

THE ORIGIN OF THE TAMIL VANNI CHIEFTAINCIES OF CEYLON

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After the drift of Sinhalese political power to the south-western parts of Ceylon and the emergence of the Jaffna kingdom in the northernmost region of the island (which processes took place in the middle third of the thirteenth century), the only political authorities in the major part of the ancient Rājarat̥ṭha about whom we hear from our sources are those chieftains often loosely referred to as the Vanni or Vanniyar. The area that came under their rule has also been referred to as the Vanni.

The extent of the Vanni lands has varied from time to time. In the Sinhalese chronicles of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the depopulated jungle area that separated the Sinhalese kingdom from the Tamil kingdom of Jaffna is commonly referred to as the Vanni. In the chronicles of Jaffna this name is mainly used to describe the chieftaincies of northern Ceylon. In the chronicles of the Eastern Province, the chieftaincies of the Batticaloa region also receive the appellation of the Vanni. In the period of Dutch and British rule, by the Vanni region was meant the present Vavuniya District and some parts of the Polonnaruwa District. In this study the name Tamil Vanni is used to the chieftaincies of the Mannar, Vavuniya, Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Polonnaruwa districts.

The archaeology and history of the Vanni is still an unexplored field, although the jungles of that region are fast vanishing in the face of government-sponsored colonisation schemes. Very little information on the Vanni is available in our literary sources and only a few inscriptions of the Vanni chiefs have come to light.¹ Much of our knowledge is confined to a few writings of

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¹ The only two known Tamil lithic records referring to Vanniyar chieftains have been published - K. Indrapala, '*Kilakkilaṅkai Cācanaṅkaḷ*', *Cintanai* (Tamil) II, Nos. 2&3, July - Oct. 1968 (Peradeniya), pp. 35 - 40, An unpublished Tamil copper plate grant of Kayilāya Vanniyan and other Vanniyar chiefs, dated śaka 1644 (A. D. 1722) is in the possession of Mr. S. Sivakolunthu of Kalliyankadu (Jaffna). There is also a copper plate grant in Sinhalese, dated śaka 1469 (A. D. 1547), referring to one Navaratna Vanniyā of Luṇṇuvīia - S. Casie Chetty, *Ceylon Gazetteer* (Colombo 1834), pp. 190-191.

some British civil servants who evinced a keen interest in the archaeology and history of this region. Among these, the writings of H. Parker and J. P. Lewis deserve special mention.¹ In 1941 Wilhelm Geiger published an interesting article on the Vanni based almost entirely on the Pali chronicle *Cūlavamsa*.² In recent years was published another work which is sadly lacking in scientific analysis.³ There is much difference of opinion among all these writers on the problem of the origin of the Vanni or Vanni^uyar.

The Term Vanni

Who were the Vannis who emerged into the limelight in the thirteenth century amidst the confusion that followed the fall of Polonnaruva? This is a question which is not easy of solution with the evidence at our disposal. The derivation of the name itself presents much difficulty. Senarat Paranavitana has the following to say about the Vanni:

The government of the districts away from the capital was carried on by a class of chieftains referred to as *Vanni* who sometimes defied the authority of the ruler at the capital. The people who lived in the ancient Rājaraṭṭha, which in our period (thirteenth to the fifteenth century) was being steadily encroached by forests, were under chieftains called *vanni*, some of whom were of Tamil race and who transferred their allegiance to the Sinhalese king, or the ruler in Jaffna, as the exigencies of the changing political situation dictated. . . . The word *vanni* is generally derived from Skt. or P. *vana*, 'forest', and is taken to have been borne by these chieftains because they ruled tracts of territory mostly in forest. The number of *vanni* and their territories is sometimes given as eighteen, and sometimes as three hundred and sixty-four. Two classes of *vannis* are also mentioned, namely *maha-vanni* 'great *vannis*' and *siri-vanni*, 'smaller

- ¹ Henry Parker, 'Irrigation in the Northern Province', *Papers Laid Before the Legislative Council of Ceylon*, No. XI, 1886, pp. 105 - 116; J. P. Lewis, *Manual of the Vanni Districts* (Colombo 1895) and 'The Archaeology of the Vanni', *Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, (JCBRAS) XIII, No. 45, 1894, pp. 151 - 178; Anonymous, 'Historical Sketch of the Vanni', *The Monthly Literary Register and Notes and Queries for Ceylon (MLR & NQC)*, I, No. 1, Jan. 1893, pp. 1 - 7; Feb. 1893, pp. 25-30.
- ² Wilhelm Geiger, 'Die Vannis', *Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, II, Heft 4 (München), Juni 1941, pp. 3-11.
- ³ C. S. Navaratnam, *Vanni and the Vanniya*s, (Jaffna 1960).

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vanni'. Perhaps the eighteen were the *maha-vanni* and the three hundred and sixty-four the *siri-vanni*.¹

According to this, the Vanni were only a class of chieftains who derived their name from *vana* because of the nature of the tracts that came under their authority. While agreeing with this derivation of the name, Geiger has a different opinion to express on the identity of the Vanni:

Der Name der Vannis (mod. Sgh. *vanniyā*, Pali *vanni* oder *vañña*) ist in seiner Bildung nicht völlig klar, aber es ist kaum zu bezweifeln, dass er mit *vana* "Wald" zusammenhangt. Wir können ihn passend mit "Waldleute" oder "Waldsiedler" wiedergeben. . . . Weiterhin istes sehr bemerkenswert, dass das Wort *vanni* oder *vañña* niemals allein vorkommt, sondern immer in Verbindungen wie *vanni-rajāno* und dergleichen, an 3 Stellen (83. 10; 97. 52; 90. 33) überdies mit dem Zusatz *sīhaḷa*. Es ergabe aber ein schiefes Bild, wollte man das mit "Vannikonige" übersetzen und nur auf die Anführer und Hauptlinge der Vannis beziehen. Nein, es war das Name der Gesamtheit, Das Wort *rājan* hat in Ceylon eine allgemeinere Bedeutung angenommen, die dem Sk. *ksatriya* entspricht. Die *vannirajāno* beanspruchen also, ein adeliger Clan zu sein, genau so wie der in Vesāli herrschende Adelsclan der Licchavi in singhalesischen Quellen (vgl. z. B. Saddharmaratnāvaliya, ed. D. B. Jayatilaka, p. 298) als *licchavi rajjuruvō*, wtl. "Licchavikonige" bezeichnet wird. Wenn sich aber die Vannis druchlich selber *sīhaḷa* nennen, so stellen sie sich damit als Arier in bewussten Gegensatz zu den *Damiḷas* (Sk. *draviḍa*) wie zu den *Vāddas*. Wir sehen also, dass schon in 13 Jahrhundert die Vannis obenso, wie dies ihre heutigen Nachfahren tun, den Anspruch auf arische Abkunft und vornehme Kaste erhoben, und dass von dem Chronisten der zu Anfang des 14 Jahrhunderts sein Werk Verfasste, also als Zeitgenesse gelten darf, dieser Anspruch offenbar als durchaus berechtigt anerkannt wurde.²

We shall presently see that while Geiger is partly right in applying the name Vanni to a whole community or caste rather than to a group of chieftains, he is wrong in claiming that they were all Sinhalese

¹ Senarat Paranavitana, 'Civilisation of the Period: Economic, Political and Social Conditions', ed. H. C. Ray, *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon (UHC)* (Colombo 1960), I, ii, pp. 736-737.

² Geiger, op. cit., pp. 4-5.

and consequently of Aryan descent. But before we come to that let us consider the various derivations that have been suggested for the name Vanni. Emerson Tennent mentions two possible derivations, namely 'one significant of the forest (*vanam*) which it (the Vanni region) covers to a great extent, the other of the intense heat that characterises the region' (*vanni* = fire ?).¹ Some have tried to derive it from the Tamil *val*, 'hard', denoting the hardness of the soil.² Still others have suggested a derivation from Baniyā or merchant.³ These are all fanciful derivations based on the similarity of their sounds with that of *vanni*. The derivation from *vana* is plausible but appears to be unusual. The Pali form *vañña* does not seem to have been derived from *vana*. No tradition has been preserved in Ceylon regarding the derivation or origin of this name but in South India, where too we hear of the Vanni in the same period, there are certain traditions concerning their origin which throw some light on our problem.

The Tamil work *Cilai-elupatu*, probably composed in the period of the Vijayanagar empire (14th - 16th century) though ascribed to Kampan who lived in the twelfth century, is a panegyric on the Vanniyar.⁴ According to this work, the Vanniyar belonged to the Agni-kula and were descended from a certain Sambhu-muni. This association with the Agni-kula (fire-family or-caste), in S. Gnanaprasar's opinion, is a theory born of the similarity between *vahni* (fire) and *vanni*.⁵ In fact, there is a legend among the Vaisiyar caste of North Arcot (Tamilnadu State) which illustrates the derivation of their name from *vahni*. H. F. Cox has recorded this legend in the following manner:

In the olden times two giants named Vatapi and Mahi worshipped Brahma with such devotion that they obtained from him immunity from death from every cause save fire, which element they had carelessly omitted to include in their enumeration. Protected thus they harried the country, and Vatapi went to the length of swallowing Vayu, the god of the winds, while Mahi devoured the sun. The earth was therefore enveloped in perpetual darkness and stillness, a condition of affairs which

¹ Emerson Tennent, *Ceylon*, II, 4th edition. (London 1860), p. 508.

