WARFARE, THE STATE, AND THE PROTO-"WORLD ECONOMY"

Armed Struggles in Ancient and Early Medieval Sri Lanka

Warfare and conquest occupy an important place in the myths, legends and historical records of the island of Sri Lanka. It is fortunate that the last category of sources is particularly rich. The chronicles, the earliest of which has been dated in the fourth-fifth centuries A.D., present accounts of wars from as early as about the second century B.C. while inscriptional records which go as far back as the third century B.C. testify to the historicity of some of the individuals and events mentioned in the chronicles. It is thus possible to form an idea of the types of wars and the responses they evoked from a very early period of the island's history. One note of caution may be needed here. It is necessary to remind ourselves constantly not only that the accounts presented in the chronicles may not be complete but also that they were subjected to considerable change before being recorded and have been handed down to us cast in the ideological mould of the chroniclers.

This paper seeks to examine the varying nature of warfare in Sri Lanka over a long expanse of time extending from about the third century B.C. to the end of the tenth century A.D. In the early phases, warfare in the island represented an essential element of a process leading to the emergence of the Early State[1] while in the later phases, especially during the last two centuries, warfare in the island was decisively affected by the growth of trade and increasing military contact with the powerful kingdoms which arose in neighbouring South India. The history of warfare has to be traced within the context of a complex process of social and economic change, and against the background of the expansion and rise into prominence of Buddhism in the island. The relationship between warfare and ideology as well as warfare and ritual are crucial aspects which help us to understand the nature of the changes taking place in this society.

Warfare and the Emergence of the State

Inscriptions and literary works which reflect conditions in the earliest phase of the history of Sri Lanka point to the presence of a large number of prestate polities which are best described as chiefdoms. Up to about the second century B.C., such chiefdoms were scattered over a wide area within the island.[2] The long period of conflict among these chiefdoms, which culminated in the emergence of the Early State, constituted the earliest phase of recorded warfare in Sri Lanka. It was a period in which agricultural production was primarily based on the cultivation of a rice crop

---

1. For a review of the importance of warfare in the Early State, see Henry J.M. Claessen & Peter Skalnik, *The Early State*, The Hague: Mouton, 1978.

2. R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, "Prelude to the State: An Early Phase in the Evolution of Political Institutions in Sri Lanka," *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, Vol. 8, 1982, pp.6–25, See also map facing p.8.

irrigated by small-scale reservoirs constructed with the communal labour of the village and owned by the village as a whole. Raising of livestock, especially cattle, and swidden farming were to be found side by side with irrigated agriculture. A certain degree of specialization in crafts was also known, as in the production of pottery and in metallurgical work involving the use of copper and iron. It is most likely that a good proportion of the large number of small-scale irrigation works, which are found in great abundance in the "Dry Zone" of the island, date from this period. Settlements were spreading into the "Wet Zone" where, despite the challenge posed by the thick forest cover which called for efficient tools, high rainfall permitted cultivation through arrangements for water control demanding less investment of labour than in the "Dry Zone."

The physical setting introduced an element of inequality in the access that different polities enjoyed to certain basic resources. The chiefdoms located at Kälaṇi, Yaṭahalena, Ämbul-aṁbe and Kirimakulgolla were close to areas where iron-bearing ores like hematite, limonite and goethite were found close to the surface, Similarly, in the area where the chiefs of Tittavela and Ranagirimaḍa held sway, there were deposits of nodular ironstone or ferricrete very close to the surface.[3] A few of these polities, namely those at Yaṭahalena, Kirimakulgolla and Kolladeniya, had access to some of the most important sources of precious stones in the island. Thus, differences in ecological setting and the inequality of access were factors which would have stimulated specialization in production and exchange among these polities. Long before the emergence of a state which wielded power over a unified island, linkages had developed between these polities through marriage alliances as well as through such relations of exchange. In fact, trade had linked the island even with other parts of South Asia. Some sailors from Sri Lanka were reaching points as distant as the mouth of the Indus even as early as the fourth century B. C.[4] Clearly this was an economy which had the capacity to produce a surplus, part of which was evidently collected as irregular tribute (*bali*) by the chiefs while another part was channelled through kinship ties and was concentrated at the level of prominent men like heads of compounds (*gahapati*) and leaders of clans (*parumaka*). Such conditions provided incentives for raids to plunder mobile wealth as well as to displace the better-off communities from their favoured ecological niches. While irrigated agriculture was more productive, it was dependent on the creation of its preconditions, *i.e.* the construction of irrigation facilities, and this necessitated not only the identification of a suitable site with adequate water resources but also the investment of labour. It is not difficult to understand why a group which was forced to leave a village settlement due to population pressure would have preferred to occupy an area with a reservoir that had already been constructed rather than to bring virgin land under cultivation. Thus, the presence of surplus-generating technologies and other conditions of more intensive agricultural production would act as a magnet which attracts groups from less advantageous positions.

3. *Ibid.*, p.29

4. J. W. McCrindle (ed.), *Ancient India as Described in Classical Literature,* Westminster: Constable, 1901, p.20.

Several archetypes of conquerors are to be found in early Sri Lankan myths and legends. In the myth of the first visit of the Buddha to the island the Buddha is cast in an uncharacteristic role which is, however, familiar to the students myths both eastern and western: the designing foreigner who asks for a limited space and then, after gaining the consent of the local folk, appropriates a large area and dispossesses the local inhabitants. Such an archetype is to be found in the tales about the foundation of Carthage, Aji Saka who with his headcloth gains the Javanese kingdom of Medang, the conquest of Malacca by the Portuguese, Coen who asks the ruler of Jakarta for a piece of land as large as a buffalo skin and also in similar tales in *Sejarah Banten*.[5] The second archetype, as presented in the myth of the founder of the first Sri Lankan dynasty, is the foreign immigrant who has to leave his homeland due to his misdeeds, and founds a new kingdom by putting the local population to the sword. A third archetype is represented by Duṭṭhagāmaṇī, a leader of a modest principality who systematically brought under his control through conquest and coercion a large number of polities scattered over a wide area within the island.

Conflicts arising from movements of armed migrants from South India fall within one categry of military activity in early Sri Lankan society. The Palk Straits which separate Sri Lanka from South India are, at their narrowest point, only twenty-two miles wide and even in proto-historic times sea-going craft had already come into use enabling the movement of peoples between the subcontinent and the island. South Indian peoples occupying such ecological zones like montane tracts (*kuriñci*) and scrubland (*mullai*) were constantly facing shortages of subsistence recources. Such communities made use of trade to obtain some of their needs. For instance, mountain products were regularly exchanged for rice. However, raiding for plunder and migration to more favourable ecological zones were often equally if not more attractive options.[6] Thus, Sartre's observation that scarcity was a primary cause of social violence is very much applicable to this South Asian situation.[7] Migrations of South Indian peoples propelled most probably by ecological and demographic pressures were among the causes of warfare in ancient Sri Lanka. If people from unattractive ecological zones formed the main element among immigrants, it is also likely that dynamic peoples from the coastal (*neytal*) tracts like the *paratavar* were also involved in these activities. As Sumati has pointed out, the *paratavar* were fishermen who later developed into a group which played an important role in long-distance trade, and Seneviratne has drawn attention to evidence which points to the possibility that they were known in

---

5. B. Schrieke, *Ruler and Realm in Early Java,* Indonesian Sociological Studies, Pt. 2, The Hague: van Hoeve, 1957, p. 283.

6. R. Sumati, *Trade and its Impact on the Early Tamils: the Cola Experience,* M.Phil dissertation, Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1984, pp. 35-6.

7. Jean Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique: précéde de question de méthode,* Paris: Bibliothèque des idées, 1960, p.72.

ancient Sri Lanka.[8] Collaboration between fishermen/traders and men who wanted to settle down in more productive land would have been essential for the latter to obtain transport across the Palk Straits. Many migrations would have gone unrecorded, but the chroniclers have preserved traditions about several instances of "invaders" from South India settling down in the island. The first recorded instance of such "invasions" is said to have been led by two men called Sena and Guttika, and it is relevant to note that they are described as men who belonged to trading families. The chronicles which speak of another "invasion" led by Elāra, assign it to the period immediately prior to the unification of the island in the second century B.C.[9] The displacement of local communities occupying more favourable and desirable ecological niches would have been the usual result of such immigrations. While the followers gained land, the leaders of the immigrants found opportunities to capture booty from the communities they displaced as also to collect tribute from those they subjugated.

The struggles for hegemony among the large number of chiefdoms within the island represent a second recognizable category of military activities in ancient Sr Lanka. Tribute was probably a primary attraction which provided the motivation for the men who led these struggles. It was these struggles which set in motion the process of the expansion of the power of the chiefdom at Kusalānkanda. The account preserved in the chronicle *Dhātuvaṃsa,* when examined in the light of inscriptions in the earliest form of the Brāhmī script, helps us to form an idea of the initial stages of this process. The ruling house of Kusalānkanda, which dominated the valley of the river Mundeni Āru with its rich hydrological resources, was initially a junior branch of the lineage which ruled at Kataragama and had formed matrimonial links with the rulers of the polities at Seru, Loṇa, Giri and Kālaṇi. The expansion of the power of the polity at Kusalānkanda continued unabated during three generations. Begun in the time of Goṭhābhaya, this process of expansion was vigorously continuend by his successor Tissa. In the time of Duṭṭhagāmaṇī, it culminated in the unification of most of the island, if not its entire area, and the shifting of the seat of this lineage to Anurādhapura which was to last more than a millennium as the foremost centre of power in the island.

The chronicles mention a variety of weapons, including bows, maces, swords, spears, lances and shields in their descriptions of warfare among chiefdoms. The inscriptional sources suggest that the bow was probably the most common weapon, but references to makers of armour and ironsmiths may suggest that the some of the other types of offensive and defensive military equipment mentioned in the chronicles were becoming available.[10] The use of both horses and elephants was

8. Sumati. *op. cit.,* pp. 164–5 ; Sudarshan Seneviratne, "The Baratas: a Case of Community Integration in Early Historic Sri Lanka," *James T. Rutnam Festschrift 1985,* A.R.B. Amerasinghe & S.J. Sumanasekara Banda (ed.), Colombo: UNESCO National Commission for Sri Lanka, 1985, pp.49–56.

9. *Dīpavaṃsa* 18.47–50; *Mahāvaṃsa* 21.10–14.

