Lanka. It is a pity that the fragmentary state of the sherd has denied us the name of an important personage from Sri Lanka, who probably visited Alagankulam'

Kenumanal is on the northern bank of the Noyyal, a tributary of the Kaveri river, in Perunthurai Taluk of Coimbatore district. The excavations at this site have confirmed the identification of this important site straddling the ancient trade route from the west coast through the palghat Gap and eastward to Karur and Uraiyur and further east to the port cities of South to Madurai. Nearly two hundred potsherds bearing inscriptions have been discovered here. They are mostly written in Tamil Brahmi script, and a few in Prakrit in the Brahmi script, and dated by archaeo - magnetic tests between ca. 300 B.C - 200 A.D. Only one inscribed potsherd written in the Sri Lankan Brahmi script has been found here and is dated to first century A.D. The text of the inscription is '(ma?) la sa', meaning 'vessel of Mala (Skt. Malla).

Finally it is also relevant to mention two seals one on bone and the other on the pottery discovered at Tamluk in West Bengal. These two inscriptions datable to about the 1st century B.C found in Tamluk area (from the port Tamralipti) provide valuable confirmation of the presence of Sri Lankans in the Vanga country even in earlier times towards the close of the Pre-Christian Era. Tamralipti was an important port of the Vanga country in ancient times, serving a large hinterland in Eastern and Northern India and having a brisk trade and cultural contacts with Peninsular India as well as Sri Lanka and South East Asian countries. It was from this port that a branch of the Bodhi Tree is said to have been despatched by Asoka to Sri Lanka. Now coming to the versions of the seal, the inscription on the first seal has been

read as mu, da ga sa meaning "the seal of Mudaga" (a male personal name.) This may be an equivalent of Skt 'mundaka' which means one with shaven head. The other inscription reads as 'ma ta sa' which means the vessel of Mata'. (Skt. Matta). Thus concluding the survey of the above inscriptions Iravatham Mahadevan asserts that 'these pottery inscriptions have opened up a new avenue for the exploration of ancient India, Sri Lanka contacts. Further excavations, especially at or near the sea ports of South India, are bound to add to the evidence presented here'. Besides the port of Tamralipti, Bharukachcha on the western India does figure as the important port of call by the Sri Lankan merchants. For, a Brahmi inscription from Bagavalena (In. No. 1183) from Kandy district speaks of a Parumaka Mala who undertook the journey to Bharukachcha.⁹⁹

The other important item of trade was beads, which confirm the close trade link between Tamilakam and Sri Lanka. On this Osmond Bopearachchi¹⁰⁰ remarks that 'in recent years there have been a series of excavations at the early historic sites of Andhra - Tamil Nadu. Beads constitute an important class of finds in all the above South Indian sites. These sites include Amaravati, Dhulikatta, Kotalingala, Peddabankur and Yeleswaram (Andhra Pradesh), Arikamedu (Pondichery) Kanchipuram, Appukallu, Tiruvamathur, Karaikadu, Mallapadi, Perur, Kodumanal, Karur, Uraiyur and Alagankulam (in Tamil Nadu). Some of these sites especially the Tamil Nadu sites have yielded coins (both Roman and indigenous), ceramics and especially beads similar to those

reported from Manthai (Mantai) and other early sites of Sri Lanka. The beads from Ridiyagama in the Walawa Ganga region) are very similar to the types recovered from four major sites of South India viz. Arikamedu, Karaikadu, Uraiyur and Alagankulam.' Finally he adds that¹⁰¹.

'It is now clear that most of the beads collected in our excavations or from our surface explorations at Ridiyagama are also attested in all the important settlement sites of South India. The conclusion to be drawn from this discovery is that they were important to Sri Lanka as early as the Pre - Christian era and no doubt reached the Southern coast through the sea ports on the Southern coast of the Island'.

The inscriptional evidence confirm the importation of lapis lazuli and carnelian beads from Afghanistan and Gujarat respectively. The early Sri Lankan coins especially the punch - marked coins, which have been referred to as Karshapanas were also introduced from India, besides the coins of the ruling dynasties of India. This shows that coins were also introduced from India, besides the coins of the ruling dynasties of India. This shows that coins were also in use for commercial transactions between India and Sri Lanka from early days.