² J. P. Lewis, 'The Archaeology of the Vanni', p. 151 note.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Quoted in S. Gnanaprasar, *Yālpāna-vaipava-vimarcanam* (Accuveli 1928), p. 40.

⁵ Ibid.

struck terror into the minds of the *devatas* and led them to appeal to Brahma. He, recollecting the omission made by the giants, directed his supplicants to desire the *rishi* Jambava Mahamuni to perform a *yagam* or sacrifice by fire. The order having been obeyed, armed horsemen sprung from the flames, who undertook twelve expeditions against Vatapi and Mahi, whom they first destroyed and afterwards released Vayu and the sun from their bodies. Their leader then assumed the government of the country under the name of Rudra Vanniya Maharaja, who had five sons, the ancestors of the Vanniya caste.¹

This is one of the many Vātāpi legends current in South India and has no special historical significance. It seems to preserve some memory of the origin of the Vanniya as a warrior caste. But its importance lies in the fact that it is meant to illustrate their origin from fire and the derivation of their name from *vahni*.² Thus we find in the literature and tradition of South India the origin of the Vanniya being associated with fire or the Agni-kula. The derivation of their name from *vahni*, therefore, seems to be plausible but is not very convincing. As Gnanapragasar has suggested, this association may represent a later attempt to derive the name from *vahni*.³ Even if we allow the association with the Agni-kula as plausible, it is difficult to explain why their name was derived from a rarer word like *vahni* instead of the more common *agni*.

Vanni being a caste name in modern India, the early occupation of the Vanniya may provide a clue to the origin of the name, for almost all caste names are based on the occupations followed by the different castes. The modern Vanniya caste of South India follows the profession of cultivation like the Vellālar. This was their occupation in the last century, too.⁴ The Vanniya of the Vijayanagar period, too, seem to have been engaged in the same occupation, for they appear in the inscriptions of that time as tenants of Brāhmaṇa and Vellāla landlords and paid a special

¹ H. F. Cox, *A Manual of North Arcot*, I, Revised by H. A. Stuart (Madras, 1895), p. 236.

² Ibid.

³ Gnanapragasar, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁴ Cox, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

tax called the *vanniya-vari*.¹ But there were other *Vanniyar* whose occupation does not appear to have been so peaceful a pursuit as agriculture. These *Vanniyar* seem to have been a source of constant trouble to some of the Vijayanagar rulers and to some of the local princes. Sāluva Tirumala (A. D. 1450), for instance, enjoyed the title of '*Pakaitta Vanniyar Kula Kāla*' (the Destroyer of the *Vanniyar* Kula which antagonized him).² Similar titles ('Destroyer of the *Vainnyar* of the Eighteen Districts' and 'Destroyer of the Pride of the *Vanniyar*') were borne by a number of Setupati princes (who ruled over the Ramnad region of Tamilnadu) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.³ The subjugation of the *Vanniyar* of the Eighteen Districts is also attributed to other princes in the fifteenth century.⁴ These *Vanniyar* were obviously not peaceful cultivators but were given to martial pursuits. And these are the *Vanniyar* who are mentioned in the contemporary literary works. The *Cilai-elupatu*, for instance, praises their skill in the art of archery and gives the bow as their emblem.⁵ The *Kallātam*, another Tamil work, refers to them as *nār-paṭai-vanniyar* (the *Vanniyar* of the Four-fold Army) which is probably an allusion to their employment as warriors in the four-fold army of the state.⁶

As we go further back in time, we find that the *Vanniyar* were warriors rather than cultivators and that Vanni chieftains enjoyed the status of feudal lords. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries several Vanni chiefs were in the service of the Cōḷa and Pāṇḍya kings and were in the enjoyment of land-grants and grandiose titles. Many of them are mentioned in the epigraphs of the time of Rājādhiraja II (1163-1179), Kulōttuṅga III (1178-1216) and Māra-

¹ *Annual Report on Epigraphy (ARE) for 1913* (Madras), Inscriptions Nos. 223 of 1912, 30 and 34 of 1913.

² T. N. Subramaniam, *South Indian Temple Inscriptions* (Madras 1952), (*SITI*) II, Inscription Nos. 549, 550, 551, pp. 555, 547 & 548.

³ James Burgess, *Tamil and Sanskrit Inscriptions*, (Archaeological Survey of South India, Vol. IV), tr. S. M. Natesa Sastri (Madras 1886), Nos. 5, 6, 7, 10, 13, 17 & 27 of the Setupati grants, pp. 71-120.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Nos. 10 and 11 of the Madras Museum grants, pp. 149, 151.

⁵ Gnanapragasar, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁶ *Kallātam*, ed. P. V. Comacuntaranar, (Madras 1962.) v. 37, p. 302, In this Tamil work the *Vanniyar* are said to have been created as a result of a miraculous conversion of twelve boars into human beings. Some take this to indicate their origin as subordinates under the Cālukyas whose emblem was the boar. *Cf.*, Gnanapragasar, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

varman Kulasekhara Pāṇḍya (1268-1308). Most of them bear the title of Vanniya-mā-devan or Vanniya-perumāl or Vanniyar-nāyan (Lord of the Vanniyar).¹ Prominent among them is one Vanniya-nāyan Cārrukkuṭātān who figures in as many as fifteen records of the time of Rājādhira II. He is described in these as a Malaiyamān chief, with the fulsome epithets Malaiyamān Irāiyūrān Periya Uṭaiyān Cārrukkuṭātān Vanniyanāyan Rājarāja Cētiyarājan.² A contemporary Ceylonese work, the *Upāsaka-janālaṅkāra*, also refers to a Vanni feudatory of the Pāṇḍya ruler (*Paṇḍu bhūmaṇḍale yo'bhū vañño sāmanta bhūmipo*).³ As in the case of some princes of the Vijayanagar period, certain rulers of the thirteenth century also seem to have faced the opposition of the Vanniyar, for we find that an army chief of Rājarāja III rejoiced in the title of *Vanniya-vēṭṭakkāran* (*Vanniya vēṭṭaikkāran* - He who hunted down the Vanniyar).⁴ There is also evidence to show that a fighting unit of the Perumpaṭai (lit. the Big Army, a regiment of the medieval period) was recruited from the Vanniya-vaṭṭam (lit. the Vanniya Circle).⁵

It is in the eleventh century that we come across the earliest references to the term *vanni* in the South Indian inscriptions. Records of Rājendra I (1012-1044) refer to a certain Vanniya Reva who was an army chief of the Caḷukyas.⁶ But perhaps the earliest occurrence of the term *vanni* is in the inscription No. 556 of 1919 which appears to belong to the time of Rājarāja I (985-1014).⁷ The term that occurs in this inscription is *vanniya-parru*, (lit. Vanniya holding), which is comparable with such terms as *paṭai-parru*

¹ *ARE for 1903*, Nos. 546 & 558 of 1902 from Tiruvannamali (South Arcot), dated A. D. 1191 and 1205 respectively, refer to a chief of Paṅkala-nāṭu named Kūttāṭuntevan Prithvigaṅgan Vanniyamātevan Alakiyacolan. *ARE for 1936/37*, No. 214 of 1936/37, also from South Arcot, refers to a Vanniyapperumāl. It is dated A. D. 1277. *ARE for 1934/35*, Nos. 126, 136, 143 to 149, 154 to 159, and 171 as well as *ARE for 1937/38*, No. 381 of 1937/38 refer to Vanniyar-nāyan. All these are from South Arcot.

² *ARE for 1934/35*, Nos. mentioned in fn. 1.

³ *Upāsakajanālaṅkāra*, ed. Moratota Dhammakkhanda Thera, revised by Kosgoda Pannasekhara Thera (Weligama 1914), p. 157.

⁴ Subramaniam, *SITI*, II, Inscription No. 709, p. 665.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Inscription No. 706, p. 662.

⁶ *SII*, III, No. 29, l. 10, p. 59; *SII*, VIII, No. 1, p. 1.

⁷ *ARE for 1920*, No. 556 of 1919. In this inscription there is a reference to one Pottappiccolan. Presumably he is the same as the Pottappiccolan who figures in other records of the time of Rājarāja I (K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Coḷas*, p. 305) and it is on this basis that our surmise rests.

(lit. army holding) occurring in the Cōla epigraphs. After an analysis of the occurrences of this term in the South Indian inscriptions, T. N. Subramaniam explains it as referring to 'lands held under military tenure' or 'lands in the enjoyment of soldiers'.¹ Since there is another term *paṭai-parru*, referring to holdings of soldiers who were different from the Vanniyar of the *vanniya-parru*, it appears that the latter referred to only the holdings of the Vanniya soldiers.²

On the basis of the above evidence in the South Indian sources, we are in a position to draw the following conclusions. In the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Vanniyar were associated with martial pursuits rather than with agriculture. Some of their chiefs were in the service of kings and enjoyed a status similar to that of other feudal officials of that time. But there were occasions when the Vanniyar constituted a source of trouble to the supreme rulers and it was considered to be an achievement to suppress them. In the period after the thirteenth century, the Vanniyar continued to be a martial community and were noted for their skill in archery. They also continued to give trouble to certain supreme rulers as well as to some local princes and to suppress them was still considered to be a great achievement. There were also some Vanniyar who had taken to agriculture.