10. S. Paranavitana, *Inscriptions of Ceylon,* Vol. 1, Colombo: Department of Archaeology, 1970, pp. 6, 65.

known.[11] It was only the leading warriors who rode to battle, but the importance of horses and elephants in warfare should not be underestimated. Targeting the leader was a usual tactic in early historical times when rulers personally rode to battle.[12] If a leader fell in battle, the followers would usually flee. The results of battles were often decisively affected by the outcome of combat between the leaders or groups of leading men riding horses or elephants. It is perhaps noteworthy that the Kusalankanda polity which was successful in the struggle among chiefdoms did not have a decisive advantage over its rivals in the access it enjoyed to sources of metal for weapons. The slow pace of the development of military technology meant that demography was perhaps the decisive factor in warfare in this historical context. Nevertheless, it is very likely that the prolonged warfare of the time took a heavy toll from the victor as it did from the vanquished. There were certain instances in the expansion of the Kusalānkanda polity of defeated rulers being put to death.[13] In some other instances, as in the case of Abhaya of Giri, a threatened ruler would be forced to leave his domain and flee.[14]

The most prolonged and violent battles were those launched by Duṭṭhagāmaṇī whose campaigns covered a wider area than those of any of his predecessors. He is said to have captured thirty-two rulers. Though this is a number which occurs frequently in myth, it is important to note that it is not very much off the mark: the presence at this time of at least twenty-nine different ruling houses is evident from the inscriptional sources.[15] Duṭṭhagāmaṇī is presented in the chronicles as a victor who turned remorseful at the conclusion of his campaigns, "remembering that thereby was wrought the destruction of millions (of beings)."[16] While war was the primary mechanism utilized in the expansion of the power of the Kusalānkanda lineage, non-military means, especially intrigue and diplomacy, were also of crucial importance in this political process. The winning over of formidable foes through cunning stratagem (*mantayuddha*), including actual matrimonial alliances or hinting at the possibility of such alliances in the future, was among the means used by the

---

11 *Ibid.* pp. 38,46.

12. Brian Ferguson has directed attention to the use of similar tactics in Yanomamo warfare. Brian Ferguson, "A Savage Encounter: Western Contact and the Yanomamo War Complex," paper presented to the Advanced Seminar on Expanding States and Indigenous Warfare, School of American Research, Santa Fe, New Mexico, April 1989.

13. *Mahāvaṃsa* 25.47,70: *Dhātuvaṃsa,* M. Kumaratunga (ed.), Colombo: Gunasena, 1939, p.29.

14. *Dhātuvaṃsa,* p. 41.

15. Gunawardana, "Prelude to the State," *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Hunmanities,* Vol. 8, p. 24.

16. *Mahāvaṃsa* 25.101-3.

leaders of expanding polities to prevent powerful combinations of foes as well as to gain political ends without battle.[17] Confronted by an invader of unequal military power, the isolated defender often had little other choice than to accept his hegemony. If, in fact, a weak ruler decided to resist, one of his options was to use a band of daring fighters to cleverly force their way to the presence of the invading ruler, and try to capture or kill him.[18] However, if this desperate tactic failed, the battle was as good as lost.

Ritualization of political aggression, which may be traced back to a very early time in the history of South Asia, is another aspect which is of interest to students of warfare. The most well-known archetype of this institution is the ritual of *aśvamedha* or horse sacrifice which finds mention even as early as in the *Ṛgveda* and in its elaborate form in later Vedic texts like the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā*.[19] The descriptions of the sacrifice in these texts are rich in symbolism with varied levels of meaning. An important stage in this ritual, which sought to magically enhance the ruler's field of authority, was the period of about one year when the sacrificial horse was allowed to "roam freely," followed by troops who would ensure that its roamings were not hindered. While it is likely that the choice of the circuit was not left entirely to the whims of the horse, the troops were expected to fight any rival ruler who tried to bar the horse's progress or to capture it. The ritual was a risky undertaking, and rulers were advised that "whosoever performs the sacrifice without possessing power" would be swept away. "Were unfriendly men to get hold of the horse," the ritual texts warned, "his sacrifice would be cut in twain, and he would become the poorer for it."[20] The *aśvamedha* provides an illuminating example of ritual being substituted for violent assault on potential rivals contending for power. The choice between passive acquiescence through not disrupting the ritual (thereby implicitly accepting the primacy of the sacrificer) and military confrontation was left to the leaders of chiefdoms surrounding the polity of the performer of the sacrifice. The *aśvamedha* thus permitted the extension of political hegemony through demonstration of power without actual military combat and the destruction of life and property that would ensue. Such acts of ritualized aggression demonstrate what Luttwak has described as "power born of *potential* force." As he observed, such power "is not expended when used" as distinct from the actual application of force which in the act of use was "*ipso facto* consumed."[21]

---

17. See *Mahāvaṃsa* 25.9, 49.

18. *Mahāvaṃsa* 25.58–66.

19. *Ṛgveda*, translated as *The Hymns of the Ṛgveda* by Ralph T. H. Griffiths, Vol. 1. Benares: Lazarus, 1896, pp. 214–9; *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, Julius Eggeling (tr.), Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 44, Oxford: Clarendon, 1900, pp. 274–375; *Taittirīya Saṃhitā*, translated as *The Veda of the Black Yajus School entitled Taittirīya Saṃhitā* by A.B. Keith, Pt. 2, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1914. pp. 402–83.

20. See *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, p. 289.

21. E.N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 1979, p. 33.

In Sri Lanka the struggles among chiefdoms took place against the background of the expansion of Buddhism. In fact the penetration of the influence of Buddhism over a very wide area of the island preceded political unification, and most of the leaders of chiefdoms had become patrons of the new religion. Buddhism represented an ideology which discouraged the performance of Brahmanical sacrifices and also upheld non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) as one of its basic tenets. The *aśvamedha* sacrifice was never performed in ancient Sri Lanka, but the chronicle *Dhātuvaṃsa* points to an analogous ritual device being used in the extension of the hegemony of the rulers of Kusalānkanda. It is said that Tissa of this ruling house decided to build a Buddhist monument, a *stūpa* enshrining "the relics of the Buddha," in accordance with the dictates of "a prophecy that had been made by the Buddha himself." What is most noteworthy about this pious venture was that the place where Tissa was destined to build that monument according to the "prophecy" lay at a considerable distance from his polity and within the chiefdom ruled by Siva of the house of Seru. When Tissa arrived at the selected site with the relics, and accompanied by Buddhist monks as well as his troops, the choice before Siva was either to militarily confront him and disrupt what was ostensibly a pious act by a ruler who claimed he was carrying out a prophecy or to follow the more prudent course of cooperating with him. Siva chose the latter. In the course of the construction of the monument, not only Siva but also other rulers from nearby polities, like Mahānāga of Loṇa and Abhaya of Soma, are found to have been reduced in status to individuals who carry out various orders issued by Tissa.[22] As in the performance of the *aśvamedha,* here, too, ritual is utilized by an expanding polity as a means of demonstrating its power and thereby reducing potential rivals to client status without resorting to open warfare.

The *aśvamedha* sacrifice and the *stūpa*-building activities of Kākavaṇṇa Tissa mentioned in the *Dhātuvaṃsa* bring out the relationship between religion and political aggrandizement. Unlike the performers of the *aśvamedha*, the Sri Lankan ruler was not attempting to magically induce the collaboration of supernatural forces. However, in both cases, ritual enabled political leaders to extend their hegemony without actual engagement in battle. It may also be suggested that the rulers would have found it comparatively easier to mobilize larger numbers for such demonstrations of power rather than for actual combat. It has been observed that, even among the "fierce Yanomamo," there is a tendency among individuals to avoid actual combat and, despite claims to "valour," a considerable number within the group may not have

22. *Dhātuvaṃsa*, pp. 70–2; Paranavitana was the first scholar to direct attention to the value of this historical source. For a detailed presentation of the material, see Paranavitana (ed.), *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon,* Vol 1, Pt. 1. Colombo: Ceylon University Press Board, 1959, p.150.

ever taken part in war.[23] Ritualized political aggression of the type examined above constituted a device which enabled the conversion of power into hegemony. The "flower wars" of the Aztecs and the "pounding matches" of the Yanomamo appear to be similar devices, though the former involved the deliberately controlled, and escalated, application of violence while the latter was evidently a device for resolving intra-group competition.[24] The possibility of utilizing ritualized political aggression as an alternative to the actual application (and resultant "consumption") of force was generally limited to situations of struggle for hegemony – as distinct from aggrandizement of the territorial state. However, in the long run, the hegemonic relationship could be the precursor to territorial incorporation.

Though, as noted above, there were certain instances in the expansion of the Kusalānkanda polity of defeated rulers being put to death, generally the strategy of the victor was to transform rivals to clients of subordinate status who paid him tribute and provided troops for his army whenever the need arose. The chronicle *Dhātuvaṃsa* would have us believe that all the members of the ruling lineage at Kataragama were killed by Goṭhābhaya,[25] but inscriptions from the area present a different picture. Though their power may have been broken, certain members of this lineage did continue to rule their chiefdom for quite some time.[26] The pace of the evolution of administrative arrangements conducive to centralization was very slow and, in the absence of such arrangements, the elimination of local rulers was counterproductive. On the other hand, it is also likely that some of the weaker rulers preferred submission to military defeat. South Asian treatises on politics like the *Arthaśāstra* provide directions for rulers placed in situations of inequality of power. The weak ruler was to accept subordination, offering tribute, ceding his recources if forced to, and even providing hostages, the aim being to await an opportunity when the situation could be reversed.[27] Thus, while Hallpike's view of the non-competitiveness of simpler societies may not apply in this particular context,[28] it is possible to suggest that leaders of warfare in early times tended to prefer reduction of vanquished rulers to client status to their physical elimination, and imposition of hegemony to total destruction of polities. Consideration of tangible political and economic advantages appears to have been an important factor behind such a course of action. While force displayed in the rituals of aggression was not "consumed" during the process, the extension of hegemonic domination in turn helped to further enhance the power of the dominant polity, An expanding polity would find access to new human resources after each such acquisition of a client polity and a wider source of recruits for its next encounter with a neighbouring polity. Arresting the continued expansion of such a polity would indeed be a formidable task, even if the threatened foes did succeed in forming a defensive alliance at an early stage.

23. Ferguson, *op. cit.*

24. Ferguson (*op. cit.*) and Ross Hassig, "Warfare and the Aztec State," paper presented to the Advanced Seminar on Expanding States and Indigenous Warfare, School of American Research, Santa Fe, New Mexico, April 1989.

25. *Dhātuvaṃsa*, p. 29.

26. See Paranavitana, *Inscriptions of Ceylon*. pp. 42–4.

27. *Arthaśāstra*, R. Shamasastry (ed.) Mysore: Raghuvir, 1951, pp. 298–301.

28. C.R. Hallpike, *The Principles of Social Evolution*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 59, 89, 102.

Warfare under the Early State

While ritualized political aggression did contribute to the expansion of the Kusalānkanda polity, There is little doubt that the violent and extensive military campaigns of Duṭṭhagāmaṇī in the second century B.C. constituted a catalyst of primary significance in the process leading to the formation of the Anurādhapura state. This is not to imply that warfare was the sole factor behind the emergence of the Anurādhapura state: it was only one among a multiplicity of factors behind this development.[29] The period from the second century B.C. to the third century A.D. may be described as the period of the Early State. In terms of developments in the field of irrigation technology, it was the period during which reservoirs capable of irrigating an area more than a single village, canal systems which transcended the boundaries of village settlements and sluices which enabled stricter control of the outflow of water from irrigation systems came into use. Coeval with the evolution of the Early State was the increasing trend among the rulers of Anurādhapura to participate in irrigation activity, but some of the irrigation works of enhanced capacity were constructed and owned by powerful lineages in each locality and represented the earliest and the most common type of private property in the island. Though South Indian centres were more important than the ports of the island in the early trade between Rome and South Asia, Sri Lanka was gaining prominence in this trade by the time the *Geographia*, the Greek text attributed to Ptolemy, was written.[30] Increasing commercial relations with the West as well as within the South Asian region promoted processes of monetization which constituted an important characteristic feature of this period. Parallel to these changes in the economy was the transformation of the levies collected by the rulers from tribute to tax (*kara*) on productive resources and tolls (*suṅka*) on commodities.