IX

The above reference to 'Dameda' and Ila/Ilam indicate that both the names originally denoted the respective countries and the people of these countries. It is even doubtful whether at this time these forms denoted a particular

linguistic group: subsequently only it came to be associated with a particular linguistic group. The appearance of the form Sihala (the earliest epigraphical evidence for the form) as a name of Sri Lanka in the Nagarjunikonda inscription datable to the third century A.D shows that it too meant originally the land and subsequently only the particular linguistic group. The chronological priority of Ila/ Ilam over Sihala is also established by the early presence of Ilam during Pre - Christian times in the epigraphical records in contradistinction to Sihala. Hence it is very likely that 'hala' of Sihala, is derived from Ila - Ela - Hela - hala and later with the addition of Sri it became Sihala/ Simhala. Only subsequently a legend was evolved to account for the presence of Sinhalese speakers of the country. Probably due to this reason only we do not come across any reference to Sihala/Simhala in the early Brahmi inscriptions of Sri Lanka. Hence it is no longer possible to sustain Paranavitana's view that as all these inscriptions are in the old Sinhalese language, the vast majority of the persons who had them indited must have been of the community known as Sinhala at the time of these Brahmi inscriptions.

The presence of Tamil speakers in Ancient Sri Lanka is confirmed by both literary and epigraphical sources. The reference to 'Ilatupputantevanar' who had to his credit three poems in Akananuru,¹⁰² three in Kuruntokai,¹⁰³ and one in Narrinai,¹⁰⁴ the prevalence of Sangam words in the vocabulary of the Jaffna Tamil¹⁰⁵ show that Tamil was one of the languages spoken in Ancient Sri Lanka. This is confirmed by the early use of South Indian Brahmi (which ha

been named as Dravidi/ Damili by scholars) in the Sri Lankan Brahmi inscriptions¹⁰⁶ with the typical Tamil - Brahmi forms before the introduction of North Indian Brahmi associated with Buddhism in the middle of the third century B.C. The presence of Tamil Brahmi forms of Tamilakam is also testified to by the potsherds discovered at Punakary which had typical Tamil Brahmi forms such as la, la, la, ra, na.¹⁰⁷

Moreover the Pre-Christian Brahmi inscriptions do confirm the prevalence of a social structure very much akin to Ancient Tamilakam. As in Tamilakam, there is no evidence for the prevalence of four - fold caste system of North India in Ancient Sri Lanka. The forms such as Parumaka Vel, Barata and Aya indicate their origin from Tamilakam. Paranavitana, derived the form Parumaka from Sanskrit Pramukka and concluded that they were the pioneers of the early Indo Aryan colonists who gave leadership during the Pre-state polities and were the back bone of the rural administration. Nevertheless recent studies show that it is a derivation of the Tamil form Perumakan / Parumakan¹⁰⁸ which occurs in nearly a quarter of the Pre - Christian Inscriptions. Their role in the Pre - State Polities is amply summarised by Sudkarshan Seneviratne as follows.¹⁰⁹

'It is quite likely that some segments of the Parumaka group, who perhaps represent the earliest political elite during the Early Iron Age, had their origins in the Megalithic Black and Red ware complex emanating from Peninsular India. This was the earliest technocultural matrix formed in Sri

Lanka during the Early Iron Age prior to any dominant impact of the Northern Indo Aryan Culture. It is therefore reasonable to assume that certain elements of political leadership and authority that prevailed in Proto - historic South India may have had considerable influence upon the evolution of the pre-state political structure of Sri Lanka during the early Iron Age'

And he further continues that

*'In the first instance the distribution pattern indicates that the parumaka inscriptions have a close physical bearing to the megalithic - BRW (Black and Red ware) sites in Sri Lanka. It is perhaps more convincing to compare particular post - firing graffiti symbols on the megalithic ware with the non - Brahmi symbols found on the earliest Brahmi inscriptions.'*¹¹⁰

Similarly Paranavitana's reading of the form vel occurring in the early Brahmi inscriptions as Velu has been proved farfetched. Indeed they are no other than the Vels chieftains of Tamilakam¹¹¹ Sudharshan Seniviratne, on the basis of the place name Dvarawandala associated with pandukabbaya assignable to fourth century B.C and the presence of this form as Tavirikiya in the Brahmi inscriptions contends that some of the Velir clans arrived at an early date in Sri Lanka.¹¹² This is the case even with the Bata/ Barata occurring in the Brahmi inscriptions. They too are none other than the Paratavar of the Pandyan region of Tamilakam.¹¹³