As far as we can trace, therefore, the Vanniyar were a community associated with fighting. Gradually they must have begun to lead a settled life and taken to agriculture. Traditions relating to the later Vijayanagar period refer to them as a 'forest race, a tribe of low cultivators', who built forts and 'paid tribute to the sovereigns of Andhra, Carnata and Dravida (Tamil) countries'.³ They may have lived originally in the forest tracts. If their name has any connection with their original habitat, then it may be derived from Skt. *vanya* (= 'wild, savage or existing in the forest').⁴ *Vanya* becomes *vanniya* in Tamil (cf., Skt. *punya*=Tamil *punṇiya*) and takes the suffix *-r* (*ṛ*) as a personal plural noun. The Pali form *vañña*

¹ Subramaniam, *SITI*, III, p. LXXXVII.

² T. Desikachari, *Inscriptions (Texts) of the Pudukottah State*, (Pudukottah 1929) No. 285.

³ William Taylor, *Examination and Analysis of the Mackenzie Manuscripts*, (Madras 1838) p. 78.

⁴ M. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit English Dictionary*, p. 919.

also suits this derivation. As the name is not of Tamil derivation, it is possible that this community or tribe originated in the Telugu or Kannaḍa areas, where Sanskrit caste names are not uncommon. Indeed the Vanniyaṛ caste is still found in the North Arcot district which borders on the Telugu regions.

‘Vanni’ in Ceylon

We are inclined to think that the name Vanni originated in India and not in Ceylon. In the first place, it occurs in the South Indian sources earlier than in the Ceylonese records. Secondly, it is unlikely that a Sinhalese caste with the name Vanni migrated to South India or that the term *vanni* was introduced from Ceylon to designate a community in South India. But the converse is possible. Further, the absence in the island of traditions concerning the origins of the Vanni and the prevalence of such traditions in South India may also point in the same direction. Finally, the Tamil chronicles of Ceylon refer to the migration of the Vanniyaṛ from the Tamil country to Ceylon. It seems, therefore, not justifiable to say that the name was applied to a class of chieftains or a group of Sinhalese in Ceylon because they were living in the forest regions, unless such a name was given following the Indian practice.

It is difficult to trace how this name came to be applied to Sinhalese chieftains, too. One possibility is that the term *vanni* became current for chieftains in the abandoned regions of Rājaratṭha and in the forest tracts elsewhere after Vanni chiefs from South India established themselves in the northern parts of Ceylon. Another possibility is that the term was introduced into the island before the migration of the South Indian Vanni chiefs, in the same manner as South Indian administrative terms came to be introduced¹. *Vanni*, however, was not used in South India as an administrative term and the Vanni chiefs there were not heads of administrative units. It is possible that in the period of Cōḷa occupation (993 – 1070) or afterwards Vanni soldiers were brought to the island and given land-grants for their services in the same manner as the South Indian Vēḷaikkāra troops were employed here and given land-grants². In this way the name Vanni could have been introduced into the

¹ Cf., *Melātsi*, *muttettu*, *meykāppar*, etc.

² S. Paranavitana, ‘The Polonnaruva Inscription of Vijayabāhu I’, *EI*, XVIII, p. 337.

island at a date earlier than the thirteenth century, when we get the earliest references to it in the Ceylonese works. But in the eleventh or the twelfth century the semi-independent Vanni chieftaincies could not have come into existence in the Rājaraṭṭha even if they had emerged elsewhere. For, as we shall see later, such chieftaincies could have risen only when there was a slackening of central control, and such a slackening did not take place in the Rājaraṭṭha till after the end of the twelfth century.

In Ceylon the earliest work in which the name Vanni occurs is the *Pūjāvaliya*, written in the third quarter of the thirteenth century. This is also the only work of the thirteenth century referring to the Vanni chiefs of Ceylon. In the account of Māgha's occupation of the Rājaraṭṭha (A. D. 1215) this work refers to the Mahavanni areas and the chiefs of those regions who lived in fear of Māgha.¹ The Mahavanni was obviously a part of the area that felt the impact of Māgha's rule. There is no evidence to say that Māgha's rule extended beyond the Rājaraṭṭha and some parts of the Rohaṇa (the present Batticaloa District). The *Pūjāvaliya* reference would, therefore, mean that by about the third quarter of the thirteenth century the *vanni* had come into use in Ceylon to designate the minor chieftaincies in those areas of the Rājaraṭṭha and other provinces where the authority of the Sinhalese king was not felt any more. Further, it would also imply that the division into Mahavanni and Sirivanni had already been effected by that time. Although this may appear doubtful, it could be argued that it is not impossible.

There are a number of references to the Vanni in the *Cūlavamaṃsa* and the *Pūjāvaliya*. The period to which these relate is what may be called the post-Polonnaruva period (after A. D. 1215). Geiger is, however, of the opinion that there is a notice in the *Cūlavamaṃsa* regarding the Vannis of the twelfth century, although they are not mentioned by that name there.

Es hat Vanni ohne Zweifel auch schon im 12. Jahrhundert gegeben, denn auch in der Beschreibung der Zustände, wie sie durch die damaligen Bürgerkriege geworden waren, findet sich Mhvs. 61. 62 die Notiz: Leute von vornehmer Abkunft (*Kulīra*)

¹ *Pv.*, p. 109.

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hielten sich, hier und dort an geeigneten Plätzen (*phasutthanesu*) verstreut, verborgen und nahmen ihren Wohnsitz daselbst".¹

The strophe in the *Cūlavamsa* referred to by Geiger is as follows:

In the same way people of good family, scattered here and there, kept themselves hidden in places which seemed good to them and made their abode there.²

Geiger's claim that these 'people of good family' (*kulīna*) were Vannis is based on his assumption that the Vannis were Sinhalese of noble descent who sought refuge in the forest regions in times of distress and later came to be called Vannis, signifying 'jungle settlers' (Waldsiedler). But this interpretation, as we 'shall see presently, is unacceptable. Paranavitana, too, feels that the Vanni chiefs appear to have been in Ceylon 'from early days' (earlier than the thirteenth century).³ This opinion is based on certain statements in the *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya* and the *Elu-attanaḡaḡu-vamsa*. The latter work alludes to certain Sirivannis in the Attanaḡaḡu region who disregarded the authority of Mugalan who was ruling at Anurādhapura.⁴ This monarch may be any one of the three Mugalans who ruled between the fifth and the seventh century. The source of our information is a work of the post-Polonaruva period and, therefore, the reference to Vannis in the period before the eighth century does not seem to be authentic. Paranavitana himself has cast doubt on the validity of this reference by saying that 'we cannot be certain that the author of this text was not attributing to the past conditions which were normal in his day'.⁵ The *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya* has a similar reference to the Vannis. According to this work, Parākramabāhu I conquered three hundred and sixty-four Vanni territories.⁶ This is, however, not mentioned in the earlier work *Cūlavamsa* in which the life and achievements of that monarch are dealt with in great detail. Though at first sight these statements in the later works may appear to be inauthentic, they are not actually so. This could be explained easily if we find out the exact use of the term *vanni* in our medieval Sinhalese and

¹ Geiger, op. cit., p. 8.

² Cv., 61: 62.

³ Paranavitana, op. cit., p. 738.

⁴ *Elu-Attanaḡaḡu-vamsa*, ed. P. Aryaratna, (Colombo 1932), p. 41.

⁵ Paranavitana, op. cit., p. 737.

⁶ *Nikāya-Saṅgrahaya*, ed. D. P. R. Samaranayaka (Colombo 1960), p. 20.