The period of the Early State witnessed the evolution of administrative institutions which gradually supplanted rulers of local polities by taking over such functions as the collection of revenue and the administration of justice. By about the middle of the second century A.D., inscriptions reveal that orders issued at Anurādhapura were being implemented in the far south of the island. Thus, the transformation of hegemonic domination it enjoyed over certain parts of the island into territorial incorporation appears to have been another achievement of the Early State. However, it is not been argued here that there was a clear transition from the hegemonic state to the territorial state in the manner that Luttwak proposed in his study of the

29. For a review of the process of state formation in Sri Lanka, see R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, "Social Function and Political Power: A Case Study of State Formation in Irrigation Society," *The Study of the State*, Henri J.M. Claessen and Peter Skalnik (ed.), The Hague: Mouton, 1981, pp. 133–54.

30 Ptolemaeus, *Geographia*, S. Munster (ed.), Basle, 1540, reprinted with Introduction by R. Skelton, Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1966, pp. 127, 136–7, 148.

Roman Empire.[31] The history of the Sri Lankan state seems to reflect the co-existence of the hegemonic and the territorial aspects, each aspect gaining greater prominence from time to time, depending on a variety of factors. It may indeed be argued that this was not a unique phenomenon. While it is analytically useful to distinguish the hegemonic and the territorial as two distinct forms of domination, most historical states were mixed types that represented a combination of both forms. The hegemonic form of domination, which appeared at an earlier time in history, has proved to be remarkably resilient and adaptable to varied stages of history. Thus the sharp distinction that some scholars see between the territorial and the hegemonic states in history may amount to an exaggerated perception.

It is particularly important to note in this context that not all the prestate peoples within the island were totally incorporated within the Early State or some states which succeeded it. It would seem that several groups of totemistic kin groups, whose subsistence was based on practices varying from food-gathering and hunting to swidden forms of cultivation, lay scattered within the area which the state claimed as its territory, but they were virtually outside its control. Since these groups produced very little or no surplus, their subjugation would not present a compelling economic attraction. Exposure to techniques of irrigated agriculture and to the language and the religion of the dominant group paved the way to the continuous assimilation of certain of these groups while some others would have been attracted to large settlements where there was a demand for their services as hunters. For instance, the hunters who were provided with a special quarter in the suburbs of Anurādhapura, and were expected to provide venison and boar's meat to meet the needs of the city,[32] were probably drawn from among such groups.

The subsistence technology of hunter-gatherers could be carried over into combat,[33] and, as such, was of military use to the state. It is very likely that warriors who used the central highlands as a base in their struggles against those who controlled Anurādhapura, such as Vaṭṭagāmaṇī in the first century B.C., employed hunter-gatherers in campaigns. In the twelfth century, Parākramabāhu 1 recruited into his army hunters and other men of the forests who were skilled in following tracks in the mountains and forests even at night. They were also employed in missions to assassinate the king's enemies.[34] As late as in the eighteenth century, the Dutch were looking into the possibility of recruiting men from these groups into their armed forces since they were considered to be "brave fellows in the hunt and expert bowmen."[35]

---

31. Luttwak, *op cit.*, pp. 4–5.

32. *Mahāvaṃsa*, 10.95; *Vaṃsatthappakāsinī*, G. P. Malalsekera (ed.), London: Pali Text Society, 1977, p.295.

33. Brian Ferguson, "Explaining War," paper presented to the Advanced Seminar on the Anthropology of War, School of American Research, Santa Fe, New Mexico, November, 1986.

34. *Cūlavaṃsa* 69.20; 72.208.

35. Ryckloff van Goens, *Memoirs of Ryckloff van Goens*, E. Reimers (tr.), Colombo: Government Press, 1932, p.44.

The hunter-gatherers did constitute a source of auxiliary bowmen for Sri Lankan states well into the nineteenth century, and their familiarity with forest tracts was particularly useful in times of warfare.[36] Thus these prestate peoples were being subjected to a gradual process of assimilation while their services were utilized by the state.

Despite trends towards assimilation, the distinct status of these groups finds expression in the concept of a single category which was supposed to include all these varied kin groups within the island. Like the Amerindian terms *maku* and *poito* cited by Whitehead,[37] the term Pulinda originally used by the Sri Lankan chroniclers to designate this category was trans-ethnic in its connotations. It had wide currency in the Sanskrit literature of South Asia and had been employed to denote "wild and savage" men of mountainous and forest tracts and groups of hunters and gatherers occupying the marginal areas on the borders of kingdoms.[38] In the ideology of the Sri Lankan state as reflected in the chronicles, Pulindas are conveninently categorized as a single group descended from a common ancestor, and this categorization is reminiscent of the connotations of the term Chichimecs in Aztec usage.[39] Unlike the Chichimecs, the Pulindas were not a "border people" in the strict sence of the term, and they are presented as a group which occupied the central highlands "with the assent" (*anuññāya*) of the king of Anurādhapura.[40] The case of the Pulindas provides an example of the creation of a new identity for prestate peoples, overarching

---

36. *Cūlavaṃsa* 69.20; J.E. Sedaraman (ed.), *Āhälēpola Varṇṇanāva.* In *Praśasti Kāvya Rasaya,* Colombo: Gunasena, 1970, p. 144; Ralph Pieris, *Sinhalese Social Organization,* Colombo: University Press, 1956, p. 181.

37. Neil Lancelot Whitehead, "Tribes Make States and States Make Tribes: Warfare and the Creation of Colonial Tribe and State in Northeastern South America," paper presented to the Advanced Seminar on Expanding States and Indigenous Warfare, School of American Research, Santa Fe, New Mexico, April 1989.

38. Romila Thapar, "The Image of the Barbarian in Early India," *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* Vol. 13, No. 4, 1971, pp. 422-4; V.S. Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary,* Kyoto: Rinsen, 1978, p.1035.

39 Hassig, *op. cit.*

40 *Mahāvaṃsa* 7.68. Anthropological investigations in the early part of this century led to the view that Veddas (from Sanskrit *vyādha,* "hunters"), who may be regarded as the descendants of the Pulindas, occupied the "triangular tract lying between the eastern slopes of the central mountain massif and the sea" (C.G. & B.Z. Seligmann, *The Veddas,* Cambridge: University Press, 1911, p.vii). In more recent times, James Brow (*Vedda Villages of Anuradhapura: the Historical Anthropology of a Community in Sri Lanka,* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1978) has shown this view to be inaccurate and has drawn attention to the existence of other groups in the Anurādhapura District in the north-central parts of the island.

their kin groups, as a consequence of contact with a state. It supports Whitehead's hypothesis that the process of "tribalization" he noted in relation to colonial contact situations in South America may be also found in precolonial contexts. However, in this particular case, the process of "tribalization" was taking place not in the outer perimeter of the state as Whitehead suggested,[41] but very much in the interior of the territory claimed by the state.

It is particularly striking that, unlike in ancient Indian and more recent Sri Lankan usage, the Pulindas were not listed as "barbarians" (*mleccha, milakkha*) in the early Sri Lankan writings. While the hunters who served the city were assigned a low rank in the allocation of urban space, "the Pulindas of the highlands" were supposed to be descended from the mythical founder of the Sri Lankan dynasty, and thus they ranked well above the artisan castes of low status.[42] On the other hand, the term "barbarians" appears to have been sometimes used with a particular political connotation: it is interesting to note that, in certain writings, it denoted "foreigners" including sedentary agricultural peoples with a developed culture, like the Damilas of South India, whose states posed a potential threat to the Sri Lankan state.[43] The term Pulinda, if not, at least in certain instances, the term "barbarian," seems to denote a category based as much on political as on techno-cultural criteria.

In its formative phase, the Early State was continually at war to maintain its hold over its territory, to suppress "rebellions" by local magnates and rival claimants to the throne, and at times to counter armed migrations from South India. A series of events which occurred not long after the time of Duṭṭhagāmaṇī focused attention on the crucial importance of military preparedness for the maintenance of the power of Anurādhapura. One was an uprising in the southeastern parts of the island which remained unsuppressed for about twelve years.[44] Parallel to these developments was a wave of armed immigrants who arrived from South India and succeeded in capturing Anurādhapura. It was after a series of prolonged campaigns that the dislodged ruler Vaṭṭagāmaṇī (ca. 103–77 B.C.) regained power. Political disorder did continue for quite some time, and often rebels were at large. It was in fact a successful rebel, Kuṭakaṇṇa Tissa (ca. 41–19 B.C.), who first paid attention to the crucial task of fortifying the capital and developed Anurādhapura into a circumvallated stronghold.[45]

---

41. Whitehead, *op. cit.*

42. R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, "The People of the Lion: the Sinhala Identity and Ideology in History and Historiography," *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict,* Jonathan Spencer (ed.), London: Routledge, 1990, pp. 48–57.

43. *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī*, T.W. Rhys Davids & J. Estlin Carpenter (ed), Pt. 1, London: Pali Text Society, 1886, p. 176.

44. *Sammohavinodanī*, A.P. Buddhadatta (ed.), London: Pali Text Society, 1923, pp. 445–6; *Sīhaḷavatthupakaraṇa*, P. Buddhadatta (ed.), Colombo: Anula Press, p. 162.

45 *Mahāvaṃsa* 34.33.

Though this did not deter some rebels and rival claimants to the throne from taking the city by assault, the continuation of this emphasis on enhancing the defensive capabilities of the capital city was an important trend in the period of the Early State and beyond. It was another successful rebel, Vasabha (ca. 65–109), who strengthened the defensive wall of the city, raising it to 18 cubits, more than double its former height, and added fortified gate-houses at the main entrances.[46] Anurādhapura, with its imposing city-wall and moat, became the most impressive symbol of military power in the island and in Sri Lankan thought, as in South Asian writings in general, circumvallation came to be considered an essential attribute of a city.[47]

Increasing emphasis on military arrangements was reflected in the growth in importance of the commander of troops (*senāpati*). As would be expected, this was a position which had to be reserved for the most trusted members of the ruler's kin group. In addition to such precautions, the kings, who were operating in a context of intense competition even within the ruling group, tried to prevent concentration of power in the hands of a single official. Thus, though the defence of the capital was a primary concern, the management of the city was not placed under the commander of the troops: it was given over to the Warden of the City (*nagaraguttika*), a separate official appointed by the king.[48] It is also evident that the rulers tended to avoid the creation of a large standing army constituted of local draftees. In times of war and in instances when the city was directly threatened, they relied more on a militia mobilized through the mediation of nobles at the court and "great men" in the rural hinterland. On the other hand, on matters such as their personal safety and the routine security needs of the city, the rulers depended on bands of "strangers," foreign mercenaries who were expected to be personally loyal to the king and were placed under their own commander. It is important to note that such arrangements, in which the personal relationships between the ruler and the functionaries wielding power were the primary consideration, tended to inhibit the growth of a bureaucracy in the strict sense of the term.