The form Aya occurs as a title of the Pre - state chieftains along with the other titles Gamani and Raja. As correctly perceived by R.A.L.H Gunawardana.¹¹⁴ this is related to the Tamil form Ayya, (Kannada Ayya, Malayalam Ayyan, Tulu Ayye) and ai. According to him the Tamil form has been used in the senses of ruler, master and lord. Even though he has not commented about the form Abi which occurs also in the inscriptions of Aya, it is very much close to the Tamil form Avvai/ Ammai. For, the interchange of Va and Ba has also been noted as one of the grammatical features in the inscriptions of the period.¹¹⁵ Besides this there are many other forms which could be traceable to Tamilakam - some of them are mara (Maran) Pada (Pandya), Cuda (Chola), Kera (Cera), Uti, Uttiya (Utiyanclan). Marumakane (Marumakan), Kuti (clan), Putalaha (Putalvan), Kotaya (Kottai), Tiru (Tiru), Nagara (Nagar). The discussion on these deserve a separate paper.

X

In the light of the above discussion based mainly on the Brahmi inscriptions regarding the form Dameda it now becomes imperative to go into the details of this form found in the Pali chronicles as Damila.

As mentioned above, the early Pali literature refers to the Tamil country as Damila. This could be seen with reference to invasions from the Tamil country during the early historical period. These invasions are said to have begun during the reigns of the successors of Devanampiya Tissa, the first historical

king of Sri Lanka during the middle of the third century B.C. Tamils who captured power at Anuradhapura, the capital of early Sri Lanka, are said to have ruled the whole country. Thus the first Tamils (Damilas) to capture power were Sena and Guttaka.¹¹⁶ They are the sons of a mariner trading in horses (Assanavika). They wrested power from Sura Tissa, one of the brothers of Devanampiya Tissa and jointly ruled righteously for twenty two years (177 - 155 B.C) Asela, one of the brothers of Devanampiya Tissa who wrested power from Sena and Guttaka was outsted by a Damila named Elara¹¹⁷ from the Chola country who reigned righteously for forty four years (145 - 101 B.C) till he was slain in an open battle by Dutthagamani.¹¹⁸ However, Dutthagamani's passage to power had two other hurdles, namely subjugation of the thirty two Damila kings who ruled in various parts of Sri Lanka¹¹⁸ and his confrontation with Damila Bhalluka, nephew of Elara, who came with a force of sixty thousand people to help Elara.¹¹⁹ The author of Mahavamsa says that by killing thirty two Damila Kings Dutthagamani became the sovereign ruler of Lanka.

Moreover during the rule of Vattagamani in the following century, five Damilas are said to have captured power from him and ruled Sri Lanka having Anuradhapura as their capital for fourteen years and seven months (103 - 89 B.C) They are Pulahattha, Bahiya Panayamara, Pilayamaraka and Dathika.¹²⁰ During the rule of queen Anula (48 - 44 B.C) two Damilas are again mentioned as having enjoyed power at Anuradhapura.¹²¹ They are

said to be the paramours of this queen. One was Damila Vatuka, described as a foreigner (annadesika) who ruled for one year and two months. The other was Damila Niliya, who was a palace priest and ruled for six months. Thus if we calculate the rule of Tamil kings at Anuradhapura in terms of years, they had ruled nearly eighty two years, thus making one third of the early historic period beginning with the reign of Devanampiya Tissa (250- 210 B.C) and ending with the beginning of the Christian era. This again shows the amount of interest and importance attached by the Damilas of Tamilakam to Sri Lanka. It is very likely that besides the political adventurism, the control of trade would have also been the motive for these invasions. Nevertheless, the most important aspect in the above survey is the defeat of the thirty two Damila kings by Dutthagamani. Their rule seem to have been co - eval with that of Elara. It is even possible that some of them would have even preceded his rule. Referring to them R.A.L.H Gunawardhana¹²² has made the following comment.