Pali sources.¹ In these sources, *vanni* is applied to chieftaincies and chiefs in the Rājaraṭṭha and in other forest tracts. While in the Sinhalese sources *vanni* occurs alone to mean either a chieftaincy or a chief², in the *Cūlavamsa* it occurs in compounds, namely *vanni-rājattam*³, *vanni-rāja*⁴, *vanni-rājāno*⁵, *vanni-mahīpāla*⁶, *maha-vañña-rājāñña*⁷, (variant: *maha-vanya-rājāñña*) and *vanni-rājūhi*⁸, (all of which stand for 'Vanni kings'). Perhaps the only exception is the occurrence in the personal name Vanni Bhuvanekabāhu, but here, too, it could be taken to be in the same adjectival form as in the above compounds, that is, it is used here as a qualifying noun⁹. Geiger's contention that the whole compound *vanni-rājāno* refers to a noble clan (adeliger Clan) of the Sinhalese in the same way as *Lichchavi-rajjuruvo* stood for the Lichchavi clan is not convincing. We are inclined to take these compounds to mean 'kings of the Vanni'. Geiger's argument that the word *vanni* never occurs alone but always in a compound is based purely on the *Cūlavamsa*. Paranavitana's view that the *vannis* were a class of chieftains is right in so far as the Sinhalese and Pali sources are concerned. In these sources the term is used to denote chiefs and chieftaincies in the areas that did not come under the direct rule of the Sinhalese king. When the authors of the *Eḷu-attanagaḷuvamsa* and the *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya* referred to *vanni* chieftaincies of earlier centuries, they were only using a term that had come to be applied to such chieftaincies in the thirteenth century and later. These references need not be taken to imply the presence of a clan of people called Vannis in those early times. When Geiger referred to the Vannis as a noble clan of the Sinhalese who took refuge in the jungles in the time of Māgha, he was only referring to those Sinhalese who set themselves up as minor chiefs in the abandoned areas of the Rājaraṭṭha which came to be known as the Vanni. He was basing his statement solely on the *Cūlavamsa* and

¹ Cf., Pv., p. 109: *Rājāvaliya*, ed. B. Gunasekara (Colombo 1953) pp. 44, 65, & 66; *Nikāya-saṅgrahaya*, p. 20; *Gī-āsandesaya*, ed. T. Sugathapala (Alutgama 1924), v. 128.

² Cv., 81: 11.

³ Ibid., 83: 10.

⁴ Ibid., 87: 26, 52.

⁵ Ibid., 88: 87.

⁶ Ibid., 88: 88.

⁷ Ibid., 89: 51.

⁸ Ibid., 90: 105.

⁹ Cf., Tamil *kuruvanni* in Inscription No. 8 of 1936/37, ARE for 1937.

was not taking into account the evidence of the Tamil sources regarding the Vanniyar of Ceylon. He is wrong, as we shall see, in calling the modern Vanni caste of the Northern and North-central Provinces as descendants of the Sinhalese *vanni-rājāno* of the post-Polonnaruva period.

In the Sinhalese and Pali works of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, therefore, the name Vanni has been applied to the chiefs and chieftaincies of the Rājarat̥ṭha and other forest tracts. As Paranavitana has pointed out, there seem to have been two classes of Vannis, namely the Maha-vanni and the Siri-vanni. In some works the number of Vanni chieftaincies is given as eighteen and in some others as three hundred and sixty-four.¹ These could hardly be taken seriously. Eighteen is a conventional number often met with in Indian literature. In fact, some Sanskrit works refer to the existence of eighteen forest kingdoms (*āṭavika-rājya*).² Since the Vanni chieftaincies were also forest kinglets, the Sinhalese authors may have referred to them as eighteen in number, following the Indian practice. In South India, too, there are references to the Vanniyar of the eighteen *kōṭṭam* (districts).³ It is possible that traditionally it was considered that there were eighteen Vanni chieftaincies. In the Tamil chronicles of Ceylon, however, the number of such chieftaincies in the island is given as seven.⁴ Probably these were the major Tamil chieftaincies that were feudatory to the Jaffna kingdom.

The Tamil Vanni

Although the Sinhalese and Pali chronicles do not refer to the Tamil Vanni chieftaincies, the references to 'Sinhalese Vanni kings' (*Sihale Vanni-rāja* in the *Cūlavamsa* and to 'Sinhalese Maha Vannis' (*Siṃhala maha-vannin*) in the *Pūjavalīya* imply that there were also Vannis who were not Sinhalese.⁵ It is from the Tamil sources and the later European works that we get much information about the Tamil Vanni chieftaincies. As in the Sinhalese sources, the name

¹ S. Paranavitana, *op. cit.*, p. 737

² D. C. Sircar (ed.), *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, I (Calcutta 1942), pp. 257, 375.

³ Burgess, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

⁴ *Yym.*, p. 38. *cf.*, *Elūril Atappar* (the Aṭappar of the Seven Villages) in the Kaṅkuveli Tamil inscription of a Vanni chieftain of Trincomalee, K. Indrapala, '*Kilakkilaṅkai Cacanāṅkal*' *op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁵ *Cv.*, 83: 10; *Pv.*, p. 116,

Vanni is applied in the Tamil chronicles to the chieftaincies of northern and eastern Ceylon. But the name Vanni^u is applied to a caste of South Indian Tamils whose leaders were the chiefs of the Vanni districts. These Tamil sources preserve traditions relating to the migration of this caste to Ceylon.

In the present day, with the opening up of several colonisation schemes in the Vanni, the Vanni^u caste has almost become integrated into the Sinhalese and Tamil population. But in the nineteenth century when the Vanni was being opened up for the first time the Vanni^u formed a distinct caste and followed their age-old occupation of hunting and occasional cultivation. Not all the people of the Vanni areas belonged to the Vanni^u caste. In fact only a small percentage of the people of the Vanni were Vanni^u. The following observation of S. Fowler is worthy of note in this context.

These people are the Wanniahs and are entirely dependent on hunting and occasional *chena* cultivation. They have no money and cannot buy land. These Wanniahs are a distinct caste, of which these men are the only representatives in the province. (There are five or six villages in the North-Central Province, I believe). They still use the primitive bow and arrow and are well acquainted with the most remote jungles through which they wander in search of honey and game. There are some peculiarities in their dialect, which with their mode of life, suggest relationship with the Veddah, but they altogether repudiate the idea¹.

The Vanni^u of the nineteenth century were divided into two different communal groups. Those who lived in the Vavuniya district were Tamil-speakers while those in the Nuvarakalaviya district were mainly Sinhalese-speakers. There is reason to believe that these Sinhalese-speaking Vannis were in fact descended from Tamil Vanni^u who had become assimilated to the Sinhalese population after the Nuvarakalaviya district was re-colonised by the Sinhalese. It was traditionally believed by these people that they were descendants of Tamils. A. Brodie, basing his account on certain traditions preserved among them, wrote in 1856:

¹ S. Fowler, *Diary of 3rd May 1887*, quoted in the *MLR & NQC*, II, No. 5, May 1894, p. 98.

K. Indrapāla

There is one (caste) here not general over the Island and which is superior to that which is elsewhere considered the highest. I mean the Wannī caste. These persons are descendants of certain Tamils who came over from the continent in the time of Raja Sen, who granted to each extensive tracts of land¹.

There were other aspects of their life which revealed their close affinity to the Tamils. Another of the nineteenth-century writers makes the following observation on these Sinhalese of the Vanni region:

They have adopted the Tamil system of personal names, thus a man has his father's name prefixed to his own and does not take his name from the village or family he belongs to or the land he owns, as is the common Sinhalese custom elsewhere. Many of their names, too, are Tamil in a Sinhalese shape. The older generation have taken to wearing earrings, but this practice has been discouraged by the present Sinhalese headman. The Sinhalese villagers have as much faith in the Hindu god Pillaiyar as have the Tamil villagers whose favourite god he is. . . As regards dress the Sinhalese keep generally to their own customs, but they often wear the Jaffna cloth (*chayaveddi*) and fasten the handkerchief on their heads after the Tamil manner.²

The foregoing observations of nineteenth-century writers reveal certain facts about the so-called Sinhalese Vanniya. In the first place, we find that they were a caste distinct from the Sinhalese. Secondly, traces of Tamil descent could be found in their traditions, customs and manners. Thirdly, they considered themselves to be superior to all other castes of the Vanni. This feeling was evidently due to the fact that they were at one time the ruling caste in the Vanni. In the light of these considerations it is difficult to accept the view of Geiger that the Vannis were a degenerate group of Sinhalese. It appears that the Sinhalese Vanniya who lived as a separate caste in the North-Central Province were descendants of the Tamil Vanniya who gained authority in that part of the island after the decline of Polonnaruva. But the name Vanni or Vanniya was also used in the post-Polonnaruva period to refer to

¹ A. Brodie, 'Topographical and Statistical Account of the District of Nuwara-kalawīya', *JCBRAS*, III, 1856, p. 150.

² Anonymous, 'The Vanni', *MLR & NQC*, II, No. 5, May 1894, pp. 98-99.

the chieftains of the Vanni regions who may or may not have been of the Vanniya caste. A copper plate of Bhuvanekabāhu VII (dated A. D. 1547) refers to a Mukkuva (a South Indian caste) chieftain of the Puttalam region with the title Vanniya¹. The *Maṭṭakkaḷappu-mānmiyam* (*Mm*), a late Tamil chronicle of the Batticaloa district, refers to other Vanni chiefs of the Mukkuva caste². It appears, therefore, that the Vanni chiefs were not always members of the Vanniya or Vanniya caste. The South Indian Vanniya, who, as we shall see presently, established chieftaincies in the Trincomalee region some time after the twelfth century, were probably the first Vanni chiefs of the island. Later, it appears, similar chiefs, both Sinhalese and Tamil, and their chieftaincies in other parts of the island were also given the appellation of the Vanni.