In the period between the accession of Kuṭakaṇṇa Tissa in the first century B.C. and the reign of Mahāsena (ca. A.D. 276–303) there is only one clear instance of a successful invasion in which South Indians participated. Even in this instance, the invasion was led by Iḷanāga, a former ruler of Anurādhapura who had been deposed, and he appears to have depended as much on local troops from the southeastern parts of the island as on the South Indian warriors he brought. A late

46. *Mahāvaṃsa* 35.96–7.

47. R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, "Anuradhapura: Ritual, Power and Resistance in a Precolonial South Asian City," *Domination and Resistance,* Daniel Miller, Michael Rowlands & Christopher Tilley (ed.), London: Unwin Hyman, 1989, pp. 156–9.

48. Though the term *nagaraguttika* finds mention in the early part of the chronicle (*Mahāvaṃsa* 10.81), the office would have been created in the period of the Early State, after the circumvallated city came into being.

chronicle, datable to about the eighteenth century, speaks of an invasion which is said to have taken place in the second century A.D.,[49] but the historicity of this event is open to serious doubt. The success of the Early State of Sri Lanka in providing security from South Indian intervention perhaps owes as much to the comparatively slower processes of state formation in the southernmost parts of India closest to the island as to its own military capacity. The situation in South India was to dramatically change with the rise to power of the Pallavas, Pāṇḍyas and the Cōḷas.

Warfare and the Mature State

The period from the third to the ninth century witnessed the intensive involvement of the state in irrigation activity which resulted in the completion of sixty-six large-scale projects including twelve gigantic reservoirs. The first of the new type of reservoirs, the Minneri built by Mahāsena, had an estimated capacity of 87 million cubic metres and was capable of irrigating more than 4450 hectares of rice fields. The most important irrigation works were located in two core regions, one of them being the hinterland of Anurādhapura while the other lay in the area around the eastern city of Polonnaruva. The investment of labour resources in irrigation activity brought returns to the rulers in the form of enhanced taxes and irrigation dues. Evidently, the rulers were also aware of the long term political implications of their irrigation activities. By constructing large irrigation works they were creating the preconditions for future concentrations of population which would be crucial in warfare for maintaining and extending their power within the island and for resisting external intervention. They do appear to have been very selective in deciding on the location of the large-scale irrigation works and clearly avoided sponsoring major works in the peripheral areas, the bases from which resistance to Anurādhapura was often encountered. In this context, it is important to note that even during this period irrigation activity did not become a monopoly of the state. While the construction of irrigation works in the peripheral areas was directed primarily by the local potentates, even in the core areas, the smaller irrigation works were constructed or/and owned by leading local lineages and monasteries. Some of the minor irrigation works continued to be communally owned by the respective village communities as in the earliest times. This meant that, while irrigation dues were an important source of revenue for the state, they were also the basis of the power of certain social groups who were capable of resisting it.

One of the most common tactics employed in warfare in irrigation societies was the destruction of reservoirs and canals in the territories of foes. When used systematically, such tactics would effectively undermine the economic and demographic bases of the power of a potential enemy or a hostile state engaged in war. According to the *Arthaśāstra,* the aim of the enterprising ruler seeking dominance was to ensure that the enemy's sources of wealth including irrigation works, mines, roads, and the sources of elephants and timber were destroyed or rendered unproductive.[50] It was

49. *Rājāvaliya,* A.V. Suravira (ed.), Colombo: Lake House, 1976; pp. 186–7.

50. *Arthaśāstra,* p. 377.

expected that the resultant impoverishment of the subjects would make them migrate, thereby undermining the demographic advantages of the rival, or that it would at least alienate the ruler from his subjects. As pointed out by Sumati, distruption of the production processes by destroying irrigation reservoirs was also common in South Indian warfare as reflected in *Sangam* literature.[51] In Sri Lanka where the economy of the core regions was heavily dependent on large-scale irrigation works, such destruction would have created major setbacks which necessitated many years of reparative work involving massive diversions of labour and other resources. Even in times of peace, individual acts of sabotage carried out with the intention of causing damage to irrigation works owned by rivals were not uncommon. The fifth-century Sri Lankan text *Samantapāsādikā* prescribes stiff penalties on those found guilty of such acts while the *Arthaśāstra* recommends the death penalty for a miscreant guilty of destroying the dam of a reservoir if it was filled to capacity at the time of the deed.[52] Referring to a later period, the *Cūlavaṃsa* describes how contenders for power in the island wrought destruction "by breaching reservoirs filled with water and by destroying everywhere all weirs and canals."[53] Under these conditions flight was not an easy option for defenders in irrigation society.

The Mature State was more intensely involved in hydraulic enterprise in comparison with the earlier state formation, but it is interesting to note that it was at the same time less marked by centralized forms of administration. Further, this hydraulic state continued to be a trading state and, hence, long-distance trade is another aspect which helps to understand factors behind warfare during this period. The diplomatic initiatives of Sri Lankan rulers who developed links with Byzantium as well as the court of the Early Sungs in China helped the island's rise in commercial importance and enabled it to benefit from the revival of trade between the Mediterranean region and Asia in the fourth century, after the rise of Byzantium. In the context of the growing importance of sea-routes in this trade, the strategic location of the island in the Indian Ocean proved to be a decisive advantage. The commercial importance of the island was at its height in the fifth century and in the early part of the sixth century, as noted by Cosmas Indicopleustes and Procopius.[54] According to these two writers, it was one of the main bases from which Persian traders sought to acquire Chinese silk for the Mediterranean markets. Persian as well as Ethiopian ships called at its ports, and Sri Lankans used to dispatch their own ships to commercial centres around the Indian Ocean. This extensive network of trade relationships had elevated the ports in the island into centres of trade and transshipment involving such diverse merchandise as precious stones, pearls, aloe, sandalwood, *sisam* logs, pepper, cloves,

---

51. Sumati, *op. cit.*, pp. 37–9.

52. *Samantapāsādikā*, J. Takakusu and M. Nagai (ed.), Vol. 1, London: Pali Text Society, 1924, pp. 345–6; *Arthaśāstra*, 1951, p. 257.

53. *Cūlavaṃsa* 61.64–5.

54. Cosmas Indicopleustes, *The Christian Topography*, F.O. Winstedt (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1909, p. 322; Procopius, *History of the Wars*, H.B. Dewing (tr.), Vol 1, The Loeb Classical Library series, London: Heinemann, 1961, p. 193.

musk, androstachya, brassware, horses and cloth, including silk. Cosmas described the emporia in the island as "the greatest in those parts."[55] The control of this trade was essential in order to ensure the revenues required to maintain the mercenaries as well as the supply of horses needed in warfare.

The Genesis of a Proto-"World Economy" and its Implications for Warfare

The growth of commerce in the Indian Ocean, which linked South Asia with centres of trade as far apart as Rome in the west and Nan-jing in the east, helped to draw the scattered South Asian centres closer. The economic unity that was being induced by the trade networks directs attention to the relevance of Braudel's concept of a *world economy* which he has fashioned after the model suggested by the German term *Weltwirtschaft* as used by Fritz Rorig in the 1930s.[56] Unlike Emmanuel Wallerstein who has emphasized what he isolated as the unique features of the European world economy, the emergence of which he dates in the sixteenth century,[57] Braudel has ventured to recognize the existence of world economies in much earlier times, going back to the time of the Phoenicians. He draws a distinction between the economy of the world of modern times which he calls *the world economy* and *a world economy*:

> The latter only concerns a fragment of the world, an economically autonomous section of the planet able to provide for most of its own needs, a section to which internal links and exchanges give a certain organic unity.[58]

In Braudel's thought a world economy is associated with and characterized by three features: a specific geographical space, a city which dominates the world economy and a hierarchy of zones extending from the core to the periphery.[59] He has attempted to identify several such world economies in Asia, though he has not had the opportunity to examine how far the three characteristics listed above are applicable to these contexts. In one instance, he identifies India, Southeast Asia (Insulinde), and China as three distinct Asian world economies while, in another instance, he speaks of the realm of Islam, India and China as representing three world economies of the East.

---

55. Cosmas, *loc. cit.*

56. Fernand Braudel, *The Perspective of the World,* Civilization and Capitalism, Vol. 3, London: Harper & Row, 1984, p.22. Fritz Rorig, *Mittelalteriche Weltwirtschaft, Blute und Ende einer Weltwirtschaftsperiode* (1933) cited by Braudel (*Ibid.*, p. 634).

57. Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century,* New York: Academic Press, 1974, pp. 15–7.

58. Fernand Braudel, *Afterthoughts on Material Civilization and Capitalism,* tr. Patricia M. Ranum, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977, pp. 83–4. See also Braudel, *The Perspective of the World,* pp. 22–5.

59. Braudel, *Afterthoughts on Material Civilization and Capitalism,* pp. 82–3; *The Prespective of the World,* pp. 27–8.

It is clear that his views are seminal and still tentative. Braudel further presents the hypothesis that commercial exchange among Asian world economies tended to be limited up to the fifteenth century while the subsequent three centuries witnessed the emergence of a single economy incorporating all three Asian world economies. The centre of this "super" Asian economy, he suggests, was located at one time in Southeast Asia. In attempting to postulate the parallel existence of several world economies till their incorporation into the European world economy in the eighteenth century, he presents an attractive concept useful in the analysis of long-term changes in human history.[60]

Any attempt to adopt and elaborate Braudel's model has to begin with some careful distinctions and clarifications. The first and most fundamental distinction that has to be made is the one between the capitalist world economy that came into existence by the eighteenth century and the earlier, less developed, types of world economies. The latter are best described as nascent and inchoate "world economies" or proto-"world economies," depending on the specific level of development in each case. It may even be pointed out that such typological distinctions are implicit in some of Braudel's writings. In one passage, he refers to "the appearance of a true world-wide economy at the end of the eighteenth century."[61] On the other hand, in certain statements Braudel seems to be seeking to deliberately underemphasize this important distinction, for he follows the lead of such predecessors as Mommsen, Rostowtzeff and Pirenne in attributing to capitalism a much earlier genesis than most contemporary historians would.[62]

The second point relates to the recognition of the more important world economies in Asia prior to the colonial impact. To present Braudel's views in a slightly modified form, four world economies may be identified, namely, those of Western, Southern, Southeastern and Eastern regions of Asia. Following Bluss, Braudel has also spoken of the possibility of identifying another world economy created by the Japanese in the seventeenth century which incorporated Korea, Ryukyu islands and Formosa.[63] The trading world of the Polynesians is another area which deserves attention. That trade contacts transcending the limits of these early world economies were stronger and more frequent than Braudel supposes is a point that needs to be emphasized. Braudel correctly emphasizes the growth of contacts between China and the other three world economies in Ming times. However, relations among South Asian, Southeast Asian and Chinese traders, which were the results of initiatives taken primarily by the first two partners, especially the Southeast Asians, can be traced back at least to the early centuries of the Christian era. The commercial contacts between South Asia and West Asia, on the other hand, were developing even from the proto-historic times.

---

60. *Cf.* Braudel, *Afterthoughts on Material Civilization and Capitalism,* pp. 83–4 and *The Perspective of the World,* p. 486.