"Both the Mahavamsa and the Sahassavatthupakarana refer to the adversaries of Dutthagamani as Tamils. The former work emphasises that they were 'unbelievers' as well. If these statements were to be accepted without question they would imply that Tamil rulers were in power not only in the northern plains in Sri Lanka but also in the Malaya highlands and at several places in Rohana including Dighavapi and sites along the river Mahavali from Mahyangana to

Kacchatittha. Here again, the inscriptions present a picture that is entirely different. As we observed earlier, the rulers of the polities in different parts of the Island as well as other individuals who issued inscriptions appear to have shared several cultural traits in common. They issued these inscriptions in the Brahmi script and in a language which was clearly the early form of what later developed into the Sinhalese language. And, even if we cannot be sure that these rulers were all Buddhists, the greater majority of them and their families were certainly patrons of the Buddhist clerical community. Thus it appears that while some of the foes against whom Dutthagamani fought were probably Tamils, a considerably large proportion would not have been different from his own forces as regards language and religion"

As a corollary to the above statement it should be added that the archaeological work during the last three decades indicate that the Sri Lankan culture had its genesis from South India, instead of North India as claimed by the Pali Chroniclers.¹²³ This has been amply demonstrated by Sudharshan Seneviratne¹²⁴ as well. For, he says that intrusive technocultural elements from South India introduced the earliest recognizable social, economic, political and religious cultural institutions to different ecological zones in Sri Lanka.

In fact the recent studies do conform that the linguistic apparatus that was to become the Sinhala language was introduced in association with Buddhism

and that Sinhalaisation was a culturalisation process associated with the spread throughout the land of Buddhism and its consolidation. In short, Sinhalaisation came after and not before Buddhism.¹²⁵

As clearly brought out by R.A. L N Gunawardana, there were many chiefbaincies in the Pre - State politics of Sri Lanka as evident from the Brahmi inscriptions.¹²⁶ Although the number thirty two Damila kings may be an exaggeration, it is quite likely that there were many ruling families with the Tamil lineage. The author of Mahavamsa himself admits that the King Dutthagamini had to fight eighteen battles before he met the king Elara at the battle field. The perusal of the inscriptions from Kusalakanda, Mottayakallu, Henannegala and Kāl - udupotana shows that they are the records of the Ksatriyas of Kataragama and quite likely Candanagama and their colaterral branches. Their sway was extended from Katavagama to Batticaloa district. In fact the king Dutthagamani is also a scion of this Ksatriyas. These Ksatriyas had fish as a dynastic emblem. Although Paranavitana would trace the epithet Majhi - ma - rajha found in the inscriptions at Hennegala in the Batticaloa district to the Matsya clan in North India,¹²⁷ in the light of archaeological evidences mentioned above it is quite likely that it is a prakritisiation of the Pandyan title Minavan. Quite interestingly during the excavations at Akurugoda,¹²⁸ the ancient Magama the capital of Dutthagamani a coin with a legend Majhimaha in Brahmi characters has been found. This in fact is synonymous with the title Majhi - ma -

rajha. Hence it is quite likely that the Ksatriyas of Kataragama and Candanagama had their origin in the Pandyan dynasty and most probably there were many scions of this dynasty. Because of this it is often claimed that they represented the leaders of a stream of immigration to this Island different from that which was established in Anuradhapura. Probably these chieftains from Tamilakam ruled in the Rohana and other regions where Dutthagamini waged war. With the introduction of Buddhism, and by way of acculturation to Buddhist culture, many of them would have lost their original identity. The fact that Brahmi inscriptions are only the records of the persons/ rulers who patronised Buddhism, and that too in the case of the Ksatriyas mentioned above, their third and the fourth generations as patrons of Buddhism do confirm the above supposition.

Although the Pandya link with Sri Lanka harks back to the time of the mythical Vijaya, they figure in the Brahmi inscriptions as Padu.¹²⁹ It is this form that occurs in the Pali chronicles as 'Pandu'. Another form is Mara, title borne by the Pandyan rulers as Maran. Maragama (which means the village of meran.) appearing in the Brahmi inscription at Mandagala in the Hambantota district¹³⁰ where the coin with a legend 'Majhi ma' referred to above has been discovered is a pointer to the Pandyan influence here. It is very likely that the form 'Ayimara' figuring in the inscriptions which has been interpreted by Paranavitana¹³¹ as Aryaman, a vedic deity, is a reference to 'Mara'. Even the references to panayamera and Pilayamara, who figure

as Tamil rulers during the time of Vattagamani confirm their Pandyan lineage.