Tamil Tradition

Traditions relating to the migration of the Vanniya from South India are preserved in a number of Tamil chronicles. In the *Yālpāṇa-vaipava-mālai* (*Ym*) and the *Koṇēcar-Kalveṭtu* (*Kk*) this migration is connected with a personage named Kuḷakkōṭṭan. In the *Mm* it is connected with Māgha (Mākōn) while in the *Vaiyāpāṭal* (*Vp*) a Paṇḍya princess is associated with this migration.

Of these, the tradition connected with Kuḷakkōṭṭan is the strongest. This personage and his activities are also referred to in the *Taksiṇa-kailāca-purāṇam* (*Tkp*), *Tirikoṇācala-purāṇam* (*Tp*) and in a sixteenth century Tamil inscription, though he is not associated with the Vanniya in these sources³.

In the Tamil sources Kuḷakkōṭṭan is described as a Saiva prince from the Cōla country who came to Ceylon on a pilgrimage, tarried at Trincomalee for some time, effected repairs to the ruined temple of Koṇēsvaram and created the chieftaincy of Trincomalee. The *Kk* and the *Tp* are both chronicles of the Koṇēsvaram temple and therefore embody the same tradition. The account of Kuḷakkōṭṭan in these two works may be summarised in the following manner. The prince Kuḷakkōṭṭan, after renovating the Koṇēsvaram temple,

¹ Casie Chetty, op. cit., p. 190.

² *Maṭṭakkaḷappu-mānmiyam*, ed. F. X. C Nataraja, (Colombo 1962) p. 95.

³ *Taksiṇa-kailāca-purāṇam*, ed. P. P. Vaittialinka Tecikar, (Pt. Pedro 1916); *Tirikoṇācala-purāṇam*, ed. A. Canmukarattina Aiyar, (Jaffna 1909); H. W. Codrington, 'The Inscription at Fort Frederick, Trincomalee', *JCBRAS*, XXX, No. 80, p. 448.

decided to invite some families from South India and entrust them with the task of maintaining the different services in the temple. According to the *Kk*, Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ went in person to invite the families while the *Tp* states that he sent his ministers. In response to this invitation thirty families of the Vaḷava caste went from Maruṅkūr. They were assigned the duties of *tānattār* (temple executive) and were settled in Trincomalee. Twenty families went from Kārai (Kāraikkāl). They were conferred the title of *Paṇṭārattār* (lit. treasury officials) and were assigned various duties. Paḷlaveḷi, in the Trincomalee district, was granted to them for settlement. A nobleman of the Kārālar caste was invited from Tirunelvēli and conferred the title of *mutanmai* (chief). He was assigned duties concerning the conduct of festivals and was granted the villages of Kaṭṭukkuḷattūr and Nilāveḷi. A minstrel from Kāñci was assigned the duty of singing hymns at the temple and was settled at Campūr in the Koṭṭiyār division of the Trincomalee District. The prose section of the *Kk* adds that five *ācāriyar* (master craftsmen) were invited from the Coḷa country and were settled in Trincomalee. When all these people were assigned different duties and settled in and around Trincomalee, a nobleman from Madurai was invited and appointed as their ruler. He is given the title of *vannipam* (Vanni chief) in the *Kk* but not in the *Tp*.

In the *Yvm* this account has been greatly modified. According to this chronicle of Jaffna, the prince Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ, after having completed the renovation of the temple, granted fields and estates in seven districts to the temple. He then invited and settled Vanniyar in those districts and entrusted them with the task of cultivating the temple lands. After the death of Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ, a further band of fifty-nine Vanniyar came from the Pāṇḍya country and settled in these districts. Since the revenue from these districts went to the Kōṇēśvaram temple and not to the king of Kandy (to whom these districts apparently belonged), the latter neglected the affairs of these districts. The affairs of these districts were managed by several petty chieftains. Eventually the Vanniyar got together and selected seven of their chiefs to be the rulers of the seven districts.

The identity of Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ has not been easy to establish. The *Tkp* calls him Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ *alias* Cōḷakaṅkaṅ (Coḷagaṅga) and his father's name is given as Manu Cōḷaṅ¹.

¹ *Tkp.*, *Pāyiram*, v. 8; p. 67, v. 8.

The *Tp* refers to him as the son of Vararāmatēvar, also a Cōḷakaṅkaṅ, from the Cōḷa country.¹ The *Kk* agrees with this statement but does not refer to Vararāmatēvar as a Cōḷakaṅkaṅ.² The *Ym* follows the *Tkp* and refers to Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ's father as Maṅu-nīti-kaṅṭa Coḷaṅ.³ The *Tp*, too, mentions the latter but only as one of the famous ancestors of Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ.⁴ Maṅu-nīti-kaṅṭa Cōḷaṅ is a mythical ruler reputed for his benevolence and compassion who finds a place in the legendary genealogy of the Cōḷas.⁵ It is hard to explain how he came to be associated with Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ. As far as we know no Cōḷa ruler by the name of Vararāmatēvar ever existed. The Cōḷa descent attributed to Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ in the Tamil sources appears to be rather unreliable. Even the name Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ does not seem to have been the real name of this personage. It means 'He of Tanks and Temples' and is very probably a sobriquet he earned after his tank-building activities. As Paranavitana is inclined to believe, Cōḷakaṅkaṅ may have been the real surname of this prince. While the *Tkp*, the oldest of the above Tamil sources, calls him Cōḷakaṅkaṅ, the *Tp* calls his father Cōḷakaṅkaṅ. Cōḷakaṅkaṅ also seems to have been the family name of this prince, as it was in the case of the Eastern Gaṅgas (Coḷagaṅga or Coḷagaṅga) of South India. We are, therefore, inclined to accept the view that the family name of this prince was Cōḷakaṅkaṅ.

The identification of this Cōḷakaṅkaṅ is no easy matter, for this name was used not only by the Eastern Gaṅgas but also by several princes and feudatories in the Cōḷa, Pāṇḍya and Karṇāṭa countries in the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Moreover, our sources reveal that a number of Indian princes of this name had been in Ceylon in those centuries. As a result we are up against several possibilities. This prince may have been (a) Coḷagaṅga-kumāra who lived in the court of Gajabāhu II⁶, (b) or Coḷagaṅga who invaded Ceylon and captured power in 1196⁷, or (c) Coḷagaṅga of the Trincomalee Sanskrit inscription who landed in

¹ *Tp.*, p. 94, v. 53.

² *Konecar-kalvettu*, ed. A. Canmukarattina Aiyar, appended to the *Tkp.*, (Jaffna 1909) p. 1.

³ *Yalppāṇa-vaipava-mālai*, ed. K. Capanatan (Colombo 1953), p. 8.

⁴ *Tp.*, p. 94.

⁵ *El*, XV, p. 46.

⁶ *Cv.*, 70:238.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 80:29.

Ceylon in 1223,¹ or (d) Coḷagaṅgadeva who invaded Ceylon sometime before 1284,² or (e) any other prince not mentioned in the *Cūlavamsa* or inscriptions.

To consider the first possibility, we find that Coḷagaṅgakumāra was a prince who lived in the court of Gajabāhu II around 1153. No details about this prince are available. The only evidence which may be used in support of the identification of Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ with Coḷagaṅgakumāra is to be found in the Tamil chronicles. In the *Tkp*, *Tp* and *Kk*, Gajabāhu and Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ are closely associated with the Kōṇṇēśvaram temple.³ The *Maṭṭakkaḷappu-māṇṇiyam* (*Mm*), a chronicle of the Batticaloa district, in which Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ is called Makācēṇaṅ (Mahāsenā) states that this prince married a Kaliṅga princess who was an adopted daughter of a certain Ceylonese ruler named Gajabāhu.⁴ But the story of this Kaliṅga princess is given in such a legendary form that it is difficult to attach much importance to it. It is not possible to identify Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ with Coḷagaṅgakumāra on the basis of this unreliable evidence.

The Kaliṅga prince Coḷagaṅga who seized power in 1196 is said to have been a nephew of Niśsaṅkamalla.⁵ It is not stated in our sources whether he invaded the island in 1196 or whether he came to Ceylon some time before that date and captured power in 1196. If 1196 is the year in which he arrived here, it is unlikely that he is the same prince who effected repairs to the Kōṇṇēśvaram temple and settled Vanniyaṅ in the Trincomalee region, for he was ousted from the throne within a year and it is hard to think that under very insecure conditions he would have undertaken the task of repairing temples and settling people from South India. Moreover, if he were a nephew of Niśsaṅkamalla and aspired to the kingship of the island, he may have been a Buddhist and not a Saiva. On the other hand, it is possible that this Coḷagaṅga, like Māgha who also was a Kaliṅga prince, was a non-Buddhist. The late Sinhalese chronicle *Rājāvaliya* disagrees with the other chronicles and states that this Coḷagaṅga was an army chief who seized the throne on behalf of Queen Lilāvati and, having enthroned her,

¹ S. Paranavitana, 'A Fragmentary Sanskrit Inscription from Trincomalee', *EZ*, V, p. 173.

² *Cv.*, 90:32.

³ *Tkp.*, 7:88 ff.; *Tp.*, p. 170 ff.; *Kk.*, p. 20.

⁴ *Mm.* p. 28.