61. Braudel, *Afterthoughts on Material Civilization and Capitalism,* p. 93.

62. See Braudel, *The Perspective of the World,* pp. 620–1.

63. Braudel, *The Perspective of the World,* p. 533.

In the present context, South Asia deserves special attention. The growth of commerce drew together the scattered centres in the area from the early historical times. As noted earlier, even as far back as the fourth century before Christ, such distant places like Sind at the mouth of the Indus and Sri Lanka were beginning to be linked by yet tenuous bonds of long-distance trade. By the sixth century of the Christian era it would seem that a trading system, which linked far-flung areas, was in operation. It was this system of interlinked trade networks which injected the basic sense of geographical unity that is embodied in the concept of the Jambudvīpa, according to which the South Asian landmass was considered, despite its vastness, to be forming a single unit. The proto-"world economy" of South Asia represented the unity that had been brought about by the trading networks over both land and sea. This unity was characterized by the acceptance of common standards of weights and measures as also of common concepts of currency. It is a reflection of this unity that common currency units came to be used within this extensive region. Like the all too ubiquitous *rupee* of a later era, the *kahāpana* was a common medium of exchange in trade transactions executed in the Gangetic Valley as well as in the southern island of Sri Lanka. Its use was not easily supplanted by Roman currency, though the latter began to reach this region in large quantities and its reliability as to weight and quality was being appreciated. This economic unity of South Asia gained strength from the interpenetration of cultural influences which generally tended to accompany trade. It is perhaps possible to detect a dialectical relationship between the development processes of world civilizations and world economies. As Braudel remarked, world civilizations and world economies "join hands and help each other."[64]

Even at the risk of provoking controversy, one may suggest that it is possible to recognize four main subregions within the South Asian proto-"world economy." One was the Gangetic Valley. It opened on to the Bay of Bengal, but there were special problems of navigation in this sea and for several centuries the sea was more a barrier than a medium which facilitated commerce. During that period, the land routes that linked this subregion with the Indus Valley and the southern part of the subcontinent were more important in its economic life. It is probably from about the fifth century A.D. that sea routes became important in the long-distance trade of this subregion. However, products of the Gangetic subregion like the finely baked, lustrous, Northern Black Polished Ware and the exquisite textiles of Vārānasī were known and being distributed widely within the South Asian world economy. The second subregion was the valley of the Indus, important for its products as well as for its role as an intermediate stage in the trade between East Asia and the West. Trade linking the Mediterranean and West Asian centres with China passed through this subregion, utilizing the passes on its north. The West coast of the subcontinent represents a third subregion. This was, on the one hand, a source of such durable luxuries as diamonds and other precious stones, pearls and luxury consumables like spices, especially pepper. These were staples of trade *between* world economies. On the other hand, this subregion also produced articles of daily use in demand in many different parts of the South Asian world economy, like cotton cloth and good timber suitable especially for ship-building.

64. Braudel, *The Prespective of the World*, p. 66.

The fourth subregion, which is the most relevant in the present context, lay in the southeastern part of the subcontinent, in particular, in the area known as the Coromandel coast. Its products included not only luxury items, like precious stones, pearls, and later silks and diamonds, but also grain, brassware and cheaper textiles for everyday use. Three areas occupied intermediate positions in relation to the main subregions. In the case of Kaliṅga, in certain periods it was integrated with the Gangetic Valley while in other periods it would be more closely associated with the Coromandel coast. Similarly, the Maldives had close relations at different times with the West Asian world economy, the Southeast Asian world economy, the west Indian coastal subregion or the Coromandel subregion. Sri Lanka tended to be mostly an element within the Coromandel subregion. However, it occupied a special position owing to the close economic relations it maintained with especially the western subregion as well as with the East Asian, Southeast Asian, West Asian and Mediterranean world economies. While these zonal divisions are analytically useful, it is relevant to note that the economic unity of the South Asian world economy overarched the division of the economy into subregions. Though there are instances of the same type of commodity being produced in different subregions, there was at the same time a certain regional specialization in production, based partly on the natural distribution of resources and the characteristics of soil and climate. Such specialization was conducive to interdependence and to the unity of this world economy.

Unity is not the same as centralization. In fact, the proto-"world economy" of South Asia differed from the world economy of the post-eighteenth century era in that it lagged far behind the latter in respect of centralization. Braudel's theoretical postulate that "there is only room for one centre at a time in a world economy"[65] is not always substantiated in history. This is implicitly admitted in his own writings. With reference to the European world economy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, he states that "no one was quite sure where the centre of gravity lay."[66] What was true of an incipient phase of capitalism may be equally applicable to late capitalism. It is not easy to confidently assert that the centre of the modern late-capitalist world economy is located in New York or to determine how far certain other centres like Tokyo have taken over some functions of the leading centre. The centre of a world economy may not be easily detected, especially during a phase marked by intense competition. One may further suggest that this would apply with greater force to a world economy in its nascent phase when it may have not just a single dominant centre but a multiplicity of competing centres. In fact, Braudel recognized the "profusion of centres" as a sign of the immaturity or the decline of a world economy.[67] In the case of the South Asian world economy during the period under discussion, the lack of a dominant centre and the presence of a multiplicity of centres are indicative of its nascent nature; hence our term, the proto-"world economy."

65 Braudel, *The Perspective of the World*, p. 33.

66 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

Sombart has drawn attention to the important role of warfare in the consolidation of the modern capitalist world economy. His view that war created capitalism and his description of capitalism as "the plant that sprang from the warlike root" may amount to an exaggeration, but there is little doubt about the crucial role of war in the development of world economies.[68] Braudel's statement that "setting war in the context of the world economy enables one to discover a new meaning to human conflicts"[69] is an important guideline in the present context for the study of war within a subregion of the South Asian proto-"world economy." As noted above, despite its unity, it appears to have been an economy with several co-existing and competing centres. Tensions arising out of such conditions of competition, especially within the subregions, would be reflected in diplomatic effort, in localized and limited conflicts, as well as in war which became the means of controlling or manipulating trade in the interests of certain commercial centres at the expense of others. By about the ninth century, two external factors in particular had left a decisive impact on the proto-"world economy" of South Asia. One was the decline of the Mediterranean trade which resulted in the contraction of the demand for goods from South Asia. This was to have a radical and adverse effect on those centres of commerce which owed their prosperity largely to the trade with the Mediterranean region and a more general effect on the level of monetization. The second factor was the disruption of trade with the East Asian proto-"world economy" as a consequence of the period of political instability witnessed in China during the late T'ang times. This was to continue during the period of the Five Dynasties. It was only after the establishment the power of the Southern Sung that conditions matured for these trade contacts to develop. Trade of the Indian Ocean did continue, but at a much weaker level. If the level of commercial activity did recede, there were also more competitors for the diminishing pie. Arab as well as Southeast Asian traders were quite active in the Indian Ocean. The contraction of opportunities for commercial activity intensified the competition even within the subregions of the South Asian world economy. One of the most important consequences of this situation was its impact on warfare. The increase in the incidence of military conflict in the area around the Palk Straits during the period between the ninth and thirteenth centuries, which some scholars have characterized as "politics of plunder" and "a pathological symptom,"[70] may to a considerable extent reflect the intensity of this competition. Sri Lanka came to be deeply involved in the competition within the area which included the states across the Palk Straits, located in the area occupied by the modern Indian States of Tamilnad, Kerala and Andhra, as well as presumably the Maldives. Trade generated competition not only among the rival states in the region which sought to gain its control but also among contending centres within the country. Competition for the control of long-distance trade was to be one of the primary factors behind warfare during this period.

---

68. See, for instance, Werner Sombart, *The Quintessence of Capitalism: A Study of the History and Psychology of the Modern Businessman,* tr. & ed. M. Epstein, London: Fisher, Unwin, 1915, p. 76.

69. Braudel, *The Perspective of the World,* p. 57.

70. See George W. Spencer, *The Politics of Expansion: the Chola Conquest of Sri Lanka and Sri Vijaya,* Madras: New Era Publications, 1983, pp. 6-9.

A persistent problem faced by the rulers of Anurādhapura was the threat posed by rebels in the south who sought to win for themselves a share of the long-distance trade. From about the latter part of the sixth century it increasingly became usual for traders in the western part of the Indian Ocean, like Persians and Arabs, to sail beyond Sri Lanka and proceed eastward to marts located around the Bay of Bengal, and sometimes as far as China. These changes in the patterns of navigation in the Indian Ocean meant that, though the northern ports like Mahātittha and Gokaṇṇa which were easily controlled from Anurādhapura were still important as emporia, ports in the southern coast of Sri Lanka were becoming more attractive to foreign merchants.[71] When compared with the northern ports, the southern ports also allowed easier access to gem-producing areas of the island. Consequently, rebels who succeeded in wresting control over the southern coastal region and resisting the power of Anurādhapura could draw considerable revenues from long-distance trade.

The inability of the Anurādhapura state to control Rohana, the southern region, by military means becomes a prominent feature of the political conditions during this period. The strategy behind nearly two centuries of effort to bring Rohana under control included frequent invasions, setting up garrisons and "protecting the ocean," an euphemism which probably denoted naval activities including patrols to dissuade foreign merchantmen from visiting southern ports.[72] However, these means did not turn out to be effective. Even in the sixth century, Cosmas noted that the island was divided into two kingdoms. At that time the more important emporia were controlled by the northern ruler, but the gem-producing area was within the other kingdom.[73] Paradoxically enough, it was when Anurādhapura was captured by southern rulers like Mahānāga (ca. 573–5) and Moggallāna III (ca. 618–23) that the whole island was united within a single kingdom, but such unity was only temporary. Conditions had not improved appreciably at the time of the visit of Vajrabodhi in the eighth century. This Buddhist pilgrim found that the gem mines were still within the area under the rule of the southern kingdom.[74] By the end of the eighth century, it was clear to the rulers of Anurādhapura that it was not feasible to seek a solution to the problem of Rohana by military means alone. Mahinda II (ca. 777–97) invaded Rohana and ravaged the land, but, instead of thinking of annexation, he preferred to enter into a treaty with the ruler of Rohana. The latter agreed to pay tribute and both rulers accepted the Gāḷha river as the boundary between the two kingdoms.[75]

---

71. R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, "Changing Patterns of Navigation in the Indian Ocean and their Impact on Precolonial Sri Lanka," *The Indian Ocean: Explorations in History, Commerce and Politics,* Satish Chandra (ed.), New Delhi: Sage, 1987, p. 76.

72. *Cūlavaṃsa* 41.35.

73. Cosmas, *op, cit.,* p. 322.

74. Sylvain Lévi, "Les Missions de Wang Hiuen-ts'e dans l'Inde: Ceylan et Chine," *Journal Asiatique,* Vol. 9. 1900, pp. 419–21.

75. *Cūlavaṃsa* 48. 131–2.

The agreement between the rulers of Anurādhapura and Rohana represented the recognition by the former of the fact that the southernmost part of the island, which had been territorially incorporated in the period of the Early State, could no longer be held by Anurādhapura under the territorial form of domination. The hegemonic form of domination had again become more suitable to meet the needs of the prevailing political conditions. The treaty brought about a semblance of political unity in the island at a time when Sri Lanka was coming under increasing pressure from the rising power of South Indian kingdoms. Since this time, though there were instances when military pressure was used, as in the reigns of Sena I (ca. 833–53) and Udaya II (ca. 887–98), the rulers of Anurādhapura relied more on support for rival claimants to power in Rohana, marriage alliances and other diplomatic effort as the main means of influencing the southern kingdom and obtaining its cooperation.