It is in this context only one has to interpret the most noteworthy specimen of a coin found at Salgaha Watta in Anuradhapura.¹³² It has on its obverse a Chaitya surmounted by an umbrella, elephant, and Temple. On its reverse is a fish symbol. This has been dated to 210 - 177 B.C and on this basis it has been argued that "the earliest coinage of Ceylon shows many parallels with that of the Pandyas, by which it was inspired" Instead, this could be an issue of Pandyan chief / ruler who himself a Hindu but accomodated Buddhism and gave his patronage. Pandyan coins have also been discovered besides Anuradhapura, in Kantarodai, Situlpavuwa and more recently in Punakary.¹³³ Pandya coins found at Kantarodai have been discussed by Krishnamurthy.¹³⁴ All in all eight coins have been found at Punakary area. Of these, one each from Ilavur and Kalmunai and two from Mannitalai numbering altogether four have parallels with the Pandyan issues from Tamilakam. The balance four are only important for our study as the symbols found on them have no parallels from Tamilakam and hence are taken as issues of the Tamil rulers of Tamilakam who reigned in Sri Lanka. Firstly the coin from Pallikuda has on its obverse a Temple and on its reverse a stylised fish. Similarly the second type from Vira Pandyan Munai has on its obverse a Sri Vatsa and on its reverse a stylised fish. In the third coin from Vira Pandyan Munai a humped bull on the obverse and four dots surrounded by a circle and

enclosed by a square on the reverse have been depicted. It is also equally interesting to note that humped bull seems to be an one of the most popular animals depicted in the seals found in South East Sri Lanka.¹³⁵

Besides, Pandyas, there is inscriptional evidence for the presence of Ceras as well. For, there is a reference for a ruler of a petty kingdom as Aya Kera in an inscription found at Kirimakulgolla in the Ratnapura district.¹³⁶ This could be a reference to Cera, instead of Kerala. As mentioned earlier Aya, a Prakrit form of Tamil Ayyan occurs in many inscriptions of the local rulers, it is very likely that some of their progenitors would have even been the local rulers from Thamalakam. Even the form cuda may be a reference to Chdas.¹³⁷ This would have been the case with the parumakas as well. Commenting on the use of these form in the inscriptions of this local rulers, R.A.L.A Gunawardana¹³⁸ observes that "the use of the term Aya is more widespread. Since these terms relate to such critical areas as kinship and political organization, it is likely that the Tamil influences on the Island were considerable. As these inscriptions record only the donations to the Buddhist Sangha by the rulers of most probably Buddhist faith, it is very likely that the some of the local rulers who have not been Buddhist and not patronised Buddhism would have reigned during this time as well. Thus though the number thirty two may be an exaggeration it is very likely that there were many local rulers, probably with the Tamilian lineage of Tamilakam during this time. This, is most probably

echoed in the Mahavamsa.

Conclusion

The evidence for the presence of Tamil speakers in Ancient Sri Lanka, the occurrence of the forms Demela and Dameda in both early literature and inscriptions clearly shows that Tamilakam more than any other region of India exerted influence in the politics, trade and culture of our country. However, unlike Tamilakam, Sri Lanka and Andhra, another Dravidian state of South India came under the heavy influence of Pali Prakrit. Prakrit became the lingua franca of these regions due to the introduction of Buddhism and the north Indian Brahmi script. Consequently the Dravidian languages of Sri Lanka such as Tamil and Elu or Proto-Sinhala were subject to Prakritisation. However unlike Tamil, because of Buddhism the influence of Prakrit on Elu was dominant. In fact this process of bilingualism led to the growth of what is known as later Sinhala. Perhaps when Tamil forms came to be used in the inscriptions they were adopted to the existing Brahmi forms of this Brahmi script. For instance to write the special letter La of Tamil letters such as La or da were used. This was so in the case of Tamil forms such as Parumakan, Baratan, and Ayyan. In the absence of alveolar na in the North Indian Brahmi script of Sri Lanka they were written as Parumaka, Barata and Aya. Now coming to the sphere of trade, although the naval superiority of Tamilakam is evident from the numerous references to different types of boats, warehouses and port organizations in the Tamil classical

literature, nevertheless, the occurrence of the terms mentioning horse traders, traders, shipcaptions and trading guilds in Sri Lankan sources indicate the availability of requisite infrastructure in Sri Lanka itself to actively participate in the trade during the early centuries of the Christian Era.

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