⁵ *Cv.*, 80:29.

administered the kingdom for three years.¹ This is interesting in view of the fact that the Tamil chronicles *Yvm*, *Tp*, *Mm* and *Kk* mention that a queen was wielding power at the Sinhalese capital when Kuḷakkōṭṭaṇ was renovating the temple at Trincomalee.² However, the available evidence is insufficient to indentify Kuḷakkōṭṭaṇ with this Coḍagaṅga.

The Sanskrit inscription from Trincomalee, discovered among the ruins of the Kōṇeśvaram temple, refers to a personage named Coḍagaṅga who came to Ceylon in 1223.³ Paranavitana has identified this person with Kuḷakkōṭṭaṇ. The inscription is fragmentary and is engraved on a part of a stone door jamb. Among the decipherable words on the stone is the name Gokaṛṇa (Pali, Gokaṇṇa), the ancient name of Trincomalee and the root from which the name of the temple is derived (Skt. Gokaṛṇeśvara). Since the epigraph is inscribed on a part of a building, Paranavitana feels that it 'may reasonably be assumed to have recorded the building of the monument of which it formed a part'.⁴ He therefore argues that 'it is very unlikely that there were two Coḍagaṅgas who both came from a foreign country, landed at Trincomalee and busied themselves effecting improvements to the Saiva shrine there'.⁵ He adds further that the date of Coḍagaṅga's arrival being 1223, it 'agrees with the statement in the *Yvm* that this prince had dealings with chieftains known as Vanniyaṛs, for it is only from the thirteenth century that Vanniyaṛs or Vannis are mentioned in the contemporary writings'.⁶ Paranavitana is also of the opinion that this Coḍagaṅga was an Eastern Gaṅga prince. There is, however, no evidence for such an assumption. But there is no evidence to the contrary either. Gokaṛṇeśvara was the favourite deity of the Eastern Gaṅgas.⁷ The fact that a Coḍagaṅga from outside the island interested himself in the affairs of the Gokaṛṇeśvara temple in Ceylon may indicate that he was an Eastern Gaṅga. Probably Paranavitana is right in identifying him as an Eastern Gaṅga prince. Paranavitana's arguments for the identification of this Coḍagaṅga with Kuḷakkōṭṭaṇ seem quite tenable. But let us consider the other possibilities, too, before we arrive at a satisfactory conclusion.

¹ *Rājāvaliya*, ed. B. Gunasekara, (Colombo 1953), p. 43.

² *Yvm.*, p. 8; *Tp.*, p. 119; *Mm.*, p. 32; *Kk.*, p. 32.

³ S. Paranavitana, 'A Fragmentary Sanskrit Inscription . . .', p. 173.

⁴ S. Paranavitana, 'The Arya Kingdom of North Ceylon', *JCBRAS* (NS), VII, p. 179.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁷ *El*, IV, p. 192.

The *Cūlavam̐sa* has a reference to another Coḷagaṅgadeva who is stated to have invaded Ceylon some time before 1284. From the manner in which this event is introduced in the chronicle it does not appear to have been a major invasion. It is said that Bhuvanekabāhu I 'drove back all the Damiḷa forces, like Kāliṅgarāyara, Coḷagaṅgadeva and the rest who had landed from the opposite coast'.¹ Apparently these enemies had led punitive raids which were not of much significance and in time Bhuvanekabāhu got rid of them. The nature of the expedition of Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ also seems to have been similar, according to the Tamil sources which state that he had an army with him but did not effect any conquest.² But there is one difficulty in identifying Coḷagaṅgadeva with Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ. The former was in Ceylon not long before 1284, the year of Bhuvanekabāhu's death. If we are to accept the testimony of the Tamil sources that Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ introduced Vanniya into the island, the latter must have come to Ceylon before the third quarter of the thirteenth century, when we first hear of the Vannis in the Ceylonese sources.³ It could be argued, however, that Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ only introduced a further band of Vanniya into the island or that the Coḷagaṅgadeva mentioned in the *Cūlavam̐sa* landed in the island probably much earlier than the reign of Bhuvanekabāhu but was driven away only in that reign. This would mean that the possibility of identifying Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ with Coḷagaṅgadeva cannot be ruled out.

It is also possible that Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ was different from any of the four princes taken into consideration so far. He may have been a Cōḷa, Eastern Gaṅga or Western Gaṅga prince or a South Indian feudatory ruler whose visit to the island is not recorded in the Sinhalese and Pali sources. The *Yvm*, *Tkp*, *Tp*, *Kk* and the *Mu-m* maintain that Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ was a Cōḷa prince.⁴ The last mentioned work gives Cūrya Kulōttuṅka (Skt. Sūrya Kulottuṅga) as one of the titles of the father of Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ. Of the three Cōḷa rulers named Kulottuṅga, only the first of that name (1070-1120) is known to have had a son named Coḷagaṅga (or Coḷagaṅga).⁵ He was viceroy at Vēṅgī from 1084 to 1089 but vanished into

¹ *Cv.*, 90:32.

² *Cf.* *Yvm.*, p. 10.

³ *Cf.* *Pv.*, p. 109.

⁴ *Yvm*, p. 8; *Tkp.*, 7:23; *Tp.*, p. 88. v. 4; *Kk.*, p. 1; *Munnesvara-mānmiyam (Mu-m)*, (no ed.) (Colombo 1961), p. 8.

⁵ K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Coḷas*, (Madras 1955), p. 319.

obscurity after that. Was he the prince who came to Trincomalee and tarried there? We know that his step-sister, Cuttamalli, lived in Ceylon, having married a prince of the Pāṇḍya faction.¹ In the absence of any definite evidence, it is not possible to identify Kuḷakkōṭṭan as the son of Kulottuṅga I. Further, it must be noted that there were also other Cōḷa princes named Coḷagaṅga.²

Kuḷakkōṭṭan may have even belonged to a feudatory dynasty of South India. There were several Cōḷa-Pāṇḍya feudatories named Cōḷagaṅga. One of them figures in about five inscriptions dated in the regnal years of Rājarāja III and Kulottuṅga III, between 1210 and 1222.³ Another is mentioned in a number of records of the time of Rājarāja III.⁴ Certain other Coḷagaṅgas are known from Pāṇḍya inscriptions,⁵ The *Upāsaka-janālaṅkāra* refers to a Pāṇḍya feudatory named Coḷagaṅga who was himself a *vañña* (Vanniyan).⁶ This may mean that some of the Vanniyan chiefs were themselves known as Colagaṅga and Kuḷakkōṭṭan may have been one such chief who, after establishing himself in the eastern part of Ceylon, settled there some of his kinsmen or Vanniya subjects. All these are matters of speculation and in the absence of any real evidence no certain conclusions can be drawn.

In the *Mm* the creation of the Vanni chieftaincies of the Batticaloa district is attributed to Maḡha (who is referred to as Mākōṇ in this chronicle). It is stated that this Kāliṅga ruler chose the best among the Paṭaiyāṭci (military caste) from Kāḷikaṭṭam (unidentified) and brought them to Ceylon as commanders of his army and later made them the *vannipam* (Vanni rulers) of Batticaloa. The assignment of duties to the various castes of Batticaloa is also attributed to this ruler.⁷ The renovation of the Trincomalee temple and the repair of tanks belonging to this temple are, however, attributed to another personality called Makācēnan (Mahāsena) who is identifiable with the Kuḷakkōṭṭan of the *Tkp*, *Tp*, *Kk* and the *Yvm*. There is undoubtedly a confusion of traditions relating to Kuḷakkōṭṭan with those of the earlier and better known tank-builder

¹ S. Paranavitana, 'Two Tamil Inscriptions from Budumuttāva', *EZ*, III, p. 310.

² *Epigraphia Carnatica*, IX, Tamil Section (Mysore), p. 17.

³ *ARE for 1913*, Inscriptions Nos. 535, 549, 556, 557 & 559 of 1912.

⁴ *ARE for 1908*, Nos. 202 & 205 of 1908; *ARE for 1926*, No. 194 of 1926.

⁵ Cf., *ARE for 1921*, No. 140 of 1921; *ARE for 1922*, No. 203 of 1922; *ARE for 1915*, Nos. 409, 410 & 413 of 1914.

⁶ *Upāsaka-janālaṅkāra*, p. 157.

⁷ *Mm*, p. 104 ff.