Resources for War

The failure of the agriculturally more prosperous and densely populated northern kingdom to retain Rohana within its territory becomes understandable when one notes that centrifugal tendencies gained prominence during a period of intense struggle among rival claimants to the throne as well as between the two leading clans, the Lambakaṇṇas and the Moriyas whose collaboration was essential for the proper funcitoning of the Anurādhapura kingdom. Internal divisions precluded the possibility of the Anurādhapura rulers putting their demographic advantages to effective use in warfare. On the other hand, neither side had a clear advantage as regards the technology of warfare. Though the chroniclers speak of the "fourfold constitution" (*caturaṅgamahāsenā* i.e. charioteers, elephant-riders, cavalry and infantry) of the Anurādhapura army which is said to have been "fully equipped" (*sabbūpakaraṇānugo*),[76] such poetic descriptions do not present a reliable picture of the actual conditions. Descriptions of battles from this period contain no direct references to the use of chariots. They were, anyway, hardly suitable for the type of terrain in which the battles with the rebels were fought. Elephants were available to both sides. Horses were a scarce and imported luxury item dependent on long-distance trade. The favoured position that the Persians enjoyed in the island's trade with the West, which Procopius noted, was largely due to their role in the supply of this valued commodity.[77] The continued participation of the rulers of Rohana in long-distance trade meant that they also enjoyed access to the supply of horses. In fact, it is noteworthy that both elephants and horses were among the items that Maninda II required his rival in Rohana to provide as part of the tribute.[78] The dominant element in the army was the infantry, and it continued to be largely constituted of a militia mobilized for the occasion by the leading men in the kingdom rather than a trained, standing army. Under such conditions a crucial role devolved on mercenaries trained for battle who were usually of South Indian extraction. Here again, it becomes evident form descriptions of wars of the times that most local contenders for power employed mercenaries.

76. *Cūlavaṃsa* 48.128.
77. Procopius, *op. cit.*, p. 193.
78. *Cūlavaṃsa* 48.131.

In situations where the foes were more or less equally matched, or even when the invader had a slight edge over his adversary, the selection of the location of the battle was of decisive importance. Usually, it was the rebels rather than the rulers of Anurādhapura who decided where the battle would take place. Thus, though it was sometimes possible to ravage the land, rarely was it possible to capture a rebel leader alive.

A consequence of the important role that mercenary forces played in the frequent warfare of this period was their elevation into positions commanding extensive economic resources and immense influence in the polity. They evidently received high fees from their employers. Commanders of South Indian mercenaries like Potthakuṭṭha and Mahākanda were capable of extending partonage to the Buddhist clergy on a lavish scale, by constructing mansions named after themselves for the use of the monks, by endowing their favourite monasteries with such sources of income as irrigation works and villages, and by donating slaves for their maintenance.[79] Such patronage would have brought returns in terms of extending their influence. On the other hand, the use of mercenaries tended to severely affect the economic resources of contenders for power. Some of the rulers were reduced to dire straits and could meet the costs of warfare only by confiscating monastic wealth, despoiling Buddhist monuments and melting down sacred images. If frequency of wars had made the permanent presence of a trained group of men bearing arms necessary, their very presence in turn created a need for warfare which provided occasions for booty capture. Though maintained at a cost which was not easy to bear, the mercenaries were capable of abruptly changing sides and turning against their erstwhile masters. In the reign of Kassapa II (ca. 650–59) they revolted and burned down the royal palace and the Temple of the Tooth Relic. When the prince Māna who had been selected as the heir to the throne attempted to expel the mercenaries, they succeeded in deposing him and placing a rival on the throne. Potthakuṭṭha, mentioned above, was such a powerful figure in the kingdom that, after the death of Aggabodhi IV (ca. 667–83), he was able to arrest the heir-apparent and to carry on the administration on behalf of the two nominees he successively placed on the throne.[80] A group which had been manipulated by the rulers of Anurādhapura as well as by those who resisted their power had now metamorphosed into a virtually inependendt political force.

Economic Subregions and Political Subsystems

The rise of powerful states in South India which began to compete intensely to increase their own shares of the trade in the Indian Ocean was a factor which decisively affected warfare and political conditions in the island from about the seventh century. These developments meant that the Anurādhapura state which had been attempting to extend its control over the southern parts of the island began in turn to feel the effects of other states trying to extend their power at its expense. The struggles for power in the island provided opportunities for intervention by South

79. *Cūlavaṃsa* 46.19–24.

80. See *Cūlavaṃsa* 44.134; 45.11, 19–21; 46.39–46.

Indian states. It is not unlikely that some of the participants in local struggles of the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries had obtained assistance from South Indian states, especially the Pāṇḍyas whose kingdom was the closest to the island. The *Cūlavaṃsa* records a successful South Indian invasion which took place in about the third decade of the fifth century, and the northern part of the island is said to have been ruled by Tamil princes for over quarter of a century.[81] The chronicles present a rather biased picture of Tamil rule and speak of the persecution of Buddhism during this time.[82] However, it is clear from the inscriptions that the Tamil princes were astute rulers who were aware of the advantages of extending patronage to the dominant religion. It is also interesting to note that their records are inscribed in the local language rather than their own.[83] Though the Tamil princes could not suppress resistance in the southern parts of the island, they enjoyed support from amongst some leading lineages in the north. This meant that opponents of their rule found it difficult to dislodge them. It was after a long-drawn and difficult series of campaigns, in which many battles were fought at fortified strongholds, that Dhātusena captured power from these Tamil princes. Mendis was inclined to believe that the invaders were from the Pāṇḍya kingdom across the Palk Straits, but his view is open to doubt.[84]

An even more significant instance of South Indian intervention was witnessed in the latter part of the seventh century when Mānavamma established a new dynasty at Anurādhapura with aid from the Pallava court. Despite the initial client status of Mānavamma, the friendly ties that his successors maintained with the rulers of Rohana enabled their dynasty to consolidate its power and to assert its independence.

In a study of the South Indian invasions and their effects published almost thirty years ago, the present writer drew attention to the importance of the ninth century as marking the beginning of a new phase in the history of military activities in which Sri Lanka was involved.[85] A clear change in the nature of South Indian military intervention in the island is evident from this time. The kingdom of the Pallavas was now on the decline, and the states of the Pāṇḍyas, Rāṣṭrakūṭas and the Cōḷas who had risen to greater prominence were not content with providing support for rival claimants to the Sri Lankan throne. Some of the invasions despatched by them plundered and devastated the cities, seeking thereby not only to collect booty but also to disrupt trade and to divert foreign merchants to their own ports. In certain other instances, the invaders were attempting to annex Sri Lankan territory

81. *Cūlavaṃsa* 38.11, 29–34.

82. *Cūlavaṃsa* 38.37.

83. *Epigraphia Zeylanica,* Vol. 4, pp. 111–5.

84. G.C. Mendis, *The Early History of Ceylon or the Indian Period of Ceylon History,* Calcutta: YMCA Publishing House, 1948, p. 60.

85. R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, "Dakṣiṇa Bhāratīya Ākramaṇa," *Anurādhapura Yugaya,* A. Liyanagamage & R.A.L.H. Gunawardana (ed.), Kālaṇiya: Vidyālaṅkāra University Press, 1961, p. 275.

and to gain possession of important centres of trade. The first example of such South Indian military activity was witnessed in the time of Sena I (ca. 833-53) when the Pāṇḍya king personally led an invasion of the island. It was to be followed in the tenth century by a series of invasions launched by the Cōḷa and Rāṣṭrakūṭa kings like Parāntaka I, Kṛṣṇa III, Parantaka II, Rājarāja and Rājendra.

The Sri Lankan rulers faced a challenge of unprecedented proportions. The South Indian states had extensive military resources under their control. At the height of their power, the Cōḷas were capable of mobilizing thirty-one regiments for their extensive campaigns.[86] These rulers could also rely on the support of mercantile guilds with their organizational ramifications which transcended political boundaries. The South Indian mercantile guilds played a decisive role in providing military supplies like horses and weapons. Further, they maintained armed retainers whom the rulers could enlist in times of need. There appears to have been a close symbiotic relationship between guilds like the Aiññūruvar and the Cōḷa state. While the activities of the guild facilitated the extension of Cōḷa power, the guild gained greater prominence in areas which passed under Cōḷa control.[87] The close links that prevailed between guild activity and expanding states directs attention to the important question whether there was even in ancient society a link between warfare and commercial capital. This is, however, a question which deserves a separate, more detailed and careful study.

The transport of forces and equipment across the Palk Straits would have been an aspect of warfare in which collaboration between the ruler and the traders would have been crucial. It may be largely true that the problems of logistics involved in the transport of troops, equipment and other requisites by sea limited the military capacity of invading armies of the South Indian states who sought to gain control over Sri Lanka, but the importance of this factor should not be overemphasized. The use of large ships had become part of the traditions of navigation among both South Indian and Sri Lankan mariners by this time, and crossing the narrow Palk Straits did not present too formidable a problem.

A major cause for concern for the defenders was the constitution of the Sri Lankan army. Though the mercenary troops could be generally an effective force in local warfare among Sri Lankan adversaries, they proved to be an unreliable group when the rulers of the island faced South Indian invaders. The chronicles record that the South Indians living in the island crossed over to the side of the Pāṇḍya king when he invaded in the time of Sena I.[88] On the other hand, in the ninth century and the early part of the tenth century the presence of several rival states in South India tended to hamper the military activities of a South Indian invader in Sri Lanka.

---

86. Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India,* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980, p. 88.

87. Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India,* New Delhi: Manohar, 1988, pp. 86–7.

88. *Cūlavaṃsa* 50.14–5.

A South Indian ruler who personally led an expedition to Sri Lanka, or diverted a substantial part of his military resources to such an expedition, had to contend with the possibility of his own kingdom being left open to attack by a rival state. The long-drawn struggles among South Indian states provided opportunities for diplomatic initiatives on the part of Sri Lankan kings.

The Pāṇḍya invasion was a disaster for Sena I. The army sent to bar its progress was routed and the heir-apparent who led the army was killed in battle. Sena decided to withdraw into the Malaya highlands in the central parts of the island. The Pāṇḍya army despoiled the city and plundered the monasteries of all valuables including golden images, but it does not seem likely that booty was the only motive behind the invasion. The Pāṇḍya king was careful to present himself as a chivalrous victor by organizing a funeral ceremony "befitting a king" for the dead heir-apparent.[89] If, in doing so, he had the intention of winning over the support of the local population, he was, however, forced to change his plans suddenly, probably as a result of developments in South India. He is said to have taken the initiative in negotiating with Sena and, on receiving tribute from the latter, left for his country on the very same day he signed a treaty with the envoys sent by the Sri Lankan ruler.[90]

The chroniclers attribute the defeat of the Sri Lankan forces to disunity among the local military leaders, the better leadership of the invading army and the desertion by the mercenaries.[91] However, the experience appears to have directed the attention of the Sri Lankan rulers to a wider range of problems. While they were forcefully made aware of the need to strengthen their military capacity, it is particularly noteworthy that they also seem to have grasped the vital nature of the role that ideology would play in this task. Equally important was the realization that their position could not be defended if they depended solely on the military resources of their own state. Their state had become an element of a larger political system and, consequently, developments in South India would crucially impinge on the nature of indigenous warfare and the political fortunes of local rulers. Thus, the Pāṇḍya experience directed the attention of the Sri Lankan rulers to the fact that they could respond to the new challenges they faced only by making a deliberate move to extend the filed of their diplomatic and military activities.

War and Ideology

During this period Buddhism remained the dominant religion in the island while in South India both Buddhism and Jainism were on the decline, giving way to a resurgent and militant form of Hinduism. The rulers of the South Indian states at this time were strong supporters of the two main sects of Hinduism, Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism. In this context, religion came to constitute an important cultural marker

89. *Cūlavaṃsa* 50.32.

90. *Cūlavaṃsa* 50.38–42.

91. *Cūlavaṃsa* 50.13–9.

which distinguished the Sri Lankans from the greater majority of South Indians. In their inscriptions the Sri Lankan rulers claim that their dynasty was descended from the lineage of the Buddha. They also state that, as prophesied by the Buddha himself, it was the destiny of the island kingdom that every one of its kings would be a Bodhisattva, *i.e.* a person destined to be a Buddha in the future.[92] Initiating a practice which was to become common to Southeast Asia, too,[93] one king even had an image of the Buddha fashioned in a manner that would conform to his own physical features. On the other hand, it was also maintained that kingship in the island was an office bestowed by the *saṅgha* for the express purpose of defending the Buddhist order. The implication, which was to be clearly specified in some later records, was that rulers of the neighbouring South Indian states were, not being Buddhists, unsuitable to rule over the island.[94] Another element of the ideology that became dominant during this period was the concept of the Sinhala identity which emphasized the bonds of common heritage and interests that linked the dominant lineages of the island with the ruling dynasty.[95] This ideology was articulated through monuments built by the rulers while the literati were also active in propagating it through their chronicles and other writings. It is very likely that it played an important role in mobilizing support for the resistance that the Sri Lankan rulers offered against South Indian invaders. On the other hand, the long confrontation with foes across the Palk Straits had a "feed-back" effect on the further evolution of ideology by creating a climate conducive to a redefinition and extension of the Sinhala identity to include all subjects of the kingdom.[96] In other words, conditions of war and the threat of war contributed toward furthering the processes of ethnicization.

Strategy within a Political Subsystem

Evidence from chronicles and inscriptions testify to the widening focus of the activities of the Sri Lankan rulers. It is likely that, even before the time of the Pāṇḍya invasion, they had begun to direct their attention to the need to collect information on South Indian political developments. Their agents were active in South India, and Sena I is said to have ordered the assassination of a rival claimant to the throne who was living in South India.[97] Similarly, South Indian rulers, too, showed an interest in gathering intelligence about Sri Lanka. For Sri Lankan as well as South Indian rulers, merchants involved in long-distance trade were a valuable source of political information.[98] Attempts to maintain the long-standing friendly

92. R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough: Monasticism and Economic Interest in Early Medieval Sri Lanka,* Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1979, pp. 172–3.

93. G. Ferrand, "L'empire sumatranais de Crīvijaya," *Journal Asiatique,* 11th series, Vol. 20, 1922, p. 10; Schrieke, *Ruler and Realm in Early Java,* p. 87.

94. Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough,* pp. 175–7.

95. Gunawardana, "The People of the Lion.... *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict,* pp. 53–6.

96 *Ibid.*, pp. 63–5.

97. *Cūlavaṃsa* 50.4.

98. *Cūlavaṃsa* 55.13.

relations with the kingdom of the Pallavas as also to find new allies in India were important elements of the diplomatic efforts of the Sri Lankan rulers. Mahinda IV (ca. 954–72) entered into a marriage alliance with the ruling house of Kaliṅga, the kingdom beyond the northern borders of the Cōḷa domains, and there is little doubt that this was a move designed to secure an advantage in a situation of a potential military threat from the latter.[99] A crucial opening which the Sri Lankan ruling house could utilize to its advantage appeared when a struggle for power broke out in the Pāṇḍya kingdom not long after the Pāṇḍyas had invaded the island. Sena II (ca. 853–87), the successor of Sena who had been defeated by the Pāṇḍyas, cleverly made use of this situation. Allying himself with the Pallavas, he sent his forces to intervene in the Pāṇḍya struggle. At the battle of Arisil, he succeeded in defeating the ruler who had invaded the island and was able to place his own nominee, Varaguṇa II, on the throne.

The accession to power in the Pāṇḍya kingdom of a new ruler who owed his throne to the support he received from the Pallavas and the Sri Lankans was an important development which meant that the neighbouring South Indian state which had earlier posed a military threat to Sri Lanka was now a friendly power. The Sri Lankan ruler Kassapa V (ca. 914–23) sent his forces to support these allies when they were attacked by the Cōḷas who had by this time vanquished the Pallavas. However, the campaigns waged by the combined armies of the Pāṇḍyas and the Sri Lankans against the Cōḷas suffered a major reverse at the battle of Vellūr, and its effects were disastrous on the Pāṇḍyas as well as on the long-term interests of the Sri Lankan rulers. A few years after the battle of Vellūr, the Pāṇḍya territory was annexed by the Cōḷas, and the dislodged ruler fled to Sri Lanka to solicit aid. According to the *Cūlavaṃsa*, Dappula IV (ca. 924–35) was keen to support him, but was prevented from doing so due to an uprising led by the nobles.[100]

By following a policy of close collaboration with the Pallavas and the Pāṇḍyas and of intervening in South Indian politics as their allies, the Sri Lankan rulers were seeking to utilize to their advantage the opportunities offered by the struggles for power in the larger political arena of South India. This policy was one of the main factors behind their success in ensuring the security of their kingdom from foreign invasions for almost a century. However, the premises basic to this policy were being undermined with the expansion of the Cōḷa kingdom, gradually displacing both the Pallavas and the Pāṇḍyas. Though the rivalries between the Cōḷas and the large kingdom of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas further north sometimes worked to the advantage of the Sri Lankan rulers in the earlier part of the tenth century, the rise of the Cōḷa state, which was to be more powerful than any of its predecessors in the Tamilnāḍ area, was to shift the advantage gradually but decisively against the island kingdom.

---

99. *Cūlavaṃsa* 54.9–10.

100. *Cūlavaṃsa* 53.5–8.

The Cōḷa king Parāntaka I invaded Sri Lanka in the reign on Udaya IV (ca. 946-54) when the latter's forces were engaged in quelling a rebellion in the provinces. Defeated in his initial battle against the invader, he retreated to Rohana, leaving his capital open to plunder. It appears that Parāntaka did attempt to consolidate his victory, but the chroniclers record that he was forced to return to his country rather suddenly "through fear."[101] As Basham suggested, the event which forced this retreat was probably the invasion of the Cōḷa kingdom by the Rāṣṭrakūṭa king Kṛṣṇa III who defeated the Cōḷas at Takkōlam in ca. 949.[102] Udaya seized this opportunity to attack the borderlands of the Cōḷas and to win back the booty that had been taken away.[103] Two more invasions took place in the reign of Mahinda IV (956-72). He was one of the most successful fulers of this period who had won strong support among the provincial potentates in his kingdom. The first challenge he faced was an invasion by Kṛṣṇa III who had, by the end of the reign of Parāntaka I, vanquished the Cōḷas. The second invasion, which took place several years later, was launched by Parāntaka II who had by this time revived the Cōḷa fortunes. On both these occasions, Mahinda attacked the invaders soon after they landed in the Jaffna peninsula in the north, without allowing the invaders opportunities to secure their positions or to devastate the land.[104] It is clear that both these invasions were repulsed, and South Indian inscriptions record the death of the Cōḷa general in Sri Lanka.[105] It also appears that Mahinda attempted to support new leaders in the former territories of the Pāṇḍyas to assert their independence from the Cōḷas.[106]

The warfare discussed in the preceding paragraphs reflects the achievements of the Sri Lankan rulers not only in mobilizing support for their dynasty but also in developing their militia into an efficient military force. Under conditions enabling powerful provincial lineages to enjoy access to long-distance trade and income from irrigation works, it had become no longer feasible even to maintain levels of centralization that obtained in the time of the Early State. In the ninth and tenth centuries, the rulers of Anurādhapura had to think more in terms of "sharing power" with these powerful lineages in order to gain support for their military activities.[107] That

---

101. *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, Vol. 5, Pt. 2, p. 187; *Cūlavaṃsa* 53.45.

102. A.L. Basham, "The Background to the Rise of Parākramabāhu I," *Ceylon Historical Journal*, Vol. 4, 1954/5, p. 13.

103. *Cūlavaṃsa* 53.46-7.

104. *Cūlavaṃsa* 54.14-6; *Pūjāvalī*, A.V. Suravira (ed.), Colombo: Gunasena, 1961, p. 104.

105. H. Krishna Sastri, *South Indian Inscriptions*, Vol. 5, Madras: Government Press, p. 367.

106. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, London: Oxford University Press, 1955, p. 171.

107. R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, "Total Power or Shared Power ? A Study of the Hydraulic State and its Transformations in Sri Lanka from the Third Century to the Ninth Century A.D.," *Development and Decline: the Evolution of Sociopolitical Organization*, H.J.M. Claessen *et al.* (ed.), Massachusetts: Bergin and Garvey, 1985, pp. 234-43.

they had reorganized their militia and limited their former dependence on South Indian mercenaries is evident from references to varying levels of command like *senevi* and *adhikārin* and from the prominence accorded to indigenous warriors and their leaders in the descriptions of the battles of this period. Chronicles and contemporary inscriptions extol the tactical skill and qualities of leadership displayed by military leaders of local origin like Sakka, Viduragga, and Sena. However, there is still no evidence that a standing army of local recruits had been created.[108] The constant challenges the kings faced from rivals within the royal clan, the nobility and from provincial potentates probably made the idea of stationing at the capital of a large army of local men, who might be manipulated by the king's opponents, appear to be a risky option. Under these conditions, the services of the mercenaries continued to be of vital importance for providing personal security to the rulers and for quelling rebellions.