Mahāsenā (274-301). Although Kuḷakkōṭṭan seems to have taken an interest only in the repair of some of the major irrigation works in his principality, Tamil tradition has credited him with the building of those tanks. Not only does the *Mm* refer to him as Makācēnan but it also describes him as a Vaitulliya Caivan (Skt. - Vaitulya Saiva),¹ an obvious confusion with Mahāsenā who, according to the *Mahāvamsa*, was a Vaitulya Buddhist.² Similarly, while Mahāsenā is recorded to have destroyed Brahmanical temples in Trincomalee, Kuḷakkōṭṭan is stated to have destroyed Buddhist structures in the same place.³

It is also interesting to note that in the *Mm* the account of Māgha is very similar to that of Kuḷakkōṭṭan in the Trincomalee chronicles. Firstly, Māgha is described as an ardent Saiva who was intolerant of Buddhism and even of the Vaiṣṇava faith.⁴ Kuḷakkōṭṭan, too, is stated to have been a very devoted Saiva although there is nothing in the Trincomalee chronicles to indicate that he was a bigot. It is in the *Mm*, where he is called Makācēnan that he is said to have destroyed Buddhist temples in Trincomalee. Secondly, Māgha is associated with the building of the Tirukkōvil temple and its tanks and with the invitation of priests to perform service in that temple.⁵ Kuḷakkōṭṭan, as we have seen, is credited with the renovation of the Kōṇṇesvaram temple and with the building of tanks. Thirdly, Māgha is stated to have assigned various duties for the different castes of Batticaloa. This account is remarkably similar to the assignment of duties by Kuḷakkōṭṭan to the various castes he invited from South India for the performance of services at the Kōṇṇesvaram temple. Finally, while Kuḷakkōṭṭan is said to have created the chieftaincy of Trincomalee, the foundation of chieftaincies in the Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Mannar and Jaffna districts is attributed to Māgha.

In the *Vp* and its gloss, the *Vaiyā*, a different version of the origin of the Tamil Vanni chieftaincies is given. The confused account in these works may be summed up in the following manner. When Vararācacinṅan (Skt. - Vararājasinṅha), a son of Ukkiracinṅan (Skt. - Ugrasinṅha) and king of a part of Ceylon, married a princess from the Pāṇḍya country, she brought with her a retinue of sixty

¹ Ibid., p. 33.

² *Mahāvamsa*, ed. W. Geiger, tr. W. Geiger & M. H. Bode (Colombo 1959), 36:111.

³ Ibid., 37:41; *Mm.*, p. 34.

⁴ *Mm.*, pp. 53, 70.

⁵ Ibid., p. 77.

Vanniyar. One of them stayed behind at the capital of the kingdom and the rest were asked to take over the chiefships of the Aṭaṅkāparru region, which corresponds roughly to the present Vavuniya District and the northern part of the Trincomalee District. These Vanniyar then invited from South India a number of people belonging to the eighteen castes and settled them in different parts of the Aṭaṅkāparru as well as in the peninsula of Jaffna. Madurai and Maruṅkūr in South India were among the places from which immigrants came to settle in the Aṭaṅkāparru. After this follows a long and confused list of places in the Vanni districts where various castes and prominent personalities went and settled. Among these places are Trincomalee, Verukal, Tampalakāmam, Tiriyaṅ and Kaṭṭukkuḷam, which are in the Trincomalee District. The Vanniyar are mentioned among those castes which settled in these regions.¹ It is interesting to note that the *Vp* mentions 'Pūpāla Vannimai (the Vanni Chief Pūpāla), Kōpālaṅ and others among the people who settled in Tiriyaṅ and Kaṭṭukkuḷam.'² The name of the Vanni chief of Trincomalee appointed by Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ is given in the *Kk* and the *Tp* as Pūpālaṅ, who appears to be the same as the Pūpāla Vannimai of the *Vp*. A comparison of the traditions embodied in the *Kk* and the *Tp* with those in the *Vp* shows that a section of the latter was based on the chronicles of Trincomalee.

The *Vp* does not mention Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ in connection with the origin of the Vanni chieftaincies but one could clearly see in this chronicle a confusion of the traditions relating to Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ with those about Ukkiraciṅkaṅ, who does not appear to have been a historical personality. Ukkiraciṅkaṅ's association with Jaffna is in some ways similar to Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ's association with Trincomalee. The story of Ukkiraciṅkaṅ, as it appears in the Tamil chronicles, is basically a different version of the Vijaya legend.³ Sinhalese traditions as well as some South Indian legendary material have gone into the creation of this story which forms the starting point of the history of the Jaffna kingdom in the chronicles of Jaffna. Traditions of the Rohaṅa kingdom, which once included parts of the present Trincomalee District, also appear to have helped the growth

¹ *Vaiyāpāṭal*, ed. J. W. Arutpirakacam (Jaffna 1921), vv. 29-31; *Vaiyā*, ed. S. Gnana-pragasar (Jaffna 1921), p. 26 ff.

² *Vp.*, v. 73.

³ K. Indrapala, 'Yālpāna Irācciyattin Torram parriya Cila Palaiya Karuttukkal', *Cintanai*, III, No. 2, July 1970, p. 93 ff.; K. Indrapala, *Davidian Settlements in Ceylon and the Beginnings of the Kingdom of Jaffna*, (Thesis submitted for the Ph. D. degree of the University of London, 1966), pp. 406-414.

of the story of Ukkiraciñkaṅ. The confusion of many of these traditions seems to have been the result of a belated attempt on the part of the later Tamil chroniclers to reconcile the different floating traditions in the Tamil regions and to give these a historical sequence. In the story of Ukkiraciñkaṅ, for instance, we see an attempt to reconcile the stories of Vijaya, Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ and possibly a third personality associated with the kingdom of Jaffna. In this story one could see the characters Siñha and Siñhabāhu of the Vijaya legend in the personalities named Ukkiraciñkaṅ and Vararāca-ciñkaṅ respectively. Vararācaciñkaṅ combines the characters of Siñhabāhu and Vijaya. The matrimonial mission sent by him to the Pāṇḍya court and the arrival of the Pāṇḍya princess with a large retinue, as mentioned in the *Vp*, are both based on the Vijaya legend. The coming of the Vanniyaṅ and the invitation of the different castes from places like Maruñkūr in South India, their settlement in parts of the Trincomalee District and the arrival of the chief called Pūpāla Vannimai are clearly based on the story of Kuḷakkōṭṭaṅ.

Thus we see that a number of unreliable traditions have got enmeshed in the story of the Vanni chieftaincies as narrated in the Tamil chronicles. It is very difficult to extract from these anything more than a bare sequence of events. Compared with the chronicles of Jaffna, those of Trincomalee and Batticaloa are less confused. Of the later chronicles, that of Batticaloa, namely the *Mm*, is certainly more reliable. It is the only Tamil chronicle which contains a number of episodes from the history of the Sinhalese before the thirteenth century, many of which tally with the accounts in the *Mahāvāṃsa* and the *Cūlavāṃsa*. Further, the *Mm* is the only Tamil chronicle which mentions Māgha by name and deals with his activities in a manner that compares favourably with the Sinhalese accounts. The miraculous and legendary elements which mar the accounts in the chronicles of Trincomalee and Jaffna are found to a lesser extent in the Batticaloa chronicle. These qualities do not, however, entitle the account of the *Mm* to be wholly accepted. By a comparison of this and other Tamil accounts with those of the Sinhalese and Pali chronicles we may be able to arrive at some of the basic facts and to leave aside the dubious details that have to be treated with some amount of scepticism.

The traditions in the Tamil chronicles refer to a time when invaders and settlers from South India, including the Vanniyaṅ,

occupied parts of the present Northern and Eastern Provinces and set up chieftaincies there. These were undoubtedly the chieftaincies which later came to be known as the Vanni. There were a few prominent leaders, one of whom was Māgha, who were responsible for the creation of the chieftaincies in the Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts. During this period Buddhist establishments suffered and Hindu institutions flourished. Some of the leaders or chieftains also undertook the restoration of some of the major irrigation works.

It is only in the light of the more reliable evidence of the Sinhalese and Pali chronicles that these Tamil traditions could be understood. Even to work out a chronological framework for these traditions one has to depend on the Sinhalese and Pali sources. For, with the exception of the *Mm*, which associates Māgha with the origin of the Vanni chieftaincy of Batticaloa, the Tamil traditions do not provide any definite evidence as to the date of the events reflected by them. For a number of reasons, however, it is not possible to date these events to a period before the eleventh century. In the first place, as explained earlier, it is only in the eleventh century that we get the earliest references to the Vanniya in the inscriptions of South India. Secondly, the semi-independent Vanni chieftaincies of the Rājaraṭṭha could have risen only when the central authority at Anuradhapura or Polonnaruva had collapsed. Although there was such a collapse of central power at Anuradhapura in the tenth century, the conquest of the Rājaraṭṭha by the Imperial Cōlas in A. D. 993 and the establishment of a powerful capital at Polonnaruva could not have created the circumstances necessary for the rise and continued existence of the Vanni chieftaincies in such areas like the Vavuniya and Trincomalee districts which are so close to Polonnaruva. As long as Polonnaruva was able to wield its authority at least in the Rājaraṭṭha, the Vavuniya and Trincomalee regions must have remained integral parts of the Sinhalese kingdom. These regions must have broken away to become semi-independent chieftaincies only with the collapse of central authority at Polonnaruva. The rise of the Vanni chieftaincies of the Tamil country also appears to have taken place under similar circumstances. It is only in the reigns of Rājādhiraṅga II (1163-1179) and Kulottuṅga III (1178-1216), when the central authority of the Cōla state showed signs of decline, that we get the earliest references to Vanni chieftains wielding authority in such regions as the South Arcot District,

which were far removed from the Cōla capital.¹ In Ceylon Polonnaruva was in a position to control the whole of the Rājaraṭṭha in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and the decline of central authority may be said to have set in immediately after Niśsaṅkamalla's death (A. D. 1196). Thirdly, the Sinhalese and Pali chronicles as well as the inscriptions of the eleventh and twelfth centuries clearly indicate that the regions like the Trincomalee District, where, according to the Tamil chronicles, one of the earliest Vanni chieftaincies was established, were under the rule of Polonnaruva kings. Inscriptions of Vijayabāhu I (1055-1110); Gajabāhu II (1132-1153) and Niśsaṅkamalla (1187-1196) have been discovered at Kantalai, Velagama (Periyakulam) and Allai in the Trincomalee District.² Niśsaṅkamalla's Allai plates, which record a land-grant of this ruler in Kanakkara-vatta, in the Mā-pisambi Koṭasara District (Sinh. Koṭasara = Pali Koṭṭhasāra = Tamil Koṭṭiyāram - a region in the Trincomalee District), clearly suggest that the authority of Polonnaruva had not declined in the Trincomalee District as late as the end of the twelfth century.³ Niśsaṅkamalla was the last of the powerful rulers of Polonnaruva and it is difficult to assume that the Vanni chieftaincy of Trincomalee had come into existence in his reign or in that of his more powerful predecessor Parākramabāhu I (1153-1186).