Preemptive action in military and diplomatic effort was essential for the survival of a small polity circumscribed by its physical location in an island, which limited the range of alternative responses to aggression. The strategy evolved during this period relied to a considerable extent on such preemptive action, designed to weaken and discourage potential invaders by engaging them in battles fought in South India with the aid of rival states. When invasions did occur, two main options appear to have been given preference. One was to attack the invader at or near the point of landing, soon after the invading force had completed their travels by sea. It demanded anticipation and preparedness for an invasion. The other was the favourite strategy of the weaker defender when threatened by a powerful opponent. It involved the avoidance of open confrontation, withrawal to the forests of the central highlands or the south in order to inveigle the enemy into difficult terrain where he would be harassed, and attacks on the enemy's rear when he finally decided to give up the campaign and retreat. Thus a strategy used by the "rebels" of Rohana against the expanding state of Anurādhapura was now being used by the rulers of Anurādhapura against the South Indian invaders. It was a costly option since it placed before the invader the opportunity to pillage and to destroy the resources of the kingdom, but it was the last resort for a weak defender overwhelmed by the military resources of a powerful invader. From a military point of view, it was often successful and, in fact,

---

108. In a recent study, Muttukumaru draws attention to the fact that "the Sinhalese kings made no effort to create what in modern times is called a 'standing army' even though the repeated invasions to which the country was subjected pointed to the need for such an institution." Anton Muttukumaru, *The Military History of Ceylon: An Outline,* New Delhi: Navrang, 1987, p. 210. The mercenary troops constituted the only substitute.

this was to be an important part of the tactics adopted by Sri Lankan rulers of later times when they were confronted with the threat from the technologically superior European invaders.[109]

It would appear that Mahinda V attempted to use the same strategy when the Cōḷa ruler Rājarāja invaded the island in ca. 992/3 at a time of political unrest in in the island. However, if Mahinda intended to attack from Rohana, events did not follow in accordance with his plans. Rājarāja annexed the northern part of the island as a province of the Cōḷa kingdom, and his inscriptions show that his power over the area was very much intact almost twenty years after the invasion.[110] In acquiring control over some of the most important northern ports in the island like Mahātittha, Gokaṇṇa, Jambukola-paṭṭana and Ūrātoṭa, the Cōḷas gained one of their primary objectives for the first time. Mahinda remained confined to Rohana for almost twenty-five years till he was captured in 1017 by Rājendra Cōḷa who despatched a successful invasion to Rohana. The invasion did not result in the extension of Cōḷa power over the entire island, but the capture of the ruler helped to strengthen and legitimize their hold over its northern parts. These political gains enabled the Cōḷas to expand their control over the seaborne trade in the region and created the conditions for the extension of the activities of the South Indian guilds over a wide area within the island. The far south which was beyond the grasp of Cōḷa military power remained a base of resistance. More than half a century later, when Cōḷa power was on the decline, it was with this area as the base that Vijayabāhu launched his campaigns and re-unified the island under Sri Lankan rule.

Concluding Observations

The long history of warfare in the island examined in this paper reveals the changing nature of indigenous warfare as regards organization, scope, motivation and strategy. Scarcity of subsistence resources created by ecological or/and demographical constraints appears to have been an important factor behind early movements of armed

---

109, John Davy, a surgeon who served with the British forces in the island in the second decade of the nineteenth century, has left a short but illuminating description of this type of warfare: "The natives, on their part, never met us boldly and fairly in the field: they had recourse to stratagems of every kind, and took every possible vantage of the difficult nature of their country, and of their minute knowledge of the ground. They would way-lay our parties, and fire on them from inaccessible heights, or from the ambush of an impenetrable jungle; they would line the paths through which we had to march with snares of different kinds – such as spring-guns and spring-bows, deep pits, lightly covered over, and armed with thorns, spikes &c.; and, in every instance that an opportunity offered, they showed no mercy, and gave us no quarter. Such a system of warfare as this, of which I have partially sketched the outline, had better not be given in detail." Except for the reference to fire-arms, the description may be equally applicable to the period under discussion. John Davy, *An Account of the Interior of Ceylon and of its Inhabitants, with Travels in that Island, The Ceylon Historical Journal,* Vol. 16, Dehiwala: Tisara, 1969, p. 249.

110. V. Venkayya (ed.), *South Indian Inscriptions,* Vol. 2, Madras: Government Press, 1913, p. 428.

migrants and warfare in Sri Lanka.[111] With the development of more efficient and intensive techniques of food and craft production, the appropriation of the surplus, as tribute or plunder, was a major attraction which provoked warfare among the early chiefdoms. Warfare in this context promoted the emergence of the Early State. It also wielded a formative influence on certain aspects of urbanization in that defensive needs were given significant emphasis in the layout of cities. As in several other historical contexts,[112] the development of circumvallation and fortification was a response of the Anurādhapura state to the needs of warfare.

An important phase in indigenous warfare began with the rise of powerful states in South India. Disputed sovereignty, which was a common cause of conflict in early states,[113] provided these states with opportunities for intervention in each other's affairs. Though war amongst these states was almost always associated with plunder, it is most doubtful whether plunder was "the first and foremost prospect" motivating participants in warfare as Spencer has suggested.[114] War was often accompanied and caused by movement of people to new locations. Sri Lanka owes its ethnic plurality and cultural diversity in large measure to immigrations during the period under discussion. The period of Cōḷa occupation marked an important phase in the immigration of settlers from South India. In certain instances, warfare appears to have provided opportunities for expanding South Indian states like the Cōḷas to acquire valued services of artisans and other specialists and to gain access to certain aspects of irrigarion technology.[115]

The growth of long-distance trade had a profound effect on the nature of warfare. Several of the states examined in the latter part of this paper were agrarian states which were nevertheless dependent on and interested in commerce. While trade linked Sri Lanka closely with states around the Palk Straits, it also stimulated competition among these states for a greater share in the wider network of trade in the Indian Ocean. Warfare was utilized by these states as a means of controlling trade In the interest of their own local economies in two different ways. First, when directed toward the destruction of facilities like ports and the disruption of trade in the territories of rivals, warfare played the role of undermining existing trade networks

111. Cf. Ronald Cohen, "Warfare and State Formation," *Development and Decline: the Evolution of Sociopolitical Organization,* pp. 278–82.

112. Cohen, *op. cit.,* p. 286.

113. Peter Skalnik, "Early States in the Voltaic Basin," *The Early State,* Henry J.M. Claessen & Peter Skalnik (ed.), The Hague: Mouton, 1978, pp. 484–5.

114. Spencer, *The Politics of Expansion: the Chola Conquest of Sri Lanka and Sri Vijaya,* p. 23.

115. R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, "Intersocietal Transfer of Hydraulic Technology in Precolonial South Asia: Some Reflections Based on a Preliminary Investigarion," *Southeast Asian Studies,* Kyoto, Vol. 22, No. 2, 1984.

and creating new networks which were more favourable to the expansionist state's economy. Secondly, warfare enabled such a state to incorporate places which had come to occupy strategic points in the trade network in consequence of their favourable location or the presence of highly valued natural products. In such contexts, warfare appears to have been a crucial mechanism which enabled one local economy to develop at the expense of another local economy.[116] It would thus seem that trade was not always an alternative to war, but sometimes a factor which led to war.

Generally, trade took place in historical contexts of uneven distribution of power. The organization and terms of trade were, to a considerable extent, reflections of the prevailing balance of power. Hence trade itself created potentialities for conflict and war. The initiative to war could come not only from the dominant power seeking to preserve the status quo and to further strengthen its position, but also from alliances of small states striving to change the prevailing conditions. Thus the constant struggle among South Indian and Sri Lankan states may be understood as much in terms of an "archaic imperialism" as in terms of a recurrent trend of alliance-formation among the weaker powers to preserve and to increase their own positions within a proto-"world economy."

The relationship between political aggression and ritual and the interaction between warfare and ideology are important aspects which deserve attention. Ritualization of political aggression made it possible for expanding polities to extend their hegemony without engaging in actual combat, thereby achieving an "economy of force."[117] Theoretically, the influence of religions which espoused the cause of non-violence could inhibit the military activities of a state, but the history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka reveals the transformation of ideology within a state struggling for its survival under conditons of frequent warfare. In certain Sri Lankan myths the Buddha is cast in a role that does not conform to the ideals of non-violence, thereby presenting the message that violence, though generally abhorrent, is permissible in certain special contexts as when the survival and furtherance of the Buddhist order are threatened.[118] It is an irony of history that, in the ninth and tenth centuries, the rulers of the island were utilizing the Buddhist identity as a means of mobilizing support for their political and military struggles against the expanding states of South India.

---

116. Tom P. Ritchey, "Precapitalist to Capitalist Imperialism," paper presented to the *First International Conference on Marxist Anthropology,* Uppsala, 1978, p. 11.

117. Luttwak, *op. cit.,* pp. 198–9.

118. R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, "The Kinsmen of the Buddha: Myth as Political Charter in Ancient and Early Medieval Kingdoms of Sri Lanka," *Religion and Legitimation of Political Power in Sri Lanka,* Bardwell L. Smith (ed.), Chambersburg: Anima, 1978, pp. 98–100.

The employment of alien armed men, drawn from distant communities and linked by bonds of personal relations to the ruler, was a feature that the Sri Lankan state shared in common with many Early States.[119] The increasingly prominent role of the mercenaries was a characteristic feature of warfare in state society which distinguished it from warfare in the prestate polities of Sri Lanka. Within a certain phase in the island's history these mercenaries wielded considerable power and did represent an emerging stratum of professional warriors. Following Schumpeter's theoretical insights, one should expect that the long period of exposure to the threat of expanding South Indian states would create conditions for the further growth of this "class."[120] However, it is interesting to note that such a development did not in fact take place. The nascent warrior stratum that emerged as a response to the needs of warfare was an extrinsic element constituted of ethnic groups distinct from the local population. In the earlier phases of history the "alien" character of the mercenaries suited them to their specific task of fighting on behalf of the rulers against their local enemies. However, they came to be manipulated by different contenders for power. In the long run, the mercenaries did seem to emerge as an independent power group who were sometimes successful in placing their own nominees on the throne.

This trend did not continue primarily because the mercenary force failed to develop into an effective instrument for countering the invasions launched by powerful South Indian kingdoms which seriously threatened the position of the Sri Lankan state. Evidently, the changing religious conditions in South India in the period after the ninth century did leave its impact on the outlook of the mercenaries who came to serve in Sri Lanka. The mercenaries of the tenth century who burnt down the Temple of the Tooth present a clear contrast to those of the seventh century who were noted for the generous partonage they extended to Buddhism. Being probably constrained by religious considerations as well as ethnic loyalties, the mercenaries were at best reluctant participants in battles waged against South Indian invaders in the ninth and tenth centuries and were sometimes found to desert their employers to join ranks with the invaders. These developments limited the usefulness of the mercenaries and thereby hampered their growth into a powerful stratum comparable with the ancient warriors of the Egyptians and the Assyrians whose position was legitimized by their struggles against the Hyksos and the Mitannians. On the other hand, the presence of a large standing army at the capital could undermine the prevailing

---

119. Peter Skalnik, "The Early State as a Process," *The Early State,* p. 602.

120. Schumpeter's use of the term "class" in this context is controversial. Joseph A. Schumpeter, *The Sociology of Imperialisms.* In *Imperialism and Social Classes,* Heinz Norden (tr.), Pul M. Sweezy (ed.), Oxford: Blackwell, 1951, pp. 32–5.

litical equilibrium. The assertive role of the mercenary force in local politics evidently de the kings apprehensive of the threat it posed, and they appear to have opted continue to rely on a militia raised by the leading men of the kingdom while ng the mercenaries more as a countervailing force. These complex arrangements lect the delicate balance of power within the Sri Lankan polity in ancient and rly medieval times.[121]

R.A.L.H. GUNAWARDANA

121. This is a revised version of a paper originally submitted to the Advanced Seminar on Expanding States and Indigenous Warfare, jointly sponsored by the Guggenheim Foundation and the School of American Research and held in April 1989 at Santa Fe, New Mexico. The author wishes to record his gratitude to the participants in the seminar, especially to Drs. Brian Ferguson and Neil Whitehead, for their comments. An abridged version of the paper will form a chapter of a book on warfare which is due to be published by the School of American Research in the near future.