The Sinhalese and Pali chronicles leave us in no doubt that the events which followed the death of Niśsaṅkamalla, especially the invasion of Māgha (A. D. 1215), created the conditions under which the authority of Polonnaruva finally collapsed, leading to the rise of several regional authorities in many parts of the

¹ A few Vanni chieftains (*Vanniyānāyans*) of the time of Rājādhirāja II and Kulottuṅga III are mentioned in a number of inscriptions (see fn. 2, p. 114). Almost all these inscriptions are from South Arcot and are later than 1168. In one of these a *vanniyānācci* (feminine form of *vanniyānāyan*) is referred to as a *Veḷaikkāri*. This may mean that the terms *vanniyānāyan* and *veḷaikkāran* (masculine form of *veḷaikkāri*) are synonymous and that the *Veḷaikkāra* forces of the Cōla period were later known as *Vanniyar*. But it may not be preferable to rush to this conclusion on this single evidence. (122 of 1934/35B).

² S. Paranavitana, 'A Tamil Inscription from Palamottai', *EZ*, IV, pp. 191-196; C. W. Nicholas, 'The Reign of Vijayabahu I', *UCHC*, I, ii, p. 435; K. D. Swaminathan, 'An Inscription of Gajabahu II', *The Ceylon Historical Journal*, X, Nos. 1-4, (Colombo) p. 47; *SII*, IV, Inscription No. 1397; D. M. de Z. Wickramasinghe, 'Kantalay Stone Seat Inscription', *EZ*, II, p. 289; P. E. E. Fernando, 'A Royal charter on Copper Plate', *The Ceylon Daily News*, (Colombo) 20, Sept. 1968, p. 12.

³ P. E. E. Fernando, *op. cit.*

Rājarat̥ṭha.¹ There was a renewal of foreign invasions almost immediately after the death of Niśsaṅkamalla. Within the short span of twenty years beginning from 1196 there were at least eight invasions of the island, most of which were led or inspired by the Cōlas.² This quick series of invasions culminated in the onslaught of Māgha, which resulted in the occupation of several parts of the Rājarat̥ṭha by Tamil and Keraḷa soldiers and in the dislodgement of many Sinhalese from that area. Under the rule of Māgha Buddhist institutions were destroyed and what is called a 'false faith' was propagated.³ 'Villages and fields, houses and gardens' were 'delivered up to the Keraḷas'.⁴ Tamil warriors were 'settled here and there in the country'.⁵ Even in the Māyārat̥ṭha there were 'Damiḷa warriors who dwelt as they pleased in the single villages and houses'.⁶ The forces of Māgha and his associate Jayabāhu set up fortifications in several places in the Rājarat̥ṭha. These included Polonnaruva, Koṭṭhasāra (Koṭṭiyāram), Gaṅgātaḷāka (Kantaḷāy), Kākālaya (Kokkiḷāy), Kavudāvuḷu (Kattukulaṃ Pattu), Padī (Padaviya), Kurundi (Kuruntanūr in Karikattumūlai South) and Goṇa district (Trincomalee).⁷

A comparison of this account with that of the Tamil sources shows certain basic similarities. Both refer to the arrival of South Indian forces in the Rājarat̥ṭha, the destruction or neglect of Buddhist establishments, the propagation of a non-Buddhist faith and the settlement of South Indians in many parts of the Rājarat̥ṭha. If the many fortifications set up by Māgha and Jayabāhu can be taken as centres of local authority, then we may even add that the two accounts refer to the rise of regional authorities. These fortifications were doubtless in the hands of mercenary leaders who probably became chieftains of those regions. Most of these fortifications were in the areas which later became the Tamil Vanni districts. Many of the places mentioned in the

¹ For a detailed account of these events, see A. Liyanagamage, *The Decline of Polonnaruva and the Rise of Dambadeniya* (Colombo 1968), p. 56 ff.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Cv.*, 80:75,

⁴ *Ibid.*, 80:76

⁵ *Ibid.*, 83:12

⁶ *Ibid.*, 81:14

⁷ *Cv.*, 83:15-17. *Pv.*, p. 116; *Nikayasaṅgrahaya*, p. 23. For the identification of these place-names, see C. W. Nicholas, 'Historical Topography of Ancient and Medieval Ceylon', *JCBRAS*, (NS), VI, 1959, pp. 45, 45, 81, 84, & 86. Kākālaya is sometimes identified with Kavudāvuḷu.

Vaiyā and the *Vp* as those where Vanniyar chieftains established South Indian settlements are referred to as the places where Māgha's Keraḷa and Tamil soldiers had established fortifications. Muḷḷiyavaḷai, Kaṇukkēṇi, Taṇikkal, Varrāppalai and Karuvā ṭṭukkēṇi are places in the area described as the kurundī region. Kīlakkumalai and Noccimōṭṭai are in the Padī region. Tiriyaḷ and Kaṭṭukkuḷam Pattu are in the Kākālaya-Kauḍāvulu regions. Tiru-kōṇamalai, Verukal, Tampalakāmam and Koṭṭiyāram are in the Goṇa-Koṭṭhasāra regions. These regions form a major part of the Vanni districts where, according to the *Ym* too, Kuḷakkōṭṭan settled vanniyar. If we discount the details provided by the *Vaiyā* and the *Vp*, we may not be wrong in concluding that the account in these Tamil sources also refer to the occupation of the Vanni districts by South Indian soldiers and chieftains in the time of Māgha. The Vanniyar and Mukkuva leaders appear to have become the chieftains of these new settlements. Presumably they were appointed by Māgha and his associates. Probably Kuḷakkōṭṭan and possibly Pūpāla Vanniyar were among these associates. We know from the Sinhalese sources that Jayabāhu was definitely one of them.

To sum up the evidence so far discussed, we have in the first place references in the Pali and Sinhalese chronicles to the Vanni chiefs and chieftaincies of the thirteenth century. There is no evidence to suggest that there were such chiefs or chieftaincies in the Rājaraṭṭha before the fall of Polonnaruva. Next we have the evidence of the Tamil chronicles of Ceylon regarding the origin and rise of the Tamil Vanni chieftaincies. Although the accounts in these Tamil chronicles, except that of the *Mm*, do not provide any chronological data regarding the first Tamil Vanni chieftaincies, a comparison of these accounts with those of the Sinhalese and Pali chronicles clearly suggests that the former relate to the thirteenth century. The evidence of the literary and inscriptional sources also shows that the areas where Tamil Vanni chieftains rose to power were under the rule of the Polonnaruva kings till the end of the twelfth century. As one would expect, the fall of Polonnaruva and the consequent breakdown of central authority seem to have led to the establishment of regional power by South Indian military chiefs who were in the employ of Māgha and his associates. These military chiefs were in all probability the Vanni chiefs mentioned in the Tamil sources. The Vanniyar were a military caste of South India whose leaders created their own chieftaincies with the decline of the Cōḷa empire. It appears that Vanniyar soldiers were brought to Ceylon as mercenaries at the end of the twelfth

century and in the first quarter of the thirteenth by South Indian invaders and other aspirants to the Sinhalese throne. Prominent among these invaders was Māgha. Kuḷakkōṭṭan, who is regarded in the Tamil legends as the founder of the Vanni chieftaincy of Trincomalee, appears to have been a personality closely associated with Māgha. It is difficult to assume that his activities took place at a time earlier than the first quarter of the thirteenth century, either in the reign of Niśśaṅkamalla or in that of Parākramabāhu I. Māgha, too, was probably responsible for the creation of some of the Vanni chieftaincies, especially that of the Batticaloa district. With the confused and limited evidence at our disposal the origin of the Tamil Vanni chieftaincies of Ceylon cannot be held to date from a period earlier than the first quarter of the thirteenth century.

The diacritical marks used in this article for the transliteration of Tamil names are those adopted in the Madras Tamil Lexicon. But owing to the non-availability of certain types, a correct transliteration of all Tamil names was rendered difficult.